

**Agenda Item #:**

**ITEM TYPE:** Discussion  
(Action, Discussion, Report)

**BOARD AGENDA ITEM**

**TITLE:** Superintendent's Recommendation Based on the Report of the Board's Redistricting and School Closure Committee

**DATE:** October 10, 2018

**OVERVIEW:**

***Background:***

In February 2018, the Board appointed the Redistricting and School Closure Committee (RSCC) to research and develop options for the Superintendent and Board to consider. Based on the established timeline, the RSCC delivered its final report at the September 2018 Board meeting. The next step defined in the process was that the Superintendent consider the report and make any appropriate recommendation for potential Board action at the October 2018 Board meeting.

Following the presentation of the report in September, a public forum was conducted on October 1, 2018 to gather additional public feedback on the report. Subsequently, I have continued to review the report and deepen my understanding of the background data and information that led to the committee's recommendations. I have also spent time examining additional history and background, including previous reports and studies, enrollment history and projections, educational facilities, and other related factors. That examination also included reviewing the Board's work sessions on the factors and conditions surrounding school closure and utilization, including the documents and information associated with those sessions. Lastly, I have considered and synthesized public comment and feedback.

Following this process of consideration, my recommendations to the Board follow below. This satisfies the requirement that the Superintendent submit recommendations for discussion at this meeting.

***Superintendent's Recommendations:***

In reflecting on the RSCC report and preparing these recommendations, I am aware of the impact that the prior school closures have had on the system and the community. In my career, I have been part of difficult decisions, including redistricting and renaming of schools, and I can only imagine the impact associated with school closures. I am sympathetic to all who were involved in the process and decision-making, as well as those communities that were impacted.

Obviously, I was not here to experience the school closures and I do not pass judgment on any sentiment that anyone has as a result. I do believe that we must look forward in terms of our future decisions. We certainly should learn as much as we can from the past, but I also feel we must make our decisions based on our reality now and the best information available. Therefore, I have tried to not consider the "should haves" and focus on what I believe is the best way for us to move forward as a community school system.

*Specific Recommendation #1:*

Immediately commission a feasibility study to determine fully the viable and specific possibilities related to options 1, 2, and 3 of the RSCC report. I recommend that the feasibility study be undertaken promptly with a target date for the final result by April 2019. If necessary, I recommend the use of one-time fund balance to pay for the study, which is estimated at \$100,000 given the scope contained in RSCC options 1, 2, and 3.

*Rationale for Recommendation #1:*

While the RSCC report is impressive in its comprehensive examination of multiple factors, thorough analysis of data, and impacts for each option, it is also clear that the next step in the planning process requires a feasibility study to determine with specificity the potential projects for the Board to consider when developing the next Educational Facilities Master Plan beginning in May 2019. Furthermore, a feasibility study is required as part of the State construction process, so this would not be a wasted expenditure. Also, it would expedite our efforts through the next Educational Facilities Master Plan and Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

The feasibility study is necessary to determine specifically what may be accomplished under RSCC options 1 and 2. For instance, is it feasible:

- To fully modernize the existing East Middle School facility;
- To construct a replacement East Middle School on the existing site;
- To construct a K-8 facility on the East Middle site;
- To construct a replacement East Middle School at the Friendship Valley Elementary site; and
- To construct a K-8 project at the Friendship Valley Elementary site?

The feasibility study will, by default, determine the viability of RSCC option 3. The study will analyze the condition of the existing building systems as part of its cost-benefit analysis and allow us, as a County, to make an informed decision at the time of the next Educational Facilities Master Plan.

Lastly, my recommendation includes the requirement that the feasibility study must fully account for any special programs that may be impacted. This would include the middle school BEST program housed at East Middle School and the PRIDE program at Friendship Valley Elementary School.

*Specific Recommendation #2:*

I recommend that the Board declare an end to any consideration of additional

school closures for at least the first five years of the next enrollment projections report and analysis, unless a school closure is part of a replacement modernization project.

*Rationale for Recommendation #2:*

The RSCC report clarified for me that our school system today must exist with East Middle School or its replacement. The RSCC carefully considered every possibility regarding East Middle and concluded that it is necessary to have an East Middle or some form of replacement. To simply close the facility and redistrict the students has too many negative implications for the county-wide community as a whole. Moreover, the operational impacts and possible fiscal impacts are not clear. It is obvious that the closure of East Middle or any school would result in capital cost avoidance and some operational savings, but it is far from clear to me that these savings outweigh the other consequences, not the least of which is the service to the students in the special programs.

In my review, I found that prior studies, both internal and external, support this same conclusion. The population of East Middle and the factor of the centralized special program time and again have led to the conclusion that closure alone is not viable. Additionally, given the prior school closures and current enrollment and projections, I conclude that closure alone would be imprudent and possibly a mistake our county would come to regret.

Moreover, the RSCC report and my subsequent examination crystalize for me that we must be careful to not isolate our thinking to the one school that is presently the highest capital priority. While the capital needs of East Middle may drive the majority of the options, it is a fair assessment that the committee is overall stressing the need to address our complete facility inventory. Stated differently, we cannot simply close our way out of maintaining our buildings as needed. There will always be the next aging facility that requires attention.

Closing East Middle simply because it is our facility with the most needs based on age and condition, fails to fully consider all of the other important factors in our educational programs. In my philosophy, while I recognize that there will always be fiscal constraints which we must work within, we must be careful not to allow a facility or fiscal decision to completely outweigh our instructional services.

I have spent considerable time discussing these options with staff and asking a wide variety of questions. I believe that, in the upcoming fiscal years, we may have more ability as a county than in prior fiscal years to address our capital needs. The feasibility study will reveal the various, specific approaches and the timing of that recommendation will allow us sufficient time to fully explore the available capital room with the county prior to the next Educational Facilities Master Plan and CIP. In the interim, I recommend that we work with the County to dedicate additional, temporary maintenance help to East Middle School until the specific options are understood and a capital plan established.

*Specific Recommendation #3:*

The Board convene a committee in 2023 to evaluate school boundaries.

### *Rationale for Recommendation #3:*

I concur with the RSCC report that comprehensive redistricting is not warranted at present given system-wide utilization rates. RSCC also noted that the annual process for developing the Enrollment Projections and Analysis Report examines the capacities and utilizations for different regions and at each school.

Moreover, the Board revised Policy JCAA – Boundary Adjustments in April 2018. Those revisions included the requirement that the Board “appoint a committee every five (5) years to evaluate the need for any boundary line adjustments, and to make any recommendations for any necessary boundary line adjustments.” This recommendation is consistent with the Board’s policy and the findings of RSCC.

Lastly, in making this recommendation regarding comprehensive redistricting, I recognize that my first recommendation may lead to some redistricting depending upon the feasibility study and any project that may be developed from it.

### **LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN:**

Pillar IV - Establish safe, secure, healthy, and modern learning environments; Objective IV.iv: CCPS provides safe and secure schools, facilities, and assets that serve our students and communities; and Objective IV.v: CCPS maintains modern schools, facilities, and resources that support the educational program.

### **FISCAL IMPACT:**

Estimated \$100,000 for feasibility study.

### **RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:**

These recommendations are submitted for discussion and possible future Board action.

### **Submitted by:**

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Steven A. Lockard, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools