

Space and Safety

Final Report and Recommendations to the WGSD Board of Education

January 5, 2019

This report is the culmination of nearly a year's worth of work and input from WGSD community members, parents, volunteers, students and staff. It represents an exhaustive compilation of relevant information, analysis, surveys, studies, assessments and projections specifically related to the condition, adequacy, safety and health of physical plant—i.e. district schools, buildings and site improvements. Based on this information and input, it presents the best thinking and recommendations of district administration to the Board of Education regarding the best path forward with respect to maintaining, improving and right-sizing district facilities.

Each year, the WGSD surveys the community regarding awareness of, satisfaction with and expectations of district programs, services, operations and communications. In the spring of 2018, the WGSD community was asked by the district in its annual survey where the district should focus its tax dollars and efforts to improve the quality of education. Facilities issues ranked among the top priorities, including maintenance, renovations, new construction and safety/security. We believe this perceived need is most likely due to the district's aging infrastructure.

Over the past few years, including this year, the district has continued to collect much information and data regarding space and facility needs in the school district. Included in this collection are:

- Accessibility Needs (Fall 2018 by district)
- Asbestos (August 2018 by district)
- Safety and Security (July 2018 by Gallagher Bassett)
- Safety and Security (Fall 2018 by Webster Groves Police Department)
- Facilities Condition Assessment (April 2018 by EMG)
- Enrollment Projections (updated January 2018 by Dr. Charles Kofron)
- Additional Enrollment Data (June 2018 by district)
- Programmatic Needs (updated September 2018 by district)

Building on this information and work, this fall the district initiated two processes designed to problem-solve its response to both current and emerging needs. One process addressed district space needs directly related to enrollment, while the other addressed safety and other (non-enrollment) space needs.

Safety and Other (Non-Enrollment) Space Needs

With older school buildings, it is critically important for the district to be proactive with maintenance and upkeep of its aging infrastructure, as well as responsive to ways schools across the country are changing to meet the needs of students and the realities of the 21st century society. Over the past several months, the board-appointed Building Advisory Committee has engaged in a process to explore, evaluate and make recommendations regarding district safety and facility-related needs (not directly related to enrollment). Following a review of the information and data collected and discussed, Mr. Ellerman facilitated the group in developing a prioritized list of proposed solutions for addressing these district needs. The committee evaluated and prioritized each possible solution using a common rubric developed by the committee containing the following weighted criteria: a) safety/health/mandated by governing authority, b) potential educational impact, c) condition of existing, d) life cycle expectancy/efficiency, and e) aesthetics/public support. This process enabled the committee to assign a standardized priority score to each need which could be compared to all other district needs. The results of that committee's work is found in an

accompanying document and serves as the basis for facilities related projects as part of Option A and Option B recommendations subsequently presented herein..

The pictures below illustrate some of the areas explored and evaluated.



A few district schools are not fully accessible to everyone (ADA).



The security of interior doors varies.



**The distance from the front entrance to main office, where visitors check-in, varies among schools.
In addition, each main entrance is not accessible to everyone (ADA).**



Enrollment Space Needs

Enrollment in the Webster Groves School District has been growing for quite a few years. Since 2009, elementary resident enrollment has increased by 8% and total district enrollment has increased by 11%. While a few factors surely attribute to this increase, the data shows an upward trend in the number of children born in the district and a notable increase in the number of students who had attended private/parochial schools prior to entering the district (2nd most of any regional school district from 2009 - 2013).

While we monitor actual district enrollment on a regular basis, the district is in its third year of contracting with Dr. Charles Kofron to develop 5 year rolling enrollment projections. Dr. Kofron's projections are based on the number of children born within district boundaries and the number of resident children who enter kindergarten in the district. While a projected decrease can be observed in the 2022-23 and 2023-24 kindergarten cohorts (2023-24 based on 5 months of actual births and 7 months of projected births), resident district enrollment is still expected to increase 2.3% between now and 2023-24, and resident elementary enrollment is expected to increase by 4.1% within the same timeframe.

