

CSDA Middle School Configuration Executive Summary

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The City School District of Albany provides middle-school programs for students in grades 6-8 in three schools: Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School of Excellence, Stephen and Harriet Myers Middle School and William S. Hackett Middle School. Sixth graders are also housed in four elementary schools: ASH ES, Giffen Memorial ES, Eagle Point ES, TOAST ES.

Since May 2015, the City School District of Albany has had two separate groups of parents, staff and community members -- the Grade Configuration Steering Committees -- studying a range of issues relating to the District's future elementary- and middle-school enrollment and facility needs.

That work, done in two separate phases, culminated in the committee's Sept. 14, 2017 presentation to the Board of Education. Throughout the 2017-18 school year, the Board has been reviewing those recommendations, conducting community focus groups, and requesting additional demographic studies as it continues to explore long-term options to serve the District's expanding student population.

The problem

- Multiple entrance points at Hackett and Myers (students entering at 6th and at 7th) creating two tiers of disruption for those schools.
- Different programming for 6th graders in elementary buildings and 6th graders in the middle school buildings. This has resulted in better performance of 6th graders in middle school vs. elementary. For example – elementary 6th graders had 2.5 fewer instructional hours each week vs. their middle school counterparts.
- North Albany Academy students were not getting a full middle school program to prepare them well for High School.

Grade Configuration Phase 1 2015 - 2016

The phase 1 committee worked to determine the best grade configuration for our District. Their finding, ultimately adopted by the Board in June 2016:

- All sixth-graders belong in middle school.
- Middle school should be three years at minimum.
- Key Rationale:
 - Academic performance of 6th graders in middle school is substantially better than 6th graders in Elementary School.
 - Students entering middle schools at both 6th and 7th grade creates two years of substantial disruption for schools.
 - middle school principals recommended strongly that three years is the minimum needed to build relationships with students and put them on the road to success in HS

Brighter Choice and Urgent Need for Change

Brighter Choice Middle School for Boys and for Girls closed suddenly in March 2016, adding 275 middle school students to our system for the 2016-17 school year with only a few months' notice.

- The Board of Education elected to maintain as much continuity for those children and families as possible by renting and then purchasing their school at 395 Elk street, renaming it West Hill Middle school.
- That building now houses the Tony Clement Center for Education. That program is a perfect fit for that building which has unusually small classrooms, not appropriate for a middle school.
- As Brighter Choice Students moved on to AHS, West Hill would have no students entering, so would become too small to provide a solid middle school program for its remaining students. This

provided an opportunity to move towards our goal of moving all 6th graders to Middle school buildings.

- Staff recommended, and the Board adopted, a plan to move the school to 50 N. Lark, now called the Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School for Excellence, and include students from North Albany Academy, Sheridan Prep, Schuyler Achievement Academy and Arbor Hill Elementary. That work was approved by voters in January 2017 and the school opened there for the 2017-18 school year.
- That allowed 6th graders from Pine Hills to go to Myers since Sheridan Prep and Schuyler Achievement were now at EON middle school.
- The following schools still retain their sixth grades: Giffen and ASH (feeding Myers) and TOAST and Eagle Point (feeding Hackett)

Grade Configuration 2: September 2016 – September 2017

Meanwhile, while the Board had handled the urgent need to educate the Brighter Choice students, the effort to develop a permanent solution moved forward. The Phase 1 work had determined that 6th graders belong in Middle school. But even with the new Edmund J. O'Neal Middle School for Excellence our current middle schools were not large enough to handle all the grade 6 students.

The second Grade Configuration Committee reviewed a large number of options for a fourth middle school or a third larger middle school to address this problem.

- Rejected ASH and TOAST as being too small.
- Rejected Giffen because using it as a Middle school would leave the South End with no elementary school.
- Rejected using Arbor Hill as a much bigger, 800 seat middle school, with a consensus that 650 is the maximum number for a good middle school program.
- Rejected building an entirely new school because of the substantial cost (about twice estimates for the various renovation options) and the lack of an appropriate available site in the City.
- North Albany and Arbor Hill were the preferred options because they offered the most space and a middle school on the North side of town.
- Ultimately the committee recommended two options with to the Board in September 2017, both had four middles schools of either 650 or 500 students. Both used Arbor Hill as the third middle school. One used North Albany Academy as a fourth middle school, the other used EON middle school.

Additional Information Gathered October 2017 – April 2018

- After careful consideration of the recommendations of the Grade Configuration 2 committee, the Board asked for two new middle school items of information:
 - An updated demographic study
 - A feasibility study of three options based on the work of the 2nd grade configuration committee. The three requested scenarios all included:
 - Hackett & Myers at 650 students, and two 500 seat middle schools
 - Option A: EON middle school and North Albany Academy
 - Option B: AHES & North Albany Academy
 - Option C: EON middle school & AHES.
- The feasibility study included construction costs, operational costs, and transportation impacts of the three options.
- While the feasibility study was ongoing, the demographic study came back. The new estimates suggested that while middle school enrollment would continue to grow, it would not grow as much as anticipated in the prior 2015 study.

