

To: School Modernization Committee
From: Rich Gusenburg, AnnMarie Kemp, Jen Bates
Date: May 14, 2020

Re: Report of the Staff/Teacher Input Subcommittee

As requested by the School Modernization Committee, the Staff/Teacher Subcommittee has met with the teachers and staff of each of the Cheshire school facilities. Minutes of these meetings have been forwarded to all members of the School Modernization Committee and we urge all members to read over these minutes as we will not, within this report, detail all of the comments and concerns that were expressed. In addition, each of our meetings was videotaped and is available on line for your perusal. Following are some of the major findings from our discussions:

1. The teachers and staff demonstrated great pride in the work they are doing. Although they often expressed concern with various aspects of the facilities in which they work, the teachers and staff often expressed a sense of camaraderie and felt they were achieving a great deal, often under difficult circumstances.
2. Space requirements came up as an issue in almost every school setting. Many of the classrooms in our schools are small with little storage. Modern instructional techniques require spaces in which students can work in groups and require flexible use of space. Our smaller classrooms, the older furniture contained in most of these rooms, and the lack of space for storage is greatly hindering the instructional programs.
3. Maintenance and environmental issues are a major source of concern. In every school the teachers and staff discussed environmental issues such as leaky roofs, windows that don't function properly, rooms that are either too hot or too cold, lack of airflow, and in most buildings, lack of air conditioning. The teachers were quick to complement the maintenance crews but also readily noted that the problems were so pervasive that no crew could handle them all. Although the town has spent a great deal on maintenance such as window replacement, the universal age of our many buildings has made it impossible to keep up with the maintenance needs.
4. The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990. Thirty years later we have school facilities in Cheshire that are not fully accessible. Staff have worked to give access to all students but this may require having wheelchair students go outside in rain or snow in order to access a lunchroom or library. Or it may mean a student with a broken leg struggling to get up a stairway. And although some students with handicaps can be moved to another facility we still may have teachers, staff or parents who need full access to the buildings.

5. Security is a concern amongst our staff and teachers. Our old buildings were designed in a day when security was not a major concern. New buildings today have specially treated windows, mantraps, classroom doors that can be quickly locked from the inside, etc. Cheshire has spent money on security but retrofitting old buildings is not an easy task.
6. In our meetings we discussed grade level configuration. Almost universally, the teachers we spoke with felt that grade six would be better served in a middle school setting. They noted that new standards for science and social studies are written for a grade 6-8 continuum. Teacher subject area specialization at these grade levels (6-8) is preferred as opposed to the elementary model where the teacher is a general “expert” in all subjects. Also, it was noted that it is difficult to meet the needs of 6th graders within an elementary schedule. Teachers also discussed the greater options available to middle school students such as clubs and sports. We did encounter a couple of teachers who felt sixth graders were still young and therefore, better served in an elementary setting.
Along these same lines, the teachers at Doolittle expressed the strong desire to have their kindergarten students in their buildings. At this time all K students are serviced in their home schools except for Doolittle due to lack of space. These students are at Darcey. Darcey kindergarten teachers are very positive about their K program while, at the same time, commenting on the positive aspects of having students in a single school for their elementary years.

Facilities with severe program issues:

7. **Cheshire High School** teachers and staff were anxious to speak with the subcommittee and noted multiple issues with the building that were inhibiting programs. Some of these, such as room size, lack of storage, and environmental issues were noted earlier. But they also noted specific issues related to CHS. For instance, they noted the inadequacy of science labs and the poor layout of the building that, for instance, makes it very difficult for programs to coordinate their efforts such as the wood shop and the drama program. The staff noted issues related to ADA accessibility in a large building with numerous additions. The school layout also makes it difficult to control access during the extensive use of the building at night and on weekends. Traffic flow for students and parents were areas of concern expressed by staff.
8. **Humiston** Teachers and staff exhibited a great deal of pride in their program and the success they have had with their high school students. At the same time the subcommittee was appalled by the Humiston facility. The office is in the basement with no direct sight of the entrance. There is no nurse’s office but a small room next to the office or the psychologist office is used for ill students. The building has no science lab and must “borrow” science equipment from the high school. There is a small gym but students are not allowed to run or bounce balls because there are classrooms below and the low ceiling combined with the required fire prevention sprinkler system

