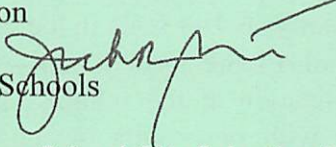


Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

August 31, 2017

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jack R. Smith, Superintendent of Schools 

Subject: Recommendation for an Elementary School Site Selection Process in the Gaithersburg Cluster

Elementary school student enrollment growth continues in the Gaithersburg Cluster and, therefore, several schools exceed their program capacities—Gaithersburg, Rosemont, Strawberry Knoll, Summit Hall, and Washington Grove elementary schools. In the 2014–2015 school year, a *Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* was conducted to determine whether additions to cluster schools could address the projected space deficits. Along with additions to existing schools, a new elementary school also was considered.

On October 15, 2015, the *Findings of the Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* were released. Then interim superintendent of schools, Mr. Larry A. Bowers, concluded that challenges existed with both approaches—additions or a new school—including concerns regarding future enrollment, size of schools, and potential reassignment of students. Also, the recommendation stated it was not appropriate to solely focus on the Gaithersburg Cluster. As a result, then interim superintendent of schools recommended a *Tri-Cluster Roundtable Discussion Group (Roundtable) for the Gaithersburg, Col. Zadok Magruder, and Thomas S. Wootton Clusters*. This Roundtable would review school enrollments, utilization levels, and facility options at the three adjacent clusters to more broadly address enrollment growth and space deficits in the Gaithersburg Cluster.

On April 19, 2016, the Board approved the following recommendations for the elementary schools in the Gaithersburg Cluster that stemmed from the Roundtable.

- Gaithersburg Elementary School—construct an addition at the school that would provide two schools in one building—Grades pre-K–2 and Grades 3–5—with physical separations where possible or a building with one school that would house Grades pre-K–5. In order to expedite the project, a feasibility study was recommended to be conducted in Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 followed immediately with planning to begin in FY 2018 with construction completed by September 2020.

- Rosemont Elementary School—monitor enrollment before any capital solutions or reassignments are considered. At the time of the Roundtable, the projected overutilization was 250 seats in the 2021–2022 school year. Only a four-classroom addition would be feasible at this school. Reassignment of the area west of Interstate 270 to Thomas S. Wootton Cluster schools was considered; however, then interim superintendent of schools did not support reassignment of additional students to the Thomas S. Wootton Cluster due to projected enrollment at Thomas S. Wootton High School.
- Strawberry Knoll Elementary School—monitor enrollment and consider an addition in a future Capital Improvements Program. At the time of the Roundtable, the projected overutilization was 144 seats in the 2021–2022 school year.
- Summit Hall Elementary School—the future revitalization/expansion would address the overutilization at the school. In the short-term, replace the six older relocatable classrooms with new units or modular classrooms. At the time of the Roundtable, the projected overutilization was 191 seats in the 2021–2022 school year.
- Washington Grove Elementary School—conduct a boundary study in spring 2017 to reassign the portion of the Shady Grove Sector Plan within the Gaithersburg Cluster service area to Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster schools. At the time of the Roundtable, the projected overutilization was nine seats in the 2021–2022 school year.

To date, based on the recommendations, a feasibility study was conducted at Gaithersburg Elementary School to determine the scope and cost of constructing an addition at the school with a capacity for 1,000 students. Also, a modular unit was installed at Summit Hall Elementary School to replace the existing older relocatable classrooms. Finally, a boundary study was conducted to reassign the portion of the Shady Grove Sector Plan within the Washington Grove Elementary School service area to the Col. Zadok Magruder Cluster schools.

With respect to the feasibility study for the addition at Gaithersburg Elementary School, there were a number of challenges that were revealed during the process. For example, with minimal site opportunity to construct the addition, several options were explored for a two- or three-story addition, raising questions related to program adjacencies, potential difficulties in navigating the building, as well as passive security opportunities. Also, due to the challenging existing pedestrian and vehicular infrastructure on the site, as well as surrounding the school, concerns were raised regarding arrival and dismissal of 1,000 students. Finally, while a second cafeteria would ensure that students have sufficient time to eat lunch, recess for students would be impacted as a result of the additional footprint of the new building on the site.