In response to crowding, and in order to best attend to the educational needs of district children, district schools have adapted and modified their physical environments in very intentional, thoughtful, and, at times, creative ways.

Among other responses to crowding, since 2013 the district placed modular units at Avery (2 classrooms), Clark (2 classrooms), and Edgar Road (4 classrooms). A Request for Proposals is currently out to bid for a third modular unit (2 classrooms) at Edgar Road. While modular units have provided some space relief at the three elementary schools, the interiors of those schools and others remain crowded. The pictures below illustrate some of the modifications undertaken at district schools.

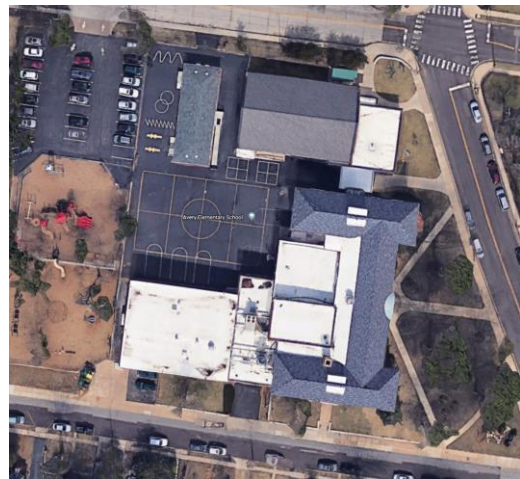
Avery Elementary



A hallway space between two restrooms was “carved out” for individual and small group learning.



Hallways and teacher assistants' desks (in hallways) are used in support of individual and small group learning.



A modular unit containing 2 general education classrooms. At Avery, this modular unit limits the amount of outdoor space for recess and physical education space.



The lunchroom at Avery is quite crowded and lunch spans 2 hours. A few years back, two classrooms were added in the lunchroom in response to enrollment growth, which further strained already limited lunchroom space.

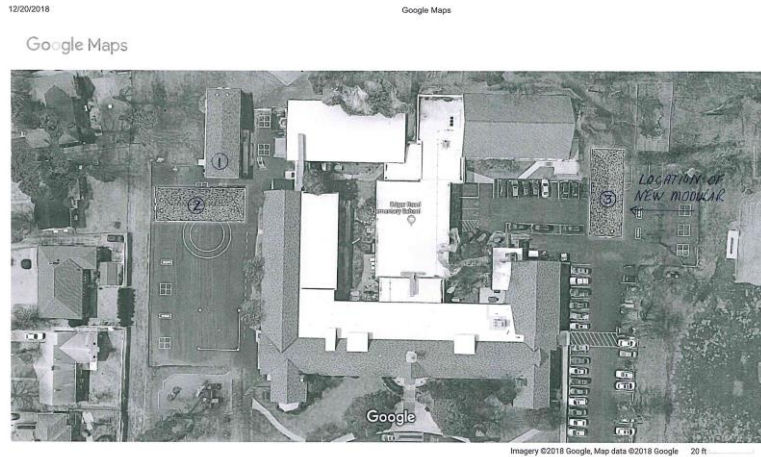
Edgar Road Elementary



Three years ago, the staff workroom, similar to the one at Clark (right), was converted into the music room.



The lunchroom is crowded. Lunch spans 2 hours and 25 minutes.



<https://www.google.com/maps/@38.5718463,-90.3483794,160a,35y,270h/data=!3m1!1e3>

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A second modular unit, housing 2 general education classrooms (total of 4) was placed at Edgar Road in the summer of 2018. A Request for Proposals is currently out for a third modular unit (which would add another 2 classrooms) due to continued growth at the school.

Clark Elementary

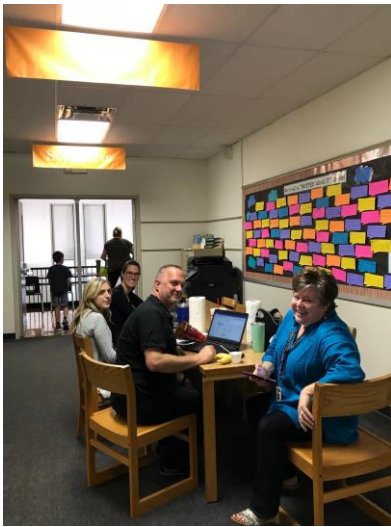


Small groups meet under the stairwell.

