

BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP
December 12, 2007, 6:30 PM
Paden Elementary School
Multi-Purpose Room

ADOPTED MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING - The community workshop of the Board of Education on options to balance elementary enrollment was held on the date and place mentioned above.

PRESENT: Members Forbes and McMahon were present.

CALL TO ORDER: President Forbes called the meeting to order at 6:47 PM. The purpose of the community workshop is to present the options explored to date by the Elementary Capacity Task Force along with a preliminary evaluation of the options using our framework.

Superintendent Dailey opened the forum, introducing Chief Financial Officer, Luz Cázares to present a report on the options explored to date to balance elementary enrollment with capacity.

Ms. Cázares prefaced that while not a final list, information provided is to share where the task force is at this point in time.

The problem is that there is a mismatch between elementary enrollment forecasts and current school capacity (over the next 5 years). The forecast shows that two school areas – Ruby Bridges and Edison/Otis are expected to increase in enrollment while their facilities are currently close to or at capacity. The remaining school areas are expected to decline in enrollment while their facilities are currently under capacity.

Categories of solutions:

- Increase capacity
- Divert overflow students
- Create magnet programs
- Change attendance boundaries

Types of impact:

- Facility
- Financial
- Program (i.e., students and staff)

Ms. Cázares emphasized that the ideas shared are not recommendations and not intended to be a preliminary set of options, but just a review of the work done to date. The task force continues to meet on a weekly basis and explore options.

Feedback loops:

- Existing district organizational structures: employees and parents
- Community Sounding Board
- BOE meetings
- Community workshops

Use Existing Classroom (“true” classroom)

Of the 246 classrooms available, 78% are for regular education, 6% for special education, and 16% for miscellaneous purposes.

Capacity is based on number of classrooms and how they are used. One idea is to convert the miscellaneous rooms to classrooms. Across all elementary schools, there are 39 rooms used for miscellaneous purposes – computer labs, daycare, after school programs, RSP, Title 1 pull out, ELL, etc. These rooms tend to be at sites currently under-enrolled.

Classrooms listed are spaces that can be used as classrooms. The task force is no longer exploring the option of converting computer labs, as they are essential learning tools.

Questions/Comments

- Are after school classrooms being used in the day and what is daycare? No students are there during the day; same is true for daycare. Daycare is a lease issue. Even though we have open space during part of the school day, the space is not open to the school to use because they claim it as part of the lease agreement. Leases run on an annual basis. The task force is considering whether or not some of those daycare rooms can be converted into regular classrooms. The question is whether a daycare can be moved to adjacent, off-site, alternative solution. The space has to allow the organization to comply with all of the necessary requirements (licensing, etc.)
- Computer lab situations can be different site-by-site. Have you considered? Task Force will look at this.
- Are the after-school spaces evenly distributed? No. Refer to handout – the table shows location. Schools that are under-enrolled are the ones that have space.
- When will specific information about the difference in the cost of portables be presented? The task force will attach more detailed information once it gets to the point of providing options.
- Why hasn't the former Island High School site been considered as an option? The task force will look into.

(Board Member Gibson arrives at this point)

- What's Title 1? Categorical program provided for federal government for students that meet criteria – primarily based on socio-economic status.

Relocation

Across all elementary schools, there are 14 SDC classrooms. The task force does not aspire to have a program put together at one or two schools only. Some special education rules that go along with whether or not this could be done, but globally at the District-level, we don't want to move classrooms simply for the sake of space.

Questions/Comments

- Students in the SDC's would be enrolled at that school site if they were regular ed students, or does the SDC program draw students from other places? We don't have each and every program available at every site, so some students attend SDC's away from their neighborhood school. We don't believe in moving an existing SDC strictly for the sake of space. If there were a way to better meet the needs of students with another program at another site, that's always on the table.
- We're not respecting the space and needs of the children who live in that area and should be going to school there if the task force is not willing to consider moving SDC's.
- Do SDC's have restrictions for square footage? Is there potential for small classes to be in spaces smaller than classroom size space?
- Flip side of issue – having SDC classes is a benefit to the entire school community. Having an integrated campus pushes children to learn other things. Also, remember that some classrooms require paraprofessionals, which equates to more people in those spaces than simply the number of students and

teacher. The Director of Special Education has indicated there are no SDC classes that can be moved to another site and still be provided with equivalent – if not better – services or programs.

Eliminate Class Size Reduction

With class size reduction (CSR), the student/teacher ratio is 20:1, which equals a capacity of 2,920. Without CSR, the student/teacher ratio is 29:1, which equals a capacity for 4,234 students. This is a pretty big increase in capacity; however, CSR is the standard in California. 99% of all districts eligible to make use of CSR do. Incentive dollars are provided by the state to implement the CSR program, although the state doesn't actually fully fund it. Remaining dollars are used from the unrestricted general fund. The law on eliminating and reducing CSR is very strict and very clear. Districts must follow exact steps and reduce in a certain order (K, 3, 2, 1).

Questions/Comments

- Can CSR be eliminated across the district, or site-by-site? The state doesn't require that the entire district eliminate it – it can be done on a site-by-site basis. For the task force, however, that would raise issues of equity.
- What is the penalty from the state? For every grade level, about \$90K.