Based on the challenges that were discovered during the feasibility study process for the addition at Gaithersburg Elementary School, as well as the absence of a solution in the approved Capital Improvements Program to address the overutilization at Rosemont and Strawberry Knoll elementary schools, my recommendation is to evaluate whether a revised plan should be developed to address overutilization. As a first step in evaluating other options, I recommend to convene a site selection committee to evaluate potential elementary school sites in the Gaithersburg Cluster that could address the overutilization at the elementary schools in the cluster. While I certainly

understand all of the reasons considered in the decision to expand the existing Gaithersburg Elementary School, that decision was made prior to the feasibility study process that revealed the many site and building challenges, several of which are noted above. Therefore, I recommend further evaluation of options through a site selection process.

I believe that an evaluation of a new elementary school in the Gaithersburg Cluster, as a result of the findings of the feasibility study, is most prudent. My recommendation is to begin the site selection process in fall 2017 with Board action in March 2018. The adopted FY 2018 Capital Budget and Amendments to the FY 2017–2022 Capital Improvements Program has funds approved for the Gaithersburg Elementary School addition project. At this time, I do not recommend changes to this project.

After the site selection process is complete and a recommendation by the site selection committee is released, we will evaluate that report and provide a recommendation by February 2018, for Board review. This time frame coincides with the Board's spring amendment process in March 2018. With respect to the Shady Grove Sector Plan boundary study, my recommendation is to release the report of the committee but make no further decisions regarding reassignments until after the site selection process is complete.

WHEREAS, Elementary school student enrollment growth continues in the Gaithersburg Cluster and therefore, several schools exceed their program capacities; and

WHEREAS, In the 2014–2015 school year, a *Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* was conducted to determine whether additions to cluster schools or a new elementary school could address the projected space deficits; and

WHEREAS, On October 15, 2015, the *Findings of the Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study* were released and concluded that challenges existed with both approaches—additions or a new school—including concerns regarding future enrollment, size of schools, and potential reassignment of students; and

WHEREAS, The interim superintendent of schools, as a result of the *Findings of the Gaithersburg Cluster Elementary School Capacity Study*, recommended a *Tri-Cluster Roundtable Discussion Group for the Gaithersburg, Col. Zadok Magruder, and Thomas S. Wootton Clusters* to review school student enrollments, utilization levels, and facility options at the three adjacent clusters to more broadly address enrollment growth and space deficits in the Gaithersburg Cluster; and

WHEREAS, On April 19, 2016, the Board of Education approved the interim superintendent of schools' recommendations for the elementary schools in the Gaithersburg Cluster that stemmed from the *Tri-Cluster Roundtable Discussion Group*; and

WHEREAS, Based on Board of Education action, a feasibility study was conducted at Gaithersburg Elementary School to construct an addition with a capacity for 1,000 students; and

WHEREAS, During the feasibility study process, a number of site and building challenges were identified with the construction of an addition on the site of the existing Gaithersburg Elementary School; and

WHEREAS, Based on those challenges, as well as the absence of a solution for the overutilization of other elementary schools in the Gaithersburg Cluster, the superintendent of schools recommends the evaluation of a new elementary school in the cluster; now therefore be it

Resolved, That a site selection committee be formed to evaluate potential elementary school sites in the Gaithersburg Cluster that could address the overutilization at the elementary school level in the cluster; and be it further

Resolved, That the site selection process begin in fall 2017; and be it further

Resolved, That after the site selection process is complete and a recommendation by the site selection committee is released, the superintendent of schools will evaluate that report and provide a recommendation to the Board of Education by February 2018, with Board of Education action in March 2018; and be it further

Resolved, That the time line coincides with the Board of Education's spring amendment process in March 2018; and be it further

Resolved, That the funds approved in the adopted Fiscal Year 2018 Capital Budget and Fiscal Years 2017–2022 Capital Improvements Program for the Gaithersburg Elementary School addition project will not change at this time; and be it further

Resolved, That with respect to the Shady Grove Sector Plan Boundary Study, the committee report should be released; however, no further decisions regarding reassignments should be made until after the site selection process is complete.

JRS:AMZ:JS:lm