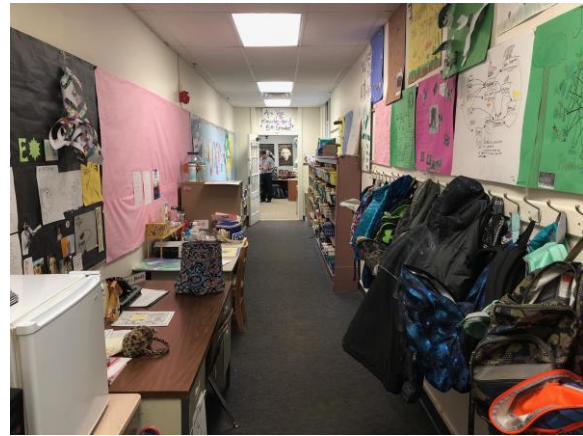


A modular unit contains 2 general education classes.

At Bristol



Staff do not have a workroom to gather.



Hallways are filled with support staff desks, supplies, etc.



The art room is quite small and is without a sink in the room.

After viewing Dr. Kofron's latest projections at the January 6, 2018 board meeting, and considering all that has been done to this point to address already existing overcrowding in our schools, the Board initiated a small subcommittee to further examine enrollment data at the schools and districtwide. The following data (5 years or less) was collected, reviewed, and discussed by that group:

- Last Wednesday September Enrollment
- Last Wednesday January Enrollment
- Resident District Enrollment Projections Shared w/ BOE on August 2016
- Resident District Enrollment Shared w/BOE on January 2018
- Enrollments During Summer

- Withdraws During Summer
- Enrollments After First Day of School
- Withdraws After First Day of School
- VICC Enrollment
- Students Enrolled But Not Attending (Great Circle/Epworth)
- Students of Non-Resident Staff Enrolled
- Student Transfers from Normandy/Riverview Gardens
- Students Only Participating in a District Program (ex: SSD, gifted, etc.)
- Students Enrolled via a Residency Waiver
- Students Transferred from an Elementary School
- Students Transferred to an Elementary School
- Resident Students Attending an SSD School
- Students Attending Private Schools (data limited)
- Occupancy Permit Data
- District Registered Voters
- Census Data
- 2012-2016: Children Characteristics
- 2010: Households and Family
- 2011-2017 School Enrollment
- 2012 - 2016 Occupancy Characteristics
- 2010 General Population and Housing Characteristics
- 2012-2016 School Enrollment
- Building Enrollment Capacity Data

Based on the data collected including Dr. Kofron's projection data, it was determined that further study was needed in order to propose recommendations for addressing the district's current and projected future enrollment space issues.

In July, district administration put out a Request for Proposal for vendors to help facilitate a process which would ultimately result in a proposed solution(s) for addressing our enrollment space needs. On August 27, 2018, the board approved Cooperative Strategies to work with Dr. Simpson in order to facilitate this process.

The process used to problem-solve and develop solutions for addressing our enrollment space needs was thoughtfully designed and implemented, and prioritized community-wide feedback throughout. Opportunities for community feedback were presented through a variety of channels, which included the Webster Kirkwood Times, direct mail (Our Schools), social media, email, and sharing with both private/parochial schools and churches for distribution.

Stakeholders across the community were also invited to contribute to the decision-making process in a variety of ways including:

- September and October: Public forums held at each school in the district.
- September and October: Presentations with staffs at each district school
- September, October, and November: Stakeholder surveys
- October: Stakeholder focus groups
- October: Community Open House
- December: Community Open House
- December: Community Feedback via email and phone calls

In addition to data and information obtained through stakeholder involvement, hard data was examined throughout the process - much of which can be found in related reports, along with survey feedback data, on our district web page dedicated to this process: <https://www.webster.k12.mo.us/domain/3898>.