- Staff added 4 more options to deal with the possibility of these lower enrollment estimates and presented the seven options to the Board in April 2018 as Options A, B, C, D, E, F and G.

Winnowing Down and Considering Options May 2018 – September 2018

- With the help of community meetings in May 2018, the Board eliminated options B, C & F which had Arbor Hill as a Middle school. It was clear that the community felt strongly that AHES needed to maintain its long-time role as a neighborhood elementary school, and that the walking distance to North Albany Academy would be problematic for the large number of impacted students.
- The Board also eliminated option G which allowed for two small schools of 375 seats at North Albany Academy and EON middle school. While the least expensive, this option provided almost no flexibility should enrollment grow naturally or via a charter school shut down.

Remaining Options – September 2018

That leaves options A, D & E from the feasibility study. They are similar in many ways:

- All anticipate a middle school at the current North Albany Academy site with the majority of the elementary students from North Albany now going to Arbor Hill.
- All anticipate Arbor Hill becoming a larger elementary school to accommodate the former North Albany students.
- All would require a new home to be found for the Albany International Center.
- All would be enrolled via a feeder school system that is balanced based on the academic performance of the elementary schools.
- All anticipate that the soonest the Board could occupy a new Middle school at the North Albany Academy site would be the in 2023-24 school year because of the need for referendum, NYSED approval design etc.

Demographics

- (show demographics from today on with line at occupancy)
- Demographics are based on the 2018 study, so even the estimates for the years the Board could occupy are at a minimum 5 years out.
- There are often and unpredictable changes in charter school enrollments.
- Of these students, 100 are currently in alternate program middle school and that is expected to continue:
 - 60 middle schoolers participate in the AIC. Total enrollment of 150 including HS students
 - 40 middle schoolers participate at the Tony Clement Center for Education.

Other Considerations

- On a per student basis, Middle schools are most cost effective to operate at about 350 students or about 650 students. 500 seat schools are very expensive to operate on a per student basis because their staffing needs are almost identical to a 650 seat middle school.
- Despite concerted efforts, the Board has not been able to identify any available greenspace near EON middle school that can be purchased for use for playing fields
- EON middle school also does not have an auditorium, and there is no place to build an addition to house one.

Still on the table: Options A, D & E

500 Seat North Albany Academy Option. Formerly called Option A & D

- Renovate North Albany to house a 500 seat Middle school
- Retain a Middle school at EON middle school with 500 seats (option A) or 375 seats (option D).
- Renovate either Abrookin or Harriet Gibbons to house the AIC

650 Seat North Albany Academy Option. Formerly called Option E (now E plus!)

- Renovate North Albany to house a 650 seat Middle school
- Complete a new demographic report in 2019-20 and at that time decide where the AIC will go in 2023-24
- If the expected enrollment is smaller than currently anticipated AIC moves to EON, no additional construction needed. 3 middle schools of 650 each.
- If the expected enrollment is as large or larger than currently anticipated, AIC moves to either Abrookin or Harriet Gibbons, freeing up EON middle school to remain a Middle school.

Comparison

	500 Seat NAA (Option A/D)	650 Seat NAA (Option E+)
Maximum Capacity	2400 Myers: 650 Hackett: 650 NAA: 500 EON: 500/350 AIC/ALC: 100	2550 Myers: 650 Hackett: 650 NAA: 650 EON: 500 AIC/ALC: 100
Possible 3 Middle School solution	Very unlikely. With only two 650 seat schools it's very unlikely that we'd have small enough enrollment to have all middle schoolers in three schools. The maximum capacity at three schools would be 650+650+500+100 (at specialty programs) = 1900.	Possibly. It's an option if enrollment is only a bit lower than the current demographic report. The maximum capacity at three schools would be 650 x 3 + 100 (at specialty programs) = 2050 Current projections are that this would not work for most years. A new demographic report in a few years will give us more information to finalize the decision.

	500 Seat NAA (Option A/D)	650 Seat NAA (Option E+)
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Possible four middle school solution	Yes. It requires it.	Yes. It's an option if enrollment is high enough to justify it.
Construction cost implications	\$26.5 million	\$27.2 million which is \$700,000 more than the 500 seat option for NAA, but creates an addition 150 seats indefinitely An additional \$3.6 million to renovate Harriet Gibbons or Abrookin if needed based on the '20-'21 demographics report.
Operating Costs Implications 500 seat middle schools are more expensive to run on a per student basis due to staffing requirements than 650 seat schools.	Higher: Two 500 seat schools would be \$31 million, or \$28.2 million if EON was 350 seats as opposed to 500 seats.	Lower: \$24.7 million if the District can operate with three 650 seat schools. If a fourth 500 seat school is needed (<i>Plus</i>) and it were fully occupied, then the costs would increase to \$31.9 million. However, if only 350 seats were needed in the fourth school, then the operational costs would be similar to Option D.

Other	Fixed and certain. Decisions are made now and implemented by 2023-24.	Flexible, but more complex. At most, there would be one 500 seat school. Final decision not made until 2020-21. If the additional space is necessary, it would require a second, much smaller referendum. All schools still open 2023-24
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