- does not allow for the use of balls for play. Bathrooms between classrooms are totally inadequate for high school students and there is no staff bathroom. There is no library. And, once again, the building has no handicap accessibility in a three-story school building.
9. **Dodd Middle School** issues overlap those of the other schools with concerns regarding class size and environmental issues. The staff noted numerous concerns where lack of space has limited programs. The small stage that shares space with the cafeteria has meant limiting student involvement in drama activities. Other programs such as culinary arts and video production have no space or inadequate space. The band room does not accommodate the entire band and there is inadequate storage for band instruments. The cafeteria is poorly placed in the building and too small to accommodate the number of students. Parking is a major problem and the fields were noted to be of very poor quality, especially when measured against the fields of opposing teams.
 10. **Chapman** staff love their small environment and are very proud of the accomplishments of their students. However, the Chapman facility is grossly inadequate. It is extremely old and outdated. Handicap accessibility is non-existent with the cafeteria, band room, library, and psychologist in a basement area with no elevator. The building also has a second floor of classrooms, also with no accessibility. Many of the classrooms do not have sinks and room temps varied widely. Staff expressed concern with parent drop-off where students must walk between busses to access the building.
 11. **Norton** is also a very dated and needy facility according to the staff. Art, music, and PT are held in dated portable classrooms, which, according to the teachers, have numerous issues such as security concerns (students must go outside to get to the portables), issues regarding heat, and handicap accessibility. Lack of electric outlets and storage space were noted repeatedly by teachers of every grade level. There are concerns regarding the lack of a lobby area, which creates security issues, and the lack of an adequately sized multipurpose space where the students can gather and do performances. . Parent dropoff and pickup areas were noted as a danger for children and adults. Library is poorly located in the building.
 12. **Doolittle** concerns related mainly to maintenance issues such as difficulty controlling temperatures in rooms, the inability to open windows, moisture issues in the area near the gym. Due to lack of space the Doolittle kindergarten students attend school at Darcey. The staff strongly requested that any plan for modernizations include moving these children back to Doolittle.
 13. **Highland** is our “newest” school and, in general, it has held up well. Most staff concerns focused upon maintenance issues such as airflow in individual rooms and the need to replace windows in a timely fashion. Older design issues such as “open spaces” were noted as noise issues that cause instructional issues.
 14. **Darcey** presently houses pre-K students as well as the kindergarten students from Doolittle School. It is a very old building that has multiple maintenance

issues and is not fully handicap accessible. It does have large classroom spaces that work well for the pre-K program, although the kindergarten rooms were noted to be a substandard size. Teachers expressed concerns with lack of special education spaces for this population such as appropriate space for physical and occupational therapy, speech and remedial reading/math. Bathrooms were noted to be inadequate for students and staff. Storage was noted to be lacking. The staff also noted security concerns and issues related to safety on the playground and with the bus dropoff area.

The subcommittee was extremely pleased with the excellent turnout at all of our meetings. The teachers and staff were anxious to share their ideas and concerns and were excited by the idea of positively moving forward with a facility modernization plan. In each meeting we were careful to communicate the process and potential timeline and urge all teachers and staff to be involved in the decision-making process. Special thanks to Rob Oris, as an ex-officio member, and to Sylvia Nichols who attended several of our sessions. Having members of the Town Council attend these sessions lent a great deal of credibility to our efforts. Also thanks to Marlene Silano, Assistant Superintendent, for setting up the meetings and introducing each session. And we would be remiss if we did not thank Marilyn Milton who took copious notes and to Mike Solimine who taped all the sessions.