Preferred Options

Throughout the process, a number of possible solutions were discussed, explored and vetted, including through the use of community-wide surveys and open house opportunities. Ultimately, two options emerged as preferred solutions to address current and projected district crowding/enrollment space needs:

Option A: Building Additions at Edgar Road and Clark Schools, Space Needs at Avery

Option B: Moving sixth grade students to Hixson Middle School and converting Steger into a neighborhood elementary school or neighborhood school plus Givens School

While the benefits and challenges of these options vary, the following are assumptions currently being presented with each:

- Each offers a long-term solution to district existing and projected enrollment space needs. Utilizing Dr. Kofron's latest projections, if Option A were implemented, the district's projected capacity utilization would be at 97% in 2023-24. If Option B were implemented, the district's capacity utilization would be at 93% in 2023-24.
- Each requires some degree of elementary boundary line adjustments. Given Option B provides a "new" school requiring its own attendance area, this option would require more extensive rezoning.
- Each provides any kindergarten student, who starts at one school prior to the first year of implementation (2020/21 or 2021/22), with the opportunity to remain in that school through fifth grade if the family chooses. Allowing children to remain in the schools in which they start will more than likely lead to a slight temporary class size increase in some situations and involve a phasing out of the existing modular classrooms for classroom use over a number of years.
- Each would require additional parking spaces at each school.
- Each would be accomplished without increasing the district's tax rate for available bonding capacity. Nevertheless, each would require voter approval. .
- Each would require students to remain onsite during construction.

Considerations for Options

Option A: Additions at Edgar Road and Clark, Space Relief at Avery (estimated cost of \$7 - \$8.5 million). This option involves the construction of 8 classrooms at Edgar Road and 6 classrooms at Clark. At the recommendation of the Building Advisory Committee, it also includes \$1.5 million to provide space relief at Avery depending on the results of the boundary line adjustment process.

Considerations for Option A:

- Provides the district with more financial flexibility than Option B, which could be used to address a greater number of safety and other space-related needs now and/or allow unspent funds to be reserved for future capital needs.
- Ongoing operational cost of this option is estimated at 25% of Option B.
- Is the least disruptive to district stakeholders given there would be no changes to the current grade-level configuration, boundary-line adjustments would be minimal, and the changes would likely be implemented during the 2020-21 school year. For district staff, it would require less reorganization/fewer inter-school transfers.
- With this option, the district's projected capacity utilization would be at 97% in 2023-24.

Option B: Moving sixth grade students to Hixson Middle School and converting Steger into a neighborhood elementary school or neighborhood school plus Givens School (estimated cost of \$16,000,000).

Considerations for Option B

- Provides more space relief at the elementary school level. Under Option A, with an estimate of 18.3 students per class (current class size average), the district would increase its elementary capacity by 264 students. Under Option B, and assuming the new elementary school would have similar specials classes to other district elementary schools, the estimated capacity of the current Steger portion of that building would be 396. Thus, the added elementary capacity under Option B is 50% greater than Option A. With this option, the district's projected capacity utilization would be at 93% in 2023-24.
- Furthers our efforts to become a more equitable school system by providing more district students and families with a neighborhood elementary school.
- Due to the location of the Steger /Givens campus, which would be the site of the new elementary school, it's quite possible that the elementary rezoning process would result in schools on the south side of the district being less diverse (demographically) than they are today.
- Provides one fewer school transition for district Kdg - 12th grade students.
- Provides the opportunity for sixth grade students to access a wider array of academic and elective programmatic options (exs: electives, advanced math courses).
- Promotes and allows for improved sixth through eighth grade collaboration and professional development among teachers and support staff.
- Having middle school age students in one building for three years will help create a more cohesive middle school experience for students and families.
- Provides new, 21st century facilities to an older building and to specific-age students at a developmentally disruptive ("tough") time in their young lives.
- When fully implemented and the elementary school phase-in process is over, this option is estimated to increase the operating budget by \$200,000 due to additional staffing needs.
- The portion of cost for enrollment related space is approximately \$7.5 million dollars more than Option A.
- The research is inconclusive regarding whether the 6-8th grade structure (alone) has a positive effect on academic performance.
- While traffic at the current Givens/Steger site would likely improve with this option, the school district would need to work with the city in order to plan for the increase in traffic at Hixson. This may or may not involve an additional cost to the district.
- This option cannot be implemented until the 2021-22 school year.

