

Grade Reconfiguration  
Feasibility Study  
&  
Demographic Study

Prepared for the Palmyra School District  
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# Context for the Study

- Proposal is to establish a middle school (encompassing grades 6,7,8) on the high school campus using existing facilities.
- Currently, the 7th and 8th grades attend the high school campus, and the 6th grade attends the Charles Street School (preschool through grade 6).
- Goal is to consolidate these grades on the high school campus in order to create a better educational environment, cost efficiencies, and a middle school that is distinct from the high school for all purposes, including reporting (i.e., School Performance Reports).

# Study Scope

- Update the Demographic Study.
- Review existing facility capacity and suitability, including an analysis of the physical space and location of both middle school and high school classes.
- Determine the impact of establishing a stand-alone middle school on the high school campus including educational benefits (enrichment and co-curriculars) and impact on staffing, social and emotional benefits for students, financial impacts, as well as potential negative impacts (discipline or need for remedial programs).
- The study entailed site visits, consultations and interviews with district staff, document review, and data analysis.
- This is a feasibility study that is intended to provide needed information to guide district decision making. It is not an implementation plan.

# Facilities Adequacy: High School

- The High School building has sufficient space to house both a stand-alone middle school program and a stand-alone high school program.
- This space would, given modest and reasonable modifications, be functionally adequate for providing intended instruction and services.
- The Delaware Avenue School could also continue to be used, in part, for instructional purposes to support the feasibility of such a restructuring plan. This will be important to accommodate the slight increase in enrollments projected by the long range demographic study.

# Facilities Adequacy: Middle School

- The proposed Middle School could feasibly be made a self-contained school that would be housed primarily on the second floor.
- The middle school, 6th grade included, would require all 17 existing classrooms located on the 2nd and Basement floors; 1 Special Education room (existing) on the 2nd floor, the Gymnasium on the Basement floor, and sufficient lockers for the student body. These students would also need to utilize the existing access stairways to the 1st floor library, cafeteria and auditorium. The Cafeteria on the first floor would be a shared Cafeteria space with the High School, without the need to co-mingle populations.

# Academic Benefits

- The proposed reconfiguration should present opportunities for enhancement of the academic program for both High School and Middle School students. Among those enhancements could be opportunities for Grade 6 students to participate in more age appropriate, Middle School level (versus elementary level) courses and activities.
- Advanced mathematics and language arts/literacy curriculum opportunities could also be provided to eligible students in all three middle school grades.
- The Charles Street School would be able to improve instructional opportunities for grade PK-5 students given the space created by moving Grade 6 into the Middle School (e.g., moving Music instruction from the Stage into a classroom, creating Basic Skills Instructional space, and bringing Special Needs students back into the district for instruction).

# Benefits for Students with Special Needs

- The reorganization could, after assuring compliance with IEP guidelines, afford approximately 6 Special Needs students the opportunity to receive educational and support services in Districts (versus out-of-district placements).
- The children involved in the bring back would be directly benefited, in that their educational program and related services would be delivered in the Least Restrictive Environment. The district should also be able to offer these services more efficiently than current out of district tuition costs.

# Opportunities for Enrichment

- Given the potential cost savings through the return of some special needs students from out-of-district placements, there will likely be available additional dollars to fund program and facilities enhancements. Examples would include converting the existing High School Library into a Research Library, offering more advance placement courses, and offering a variety of distant learning opportunities.
- It would also appear that opportunities for Grade 6 students could expand in the areas of academic enrichment, art, music, and athletics. We note, however, that these students will lose the current recess period they have at the elementary school.

# Social and Emotional Benefits

Numerous examples, as well as a substantial body of research, exists indicating Middle School configurations, such as the one being proposed by Palmyra can be very successful in providing quality educational opportunities that prepare students for high school, and to begin preparing them to become college, careers and civic ready.

# Delaware Avenue School Possible Uses

- We also note that the potential of using the Delaware Avenue School for additional purposes is substantial given the space available in that building to ease the impact of the reconfiguration and accommodate any future enrollment growth.
- A few examples include expanding the current academic offerings for High School and Middle School students, offering "magnet" programs for both Palmyra and neighboring school districts, housing County or Municipal supported services (e.g., health and human services for students) on site, and offering adult education programs to the community.

# Challenges: Schedule

- It is anticipated that a staggered starting and dismissal time would be needed to accommodate the reconfiguration. As an example, a starting and dismissal time for High School students that would be 40 minutes (one period) before that for the Middle School could prove to be reasonable and feasible.
- Such a change would have an impact upon staffing assignments, and most likely applicable portions of the contract between the District and Teacher's Association.
- The district would also need to design strategies for helping the 6th grade students adjust to the new schedule. An example would be instituting an optional visitation/orientation day for students and their parents prior to the beginning of the new year.

# Challenges: Staffing

- Staffing for the High School would remain essentially as it now exists.
- Maintaining the existing number of Middle School staff currently serving Grade 7 & 8 students is feasible.
- Staff currently providing services to Grade 6 students at the Charles Street School would need to be transferred to the Middle School.
- Staffing assignments would need to be reviewed to ensure Licensing and Highly Qualified criteria are being met as a result of the reconfiguration.
- Additional staff, possibly one or two additional aides, would be needed to accommodate the number of Special Needs students who are returning to District from out-of-district placements.

# Financial Implication

- The return to District of 6 Special Needs students is financially substantial and will result in a net savings to the district.
- These net savings could be used to pay for facility renovations needed to bring about the proposed reconfiguration, as well as those needed to offer new instruction opportunities (e.g., upgrade the Library to a Research Library, and upgrade instruction that uses technology, like Distant Learning).

# Demographic Information

- A demographic study was done to project future enrollments and determine the capacity and suitability of the existing high school for the purposes of the grade reconfiguration.
- Total enrollment (PK-12) is projected to decline through SY2023. Enrollment is projected to be 829 students in SY2023, which would be a decline of 80 students from SY2018 enrollment of 909 students.
- For the High School, enrollment is projected to slowly increase before stabilizing. Enrollment is projected to be 483 students in SY2023, which would represent a gain of 55 students from SY18 enrollment of 428 students. If the school includes 6<sup>th</sup> grade, enrollment is projected to be 534 in SY23.

# Building Capacity

- Surpluses of seating currently exist in each of the district's schools.
- The surplus of seating at Charles Street is projected to increase in magnitude by 2022-23 due to declining enrollment. Under the proposed scenario, the number of surplus seats at Charles Street would increase further.
- At Palmyra High School, a small number of unhoused students (-23) is projected in 2022-23 due to increasing enrollment. However, in the proposed configuration that includes the 6th grade, the number of unhoused students at Palmyra High School would increase to 74.

# Conclusion

- No remarkable negative instructional, facility or financial impacts where identified;
- Potential for academic, social, and emotional benefits for all students;
- The return of out-of-district special needs students will both benefit those students educationally and provide the possibility for cost savings;
- Challenges presented by the proposal in regards to scheduling and staffing can be reasonably and responsively addressed.