



STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT MEDIA RELEASE

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SCASD Board of Directors Considers Elementary School Building Option Recommendations

On Monday, Sept. 12, the State College Area School District Board of Directors received two district administration recommendations that could reduce the elementary school project options proposed as part of the current District-wide Facilities Master Plan - Elementary Update.

The administration recommended a district elementary school student capacity of 3,500 and school sizes of 400 to 550 students. Based on those criteria, four of the eight original project options concerning Corl Street, Houserville and Radio Park elementary schools could be eliminated because they would lead to a lower overall capacity and larger schools than the district desires. The remaining options call for retaining Corl Street, instead of closing it and repurposing the building as proposed in the other options, and renovating it along with Houserville and Radio Park.

In other business, the Board approved [several State High Project change orders](#) and the district administration's request [to continue pursuing International Baccalaureate curriculum programs](#).

District-wide Facilities Master Plan — Elementary Update

Based on projected enrollments from a commissioned demographic analysis of the district's attendance areas, [the district administration made two key recommendations to help the Board narrow elementary school project choices](#).

Prior to Board discussion, Business Administrator Randy Brown and Director of Physical Plant Ed Poprik [gave a presentation](#) summarizing the DWFMP process to date, highlighting the recommendations stemming from a report by DecisionInsite and assessing the potential operational costs of different project scenarios.

Using municipal planning data for its enrollment project report, DecisionInsite looked at planned residential development and potential increases of students within district elementary

enrollment areas for the next decade. Demographers also took into account historical enrollments for the district and local fertility rates.

The firm prepared both conservative and moderate projections, with the conservative ones estimating lower numbers of new students from future residential growth than the moderate ones. Chosen because the district administration believes they better match the district's expected enrollments, the conservative projections predict approximately 300 more elementary students over 10 years — about a 1 percent annual increase.

Accordingly, the administration is *recommending a district-wide K-5 student enrollment capacity of 3,500*. This would accommodate a possible enrollment of 3,259 by 2022 — as forecasted by the conservative projections — and represent 92 percent capacity for the elementary schools overall.

The second key recommendation has to do with school size.

All but one of the district's current elementary schools have enrollment capacities between 400 and 529 students. The most recent schools constructed, Ferguson Township and Mount Nittany, each has a 414-student capacity. In light of past elementary school capacity decisions and current Board and community discussions, *the district administration is recommending that future buildings be constructed with capacities between 400 and 550 students*.

"This range maintains comparable size among our school buildings, and satisfies the project student enrollment over the next decade," the district administration's recommendation to the Board stated. "This range provides flexibility for future additions to one or more of our facilities if we do experience enrollment growth beyond DecisionInsite's conservative projections."

Consequently, the district administration suggested the Board, if it accepts the recommended district and school capacities, could eliminate four of the [eight initial project scenarios for Radio Park, Houserville, Corl Street and Lemont elementary schools](#) because they would produce a lower district capacity and larger schools than desired.

[As outlined in the district administration's recommendation](#), the potentially eliminated choices would be options 2, 4, 6 and 8 — all of which called for Corl Street Elementary to be closed and repurposed.

This would leave options 1, 3, 5 and 7 still under consideration. The options present various combinations of new construction and renovations/additions for Houserville, Radio Park and Corl Street. All of the options assume closing Lemont Elementary and combining it with Houserville, its sister school, an idea in district planning since 1999.

[Refined project scenarios considered by the Board in an Aug. 31 work session](#) included only one ("Scenario 3") that meets both the proposed district capacity and school size range. It also aligns with options 1, 3, 5 and 7.

Scenario 3 would:

- Result in three classrooms per grade level at Houserville (combined with Lemont), Radio Park and Corl Street, adding one classroom per grade level at Corl Street.
- Leave all three schools within the proposed building capacity.

- Generate capacity sufficient for projected K-5 enrollment.

Superintendent Bob O'Donnell said that the enrollment projections likely mean the district will have to do some "restructuring" with the attendance areas. The district administration believes the 3,500-student capacity will keep most families near their children's elementary schools.

He also noted the district's recommended school size would help with future planning.

"The range, we think, gives us some flexibility moving forward," he said.

Board member Amy Bader said she appreciated having the enrollment projections, capacity charts and recommended capacity and school size figures to consider.

"That makes things relatively straightforward in terms of narrowing down the choices we're looking at," she said.

Cost estimates for options 3, 5 and 7 have not been finished yet because the design team is still evaluating construction and addition/renovation options for each school. Original Option 1, calling for addition/renovation at all three schools, and the refined Scenario 3 have comparable cost estimates at about \$45 million — beyond the original allocation of \$40 million for the elementary school projects but within the district's financial capability. By applying in time for state grants this spring, the district was awarded \$3.8 million toward the projects. In addition, the state is eligible for more reimbursement from the state's PlanCon program.