- Hixson would be one of the larger middle schools in the state.

Recommendation

Considering the shared assumptions for the options and the considerations unique to each, the administration's recommendation is for the school district to move forward with Option B including making Hixson a 6-8th grade middle school and converting the Steger/Givens campus into a single, neighborhood elementary school - Givens Elementary (with a decision to come on how best to continue to honor the Steger name).

In addition, administration recommends the school district moving forward with the safety and other space needs proposed by the building advisory committee in accordance with Option B. Addressing these needs would come at a cost of approximately \$22,600,000 and require 4/7 voter approval of a zero tax rate increase bond issue (maintaining extending the district's existing debt service levy beyond its current expiration date). Since our current \$.5699 debt service levy will only support additional bonding capacity in the estimated amount of \$22,000,000 (actual capacity ultimately depends on the market interest rates at the time of the bond issue) and since the district is prioritizing options that don't increase the district's debt service tax rate, the additional, estimated \$600,000 (adjusted up or down as needed based on the final bond issue amount) would be taken out of the district's operating fund over a two-year period.

In order to be placed on the April 2, 2019 ballot, which administration recommends, the district has to submit board-approved ballot language and election forms to the St. Louis County Election Board prior to its deadline of January 22, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.

Rationale for Recommendation

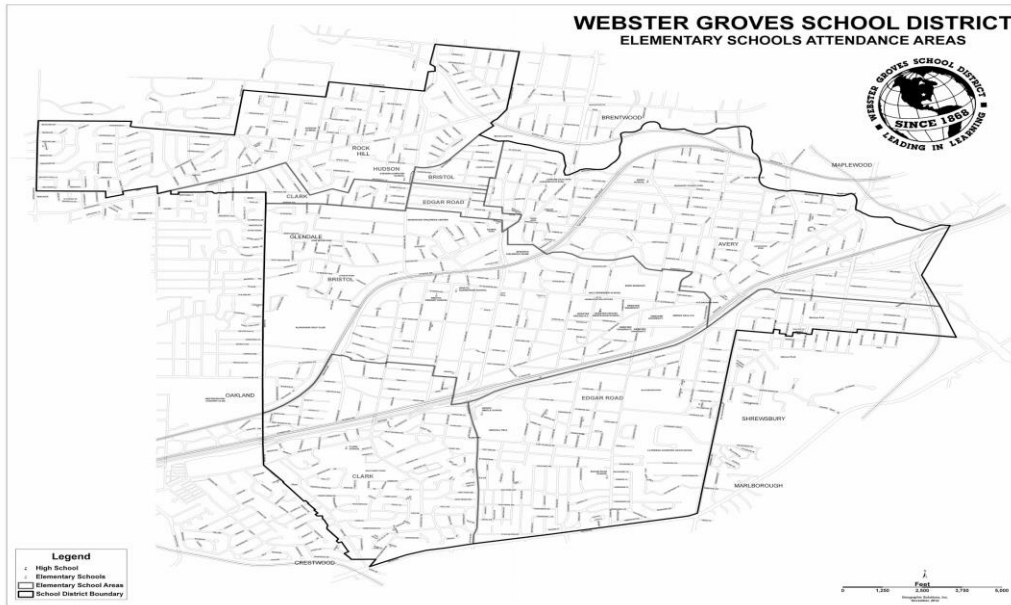
Below is a detailed explanation of the rationale for proceeding with Option B to address the district's enrollment space needs. More than anything, three strong reasons support the choice of Option B. This option provides the most space for a longer time for elementary students, addresses a long-standing inequity in our school district and will provide district students with a better educational experience in the Webster Groves School District.

- Option B provides significantly more space relief (50%) which is needed at the elementary level across the district and projects to accommodate enrollment for longer time. While we need additional general education classrooms to accommodate our current and projected enrollment, space relief is also needed for other, essential instructional (exs: academic, social/emotional interventions) and non-instructional (ex: lunch) programs. For example, there are a number of young children across our district who receive instructional support in the hallway of their schools. Due to the "traffic" that occurs in hallways, this setting detracts from a child's ability to focus on their learning.

In addition, if future enrollment dictated a need for additional elementary space (not currently projected), it would be less disruptive to add on to one or more of our elementary schools at that time – not having done so at this time with this option.

- This option directly addresses a long-standing equity issue here, at the structural and systems levels. Option B would exemplify this commitment in a transformative way, by establishing a neighborhood elementary school in this area of the district.

In 1978, in large part because of a local desegregation court case, the Webster Groves School District created non-contiguous attendance zones for Bristol, Clark and Edgar Road. Also in 1978, the Douglass Demonstration School, where a number of children from the surrounding neighborhood attended, was closed. Consistent with ongoing court decisions, the newly drawn attendance zones led to schools that are more diverse across the district, while directing children from what had been a neighborhood school, to schools as far as 3 miles away from their homes. The majority of these children, if not all, were African-American students.



These non-contiguous zones remain today, and currently contain 133 elementary students. The students who live in the Clark and Edgar Road zones continue to have access to free transportation to those schools as students did from the onset in 1978.

The overwhelming majority of district residents currently benefit from high quality, neighborhood schools. One of the advantages of a neighborhood school includes easy, usually walkable, access to the school for students and parents. A neighborhood school also provides families of the community with a shared space or place in which to connect and deepen relationships over the course of their children's start in formal education. Lastly, faculty at a neighborhood school have the opportunity to provide deeper and more meaningful curricular connections given the shared context of the children.

If this option were to move forward and be approved by the voters as part of an April bond issue, an inclusive process to redraw elementary attendance zones would be initiated soon thereafter. It would be the recommendation of administration to employ a vendor to facilitate a process that along with current and projected enrollment data prioritizes neighborhood and diverse schools across the school district.

- At this time, it is the recommendation of administration that the Steger/Givens site become one neighborhood elementary school. It is also recommended that the current, lottery-based school (one class/grade) be allowed to continue to enroll students through the kindergarten class of 20-21. Those students, along with those in the grade levels above, would move through the school as they do now – one class/grade level. School and district staff would work with current Givens families and others in support of creating the best educational experience for the current and future Givens students and families through the transition period (lottery-based to neighborhood school).
- Moving to a 6-8th grade middle school would mean one less transition for district students and families. While our current structure (K-5, 6, 7-8, 9-12) has not proven to negatively impact the overwhelming majority of students who have navigated it, there is research that speaks to the value of limiting transitions for students.

We believe that eliminating this transition will lead to a greater continuity of care and support for all students. The students will have an administrator and counselor who support them and their families for three years, instead of two sets who support them for 1 and 2 years respectively. Academic, social/emotional, behavior, and other interventions can be implemented without the disruption that occurs with a change in staff, programming and the physical environment of the school.

In a 6-8th grade middle school, sixth grade students would still be provided with a caring and supportive transition to the middle school level. Sixth graders would have their own wing of the school, lunch period, etc. Many current Steger staff would be relocated to Hixson and would provide support, guidance, and wisdom regarding successfully transitioning students from the elementary to middle school level. In addition, Dr. Lee (building principal) has both teacher and leadership experience at 6-8 middle schools and has worked with school teams and 8th grade student leaders to help successfully transition 6th grade students in the past.

It is anticipated that another benefit of a 6-8th grade school would be increased parental involvement and engagement at the school. Parent involvement and investment, financially and otherwise, in the WGSD decreases significantly at Steger in comparison to district elementary schools and is reportedly less than that observed at Hixson. While the decrease in parent involvement may be attributed to the age of students (compared to elementary level), it is believed that much of the decrease can be attributed to Steger Sixth Grade being a one-year experience for everyone.