With a quorum now present, President Forbes officially calls the meeting to order at 7:31 PM. Member McMahon moved to approve the agenda, with Member Gibson seconding. The agenda was approved.

- The first parcel tax passed had a very strong influence on making sure it would keep CSR. If you're considering future passage of other measures, you would want to consider the fact that CSR was something very important to the community. The ballot language was in general terms with only a couple exceptions – one of which was CSR, which was specifically named in the ballot language. Note – the parcel tax expires in 2012.
- The CSR state website seems like they want to help districts with overcrowding while still using the program. When districts selected participation way back when, there was another process if you wanted to change your options. Staff needs to investigate further – has anything changed since then? Recent information obtained shows that CSR reduction/elimination can be done on a school-by-school basis, which wasn't originally part of the program.

Add new classrooms

Sites can be built up through portable modular, permanent modular, or new construction. The Director of Maintenance, Operations & Facilities went to all sites to determine the maximum number of portables that could be placed there. See handout for the specific number information. Further discussion needs to take place with the Principals to see what their take is. Chances are, they will have different numbers. The task force is trying to figure out how to think about the program, facility, and financial impact of building up in this fashion.

Questions/Comments

- Is the task force also considering other equipment needs such as playgrounds? For example, at Ruby Bridges, the playground was built for 8, but there are 120 kindergarteners there. Staggering playground time should be considered. What about the same for bathrooms and lunchroom space? Staff is set to explore the “trigger points” for facilities, as well as distance.
- Are there any portables with bathrooms in them? Yes, at a higher cost due to the need to run water to them.

Diverting overflow students

Students diverted annually = 90 to 100

The capacity deficit forecast for Edison, Otis, and Ruby Bridges = 216

The intent of the enrollment policy is to divert a very limited number of students to avoid opening a new classroom. If we were to divert overflow, it would significantly increase the number of students we would be diverting annually. Someone asked how this tied into the policy recently approved – the intent of the enrollment policy is to divert a very limited number of students. If space is available in the next school over, that’s where they would be placed. Diverting at the level forecast means moving classrooms. The intent of the policy is not to move classrooms.

Questions/Comments

- Are these diverted students allowed to come back during the year? Probably 85% - 90% are back before the end of the school year. 10% - 15% who do not come back usually elect to stay at the new school.
- Option to explore – can you move the entire group somewhere else instead of 1 or 2 students? An additional benefit to this idea is that the students all move back together – helps with continuity.
- How does this affect Franklin students? Franklin is expected to continue to grow in that forecast, but they’ve always exceeded their capacity due to their very small size. The diversions that occur happen mostly because of capacity of the site. There are no more options available – the capacity is what it is now.

Creating magnet schools

The task force is not really focusing on magnet schools at this point in time. However, the secondary task force is exploring magnet programs as an option. If something comes to be implemented and staff can find a pathway along K-5 that matches, that this is something we would look at, eventually.

Questions/Comments

- Haight happens to be one of the schools that has availability of “other classrooms”. What would be the likelihood or ability to create a program that would attract 60-80 kids for some period of time? Perhaps some kind of satellite program for Edison/Otis, but at the Haight facility? Not a magnet, just kids bundled together and moved as a whole to Haight or wherever.
- At under enrolled schools, has the task force looked at how many kids are attending private schools? Are parents being encouraged to keep their families in public schools?
- Have you considered immersion programs as a draw?
- What is the difference between a magnet school and a conversion charter school? Magnet programs are specialized education programs with a focused curriculum. Not only are you doing standards-based instructions, but magnets offer a pathway of a specialized program at the same time. Not all schools would have it, only selected schools. Magnet programs require specialized programs because it costs more. Conversion charter schools are public schools that the district simply converts to a charter. In order to put a good magnet school in place, it takes more than 6 months worth of work and is not going to happen for next year. It’s a big deal, and we want to do it right and do it well. The secondary task force is seriously exploring specialized programs.
- The projections on the east end don’t take into account the number of children already attending private schools. There was great success with year-round schools in the past – providing different time options during the day of starting/stopping, or running on different schedules helps with the capacity issue.

Change attendance boundaries

The task force is exploring optimal enrollment size, enrollment range, and break even points. Most of these options have some level of interplay. If we go forward in exploring this notion of optimal school size, then it could mean many other things – e.g., a site with a current capacity of 350 is determined to have an optimal size of 450. There will have to be something done in terms of building up the site or converting miscellaneous rooms into regular education classrooms. It is important to note that they interplay with each other and work in combination.

Questions/Comments

- Remember last year, presented information that 500-600 was a “normal” urban school district elementary size. Alameda doesn’t have that kind of land option – campuses are half that size.
- Capacity issue runs head-to-head with quality of programs. Maximizing capacity by taking bonus rooms or other areas and converting, we miss something when we no longer provide what those bonus rooms provided. At some point, we need to go back to talk about what our vision for quality education in Alameda is and what we want to provide.
- What is the districts “base” understanding of what every school has to have?
- Sense reluctance to explore changing boundaries, although there has been precedence for it. Why? The issue is being looked at. This is not an “off the table” issue.
- When you buy a house according to the attendance map and then that map changes, that’s really frustrating.
- We’re running out of real estate in terms of how to actually move kids into another area.
- If boundaries change, outlying Edison blocks could be diverted to Haight. Haight feeds to a different middle school. What trail would students follow?
- Private school is the only option if kids don’t get into Edison or Otis.
- Elementary task force is only looking at the elementary piece. If there is something impacting at another level, such as the secondary piece, then the groups would speak to each other to understand what impact is and talk about how they relate to each other.
- Obvious a lot of people are opposed to boundary changes. No matter what you do, there’s going to be somebody angry.
- There is an interplay between task force and timing. If the secondary task force is potentially looking at changing boundaries, what impact does that have on the elementary schools? Right now, the boundaries match up except for one.
- What about returning to AM/PM kindergarten?
- For some reason, there is the perception – both real and imaginary – that some schools are “way better” than other schools. People look at test scores. If there was an Edison Annex somewhere else that provided the same level of education, perhaps parents would send their kids there.
- Several people have mentioned language immersion. Would that be something that could be organized more quickly?
- We are hearing comments about low-performing schools and the opinion that that equals lesser quality. There needs to be broader public education about what scores really mean, and what they don’t. A school with low scores doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a “bad” school.
- How are we making sure we have excellence and equity in all our schools? This is a baby step along the pathway towards educational excellence, but a step in the right direction, nonetheless.

Adjust number of inter-district transfer students

Currently, there are 149, based on space available. The number of inter-district transfers can be adjusted upward, downward, or maintained, depending on other options considered. The task force is leaning towards the path of adjusting the number depending on what options are ultimately considered.

Questions/Comments

- We need to have exit surveys to find out why students are leaving.

Eliminate choice on attendance zone boundary lines

Alameda is unique in offering this choice; the demographers had never seen this before. The one exception is for Paden attendance – there is no option between Paden and Ruby Bridges. The task force is exploring this idea for all schools.

Questions/Comments

- Would this kick in gradually? The task force is considering distance traveled, conditions, grandfathering, etc.

- When will more information be available on adding capacity on a school-by-school site basis? Probably the second week in January. More information will be provided at the January 8 Board of Education meeting.
- If your only option is sending your child to a private school, then you will be fulfilling your fear that your property value will go down. Take that passion into changing the perception that because a school scores poorly on exams, it is therefore a poor school that doesn't provide an excellent education. Take that energy and change that perception – you will improve your current value because the entire Island will be perceived as an excellent district.
- Keep in mind the best solutions for the entire district, not just a select few.
- Valid point that we need to educate the public. Our elementary schools are excellent.
- For many parents, it's not the academics that is most concerning about diverting, but the social impact. We chose and planned to get into a certain school because we wanted to put our child into that particular social network.

Superintendent Dailey noted the purpose in doing community meetings is to try to keep people informed but also to hear what you have to say because we're still in a "thinking" process. By February, we want to have potential recommendations. We keep running into questions of interplay between the elementary and secondary task forces. This issue of excellence and equity is about the fact that we want all schools to be excellent across the entire Island.

Member McMahon noted at this point, we've got 2 months to come to a place of creating some type of recommendation. Member McMahon noted his hope is that the focus of the task force begins to hone in on what can be done for the 2008/09 year, immediately, so we can dispel the uncertainty around the year. That's first and foremost. As the task force is now, it cannot fix in 3 months the problems that have accumulated over years. Make sure we focus on what options can be implemented that are going to address 2008/09 issues in a way that satisfies the broadest number of people in the greatest way with the least amount of unsettling. However, we do need to continue to work on long-term solutions.

President Forbes added looking at the numbers – current and in 5 years – we don't need to jump in the 5 years right now in February, but do need to address some immediate issues. Long-term, at the elementary level, staff needs to investigate some different options other than charter schools. This is not a short-term issue, but a commitment by February to explore that – to survey – to see what programs the community would support, along with the dollars attached. It may be that – on a parcel tax renewal – part goes to pay for some magnet programs. We need to look at doing things differently.

Member Gibson stated she would like to see work on every solution that would allow the Edison and Otis potential overflow not to occur next year and allow students to stay in their home school. A number of items mentioned might be a part of that solution. Look for those in the short-term. Long-term, we do have to be creative and offer choices in our district – we hear that the community wants choices loud and clear. We have had them in the past – Paden and BayFarm – and we need to offer as a district school, not a charter school. Short-term, work out what we can do starting next September. Then what is feasible to get in place within the next year as part of a long-term process. Excite people about attending Alameda schools.

Superintendent Dailey added from tonight's issues, our next steps will be to sit down and review where we are. The Sounding Board meets on Monday and will discuss. In terms of the decision-making process, we are hearing loud and clear from the Board that they are expecting the immediacy piece, but that issues of excellence and equity in the long-term is the bigger portion. Staff will go back, regroup, and figure some things out.

President Forbes adjourned the meeting at 9:08 PM.

ADJOURNMENT –President Forbes adjourned the meeting at 7:05 PM.