Board member Dan Duffy asked why projected operational costs for Scenario 3, with three updated schools, are higher than the scenario of maintaining the current state of the schools in question. He asked whether there were any reasons beyond adding another classroom per grade at Corl Street.

Brown said a larger Corl Street building not only would add operational costs, but also might require an additional administrator, its own principal. This year, Corl Street and Ferguson Township elementary schools are sharing a principal. Brown said the district wouldn't necessarily have to hire a Corl Street principal, but he factored in the possibility when making a conservative estimate.

Board member Penni Fishbaine confirmed the potential Houserville and Radio Park project deadlines determined by the state grants: They must have substantial completion by June 2019. According to PlanCon requirements, Corl Street would need to be started by 2019.

"We know we can do two projects at once," Fishbaine said. "We did Mount Nittany and Ferguson Township (elementary schools) at the same time. We know that's possible."

Like other board members, she commended the district administration for providing clarifying information.

"I think you've done a great job getting us to this point," she said. "It's kind of clear if we accept the enrollment projects, and even the conservative (ones), we're going to need more capacity in the schools."

At its Sept. 26 meeting, the Board expects to vote, in separate motions, on consolidating Houserville and Lemont schools and accepting the district administration's recommendations to pare down project options.

The current DWFMP timeline anticipates the Board receiving final project options on Oct. 10 and selecting projects on Nov. 14.

Community forums about the project options are scheduled for 7 p.m. Sept. 19 and Oct. 17 at Mount Nittany Middle School.

International Baccalaureate programs

The district administration sought approval to continue exploring International Baccalaureate study “programmes” — a so-called “Consideration Phase” that would amount to a feasibility study.

Based in Geneva, Switzerland, the [International Baccalaureate Organization](#) states that its “high-quality and challenging educational programmes” seek “to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.” IBO offerings are Diploma Programme, Career Programme, Middle Years Programme and Primary Years Programme.

After reviewing the IBO program requirements since January, the district administration believes that they strive to develop values and attributes compatible with the district’s strategic plan and instructional focus goals.

During the Consideration Phase, the district would assess its readiness to implement and sustain programs and support training for necessary staff members. It also would prepare recommendations for the next step, the Candidacy Phase. The application deadline is April 1, 2017.

The district plans to present a formal IB program proposal, including estimated professional development costs, to the Board at a later date.

Director of Curriculum 7-12 Jacque Martin told the Board the approval process from IBO typically takes two to three years, from the “Consideration Phase” to authorization. Once a school district formally applies, she said, IBO examines facilities, makes site visits and considers professional development plans for teachers in making a decision.

If the district applied by April 1, the district could begin an IB program by the fall of 2020, Martin said.

Board members expressed support for continuing to explore one or more IB programmes, having heard positive sentiment about IB programs from community members. Martin made it clear that a secondary IB program, which the district envisions offering to 11th and 12th graders both as a cohesive diploma program and individual supplementary courses, would not replace the Advanced Placement program, but complement it.

Board President Amber Concepcion, like many of her colleagues, said she supported a feasibility study for all the IB program levels.

This would be a great addition to have in the high school, but at the elementary level, it would be a real game changer because we don’t have that now,” Concepcion said.

After a successful motion for a vote, the Board unanimously authorized the district to move forward with a formal study about adopting the IB programs.

Prior to the vote, Concepcion asked whether Martin expects to have informational meetings for parents.

“We’re definitely going to need to do some communication with parents, but we haven’t nailed that down yet,” Martin said.

Board member Scott Fozard asked what form IB programs take, such as extra classes or different lines of study, and whether adopting a program would subject the district to “additional levels of scrutiny.”

Martin replied that the specific structures and courses depend on the programs, but that once a school becomes an “authorized IB school,” it receives audits from IBO to ensure consistent standards and ongoing teacher development as requirements change.

State High Project change orders

Without discussion, the Board unanimously approved [six State High Project change orders](#), one of which is a credit back to the district.

Other action items

The Board unanimously approved [a release with Mid-State Construction regarding Memorial Field construction](#) and [an easement with State College Borough to maintain sinkholes on the Radio Park Elementary School site](#).

The Board also heard a proposal from Business Administrator Randy Brown and Human Resources Director Linda Pierce [to create an assistant site supervisor position for the Community Education Extended Learning after school program](#). The program has almost doubled in size this year, and the district recommended the step to provide additional supervision for children and possibly help train replacement supervisors.

Board member Penni Fishbaine made a motion to move the recommendation to an action item, and the Board then unanimously approved the proposal.