- Having sixth grade students at Hixson would provide those students with the opportunity to access a wider array of academic and elective programmatic options including, but not limited to, electives and advanced math courses. While you could provide current sixth graders at Steger with many, if not all, of these same options, it would come at a much greater operating cost (due to the need for additional staff and changes to the Steger facilities) and/or would limit the flexibility of building schedules due to sharing staff, which limits both schools.
- While the staffs from both Steger and Hixson have the opportunity to come together to collaborate and develop together from time to time, being in the same building, as one team, will allow this important practice to occur more efficiently and more effectively. With the district's commitment to

PLCs (professional learning communities), 6-8th grade teachers would have the opportunity, within their content area, to regularly discuss curriculum, assessments, resources, student learning and performance, etc.

- With Steger and Hixson combining into one school, it would become one of the larger middle schools in the state of Missouri. There is research that speaks to the negative effect of larger middle schools. There is also research that speaks to “size” not being a decisive factor in the quality of a middle school, but rather other factors such as quality of teachers, cohesive curriculum, etc.

When comparing 2017 MAP and long-term suspension data (most current available) for local middle schools, some of the larger middle schools have the best achievement results and fewest long-term suspensions. Crestview (1205 students), Ladue (974 students) and Parkway West (1015 students) Middle Schools are among the top locally, and in the state, with respect of these data measures. Dr. Wipke, Fox superintendent and former principal at Crestview Middle School, shared that he had many benefits at Crestview due to its size. Dr. Wipke said, “We were able to have a lot of perks because we were large. Perks with staffing, class size and facility were a few. I was able to schedule for 3 full teams per grade level so the kids really knew the teachers really well. We were also able to have PLC and Team time which helped with the planning.”

Much like what is currently done at Steger and Hixson, a priority will be placed on creating smaller learning environments within the school as a whole. Among the strategies used to accomplish this are taking steps to provide a developmentally appropriate setting for our students via the construction of 21st century learning environments through this process, continuing a commitment to maintaining district class sizes optimum for personalized learning and development, and ensuring the building is appropriately staffed.

- The construction of the north addition at WGHS created much excitement and enthusiasm among the student body at the school. The effect of the physical environment on one’s attitude and readiness to engage and learn is commonly understood – for young people as well as adults. Option B would provide every district student with the opportunity to access new, 21st century learning environments at the middle school.
- Concerning the safety and other space needs, the priorities developed by the Building Advisory Committee are conveyed in an attached report. At this time, and considering district short and long-term needs, it is recommended that we proceed with the items noted to accompany Option B.

Additional Recommendations

- It is recommended that children of non-resident staff, following one year of successful employment, (continue to) be permitted to attend district schools if space allows. This benefit is commonplace among most public school districts in the region. Our district benefits from the state aid generated from these students attending and from staff being invested in the success of our schools and district in yet another way as parents. It is critically important that children of non-resident staff continue to be placed in grade levels at schools with enough space to accommodate them and additional children.

- It is recommended that the district continue its practice of allowing resident families to send their children to any district school, if space exists in the receiving school at the desired grade level. It is recommended that a group convene to review and modify our process (as needed) to be responsive to the crowding in district schools.

Tasks to Initiate if Option B Approved and Placed on Ballot

If the board votes to approve administration's recommendation and places Option B on the ballot, the following would be among the tasks initiated prior to the April vote:

- Determine how to incorporate the "Steger" name into the new 6-8 middle school in a thoughtful way (ex: "Steger Sixth Grade Wing")
- Development of a transition plan for Givens to become one neighborhood school at the Steger/Givens site
- Development of specific architectural and design documents so that the construction/addition process can begin as soon as possible assuming a favorable April vote.
- Begin advanced preparation for a sale of bonds as soon as possible after the April vote. This is both for construction cash flow purposes and for optimizing potential bond interest rates given the current rate market and the number of competing bond issues on the April 2019 ballot.
- Development of a transition plan for Hixson to become a 6-8 middle school
- Development of a staffing plan to support the movement of staff K-8 (or K-5 if Option A)
- Review and refine (as necessary) our processes related to the transfer of resident children among district schools
- Development of a Request for Proposal for a vendor to facilitate the elementary rezoning process
- Development of communications surrounding what is being proposed