Morris County Schools

From Doug Conwell, Superintendent

USD 417 employees, parents, and patrons through their cooperative efforts assure district students of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to develop into lifelong learners who respect themselves and others, contribute to their communities, and succeed in a changing world.

Information for the September 29, 2014 BOE Meeting

As per BOE request from the last BOE meeting, the following documents address the questions given to me in regards to which PH school to close and what should be the grade configuration at the remaining school. I have also included thoughts and some cost saving information regarding a 7-12 school option. Last, all figures with the exception of salary information refers back to the 2012-13 school year in order to keep data accurate with prior reports. Salary information is stated as of 2014-15.

At the meeting on September 12, each BOE member gave his/her thoughts as to what constitutes a “long-term” solution for the district’s financial stability. The most frequent number mentioned was 10 years though ranges ran from 18-20 years and 10-15 years to 7-10 years.

As I discuss the topic of efficiencies please keep in mind that this does not always mean money saved in the form of adding money back to the budget. It can also mean reallocating the disbursement of staff to keep the district from spending money or to provide additional opportunities for students.

Also at this meeting, the concept of closing the CGMS and moving to a K-6 and 7-12 configuration throughout the district really emerged with several BOE members looking at such an option. While I believe this to be a valid course for discussion and review by the BOE, I would caution the BOE not to quickly jump into such a decision. There is a lot of work to be done with our parents, which will take a great deal of time. We need to allow for a study that will help parents to become comfortable with this idea. It can be done but if we wish to make such a move successful, I would recommend to the BOE to give the process of moving to such a configuration the appropriate time for study. Keep in mind that the BOE has been studying the closing of one of the Prairie Heights schools for many years now. More on this later.

Requested Information on our Schools:

Prairie Heights Elementary School – The Prairie Heights Elementary School was built in 1954. There is a mobile unit with two classrooms located in back of the main building. These mobile units were added to the school in 1994. I do not know if these units were new at the time or used but they appear to be in good condition. Located on 6.4 acres, the square footage for PHES, including the gym, is 29,923 sq. ft. The mobile unit is 1,800 sq. ft. A typical classroom at PHES has approximately 950 sq. ft. The cafeteria has 1,044 sq. ft. The school has 7 toilets and 5 sinks for female student use and 3 toilets, 5 urinals, and 5 sinks for male student use. There are handicap stalls available for students. There is 1 staff bathroom.

The kitchen is in decent shape though we seem to have an annual issue with roots in the sewer line. If this is selected as the school to keep open, we really should invest in correcting this problem. There is little work/prep area in the kitchen other than counter tops. There is no ice machine in this kitchen. The storeroom is very small. I am told (by Mrs. Ackley) that the walk-in freezer is in very bad shape. The kitchen is smaller than the one at Alta Vista. All other equipment is listed as being in good shape or better. If possible we would ideally like to move the convection oven from AV to Dwight, assuming they could be stacked. If not then we would explore selling both units and purchasing a double stack convection oven. A good drying rack is needed if we could find a place for it to fit.

A quick look at Census history of the Dwight community shows the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Population (Census) | Household with children under 18 |
| 2010 | 272 | 31 |
| 2000 | 330 | 42 |
| 1990 | 365 | Could not find the data |

Prairie Heights Middle School - The Prairie Heights Middle School was built in 1986. Located on 8.2 acres, the square footage for PHMS is 24,735 sq. ft. Located on 8.2 acres, the total square footage for PHMS, including the gym, is 27,055 sq. ft. The south side classrooms are 672 sq. ft. The north side classrooms are 728 sq. ft. The cafeteria is 825 sq. ft. in size. The school has 6 toilets and 7 sinks for female student use and 5 toilets, 4 urinals, and 7 sinks for male student use. There are 4 classrooms that have a toilet and sink in the room. There are handicap stalls available for students. There is 1 staff bathroom.

The kitchen at Alta Vista is in good shape; it is larger which provides more space in which to work. The warming cart is old so we would likely move the one from Dwight to AV. The worktables are wooden and really should be stainless steel. We have a small stainless steel table at Dwight that could be moved. It would be nice to have a second table if possible. The sink area is OK but we could use a drying rack for this kitchen as well. There is some repair work (maybe replace) that needs to be done to the garbage disposal. There is a fairly new ice machine for kitchen use. The storage room is a good-sized space. The convection oven is older than the one at Dwight and again it would be nice if the two could be stacked or we purchase a double stack convection oven. The walk-in freezer is fairly new and is a good-sized unit.

A quick look at Census history of the Alta Vista community shows the following:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Population (Census) | Household with children under 18 |
| 2010 | 444 | 54 |
| 2000 | 442 | 57 |
| 1990 | 477 | Could not find the data |

Council Grove Middle School – The Council Grove Middle School was built in 1989. The mobile units used at the school were added in 1996. The school is located on the same campus the Council Grove Elementary School, which is situated on 6.4 acres. The middle school has 12,840 square foot of space. The classrooms in the permanent structure are approximately 795 sq. ft. The classrooms in the modular unit are approximately 636 sq. ft. The school has 7 toilets and 8 sinks for female student use and 7 toilets/urinals, and 8 sinks for male student use. There are handicap stalls available for students. There is 1 staff bathroom.

In determining the general operational costs for these two schools, plus CGMS, please know that I am using 2012-13 figures. I am using these figures to be consistent as all other data for our work this past year is based on the 2012-13 school year. There would be no reason to believe the costs from year to year vary much though 2013-14 was a colder winter than 2012-13. Here is a breakout of annual facility costs:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | PHES | PHMS | CGMS |
| Phone/Internet | $2,464 | $3,395 | $1,574 |
| Water/Sewer | $1,569 | $1,835 | $1,612 |
| Refuse | $1,026 | $3,247 | $1,586 |
| Pest Control | $499 | $553 | $502 |
| General Repairs | $3,383 | $9,948 | $4,824 |
| Fire Alarm | $4,221 | $1,640 | $6,188 |
| Custodial Supplies | $4,253 | $3,338 | $6,601 |
| Heating | $5,824 | $5,157 | $5,068 |
| Electrical | $9,796 | $11,010 | $12,531 |
| Motor Fuel | $1,627 | $1,265 | $3,615 |
| Maintenance Equipment | $211 | $164 | $2,807 |
| Property Insurance\* | $11,166 | $10,335 | $10,787 |
| Capital Repairs |  | $2,180 | $4,800 |
| Total | $46,039 | $54,067 | $62,495 |

\* The price shown reflects the 2012-13 rates to keep in line with prior publications. The 2014 rates are $3,885 (Dwight), $3,548 (Alta Vista), and $10,403 (CGMS).

While it is always hard to project future maintenance costs for our facilities, primarily because things breakdown, here is what we have on our list of capital projects for through 2019.

Prairie Heights Elementary School:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Roof Replacement (2019) | $190,000 |
| West Court HVAC Replacement (2014) | $5,000 |
| Carpet/Tile Replacement, $5,000 per year (2014-2019) | $30,000 |
| HVAC Controller Replacement (2017) | $7,000 |
| (11) RTU's Replacement | $88,000 |
| (4) Gym Furnace & AC Replacement | $28,000 |
| Security System |  $15,952 |
| Total | $363,952 |

Reviewing the list of HVAC systems in this building, there are 4 overhead heating/cooling systems listed for the restrooms and boiler room that do not show up on the maintenance list. The installation of these units is dated 2003. Also, there is an ongoing issue with our sewer line with roots getting in the line and causing a blockage. This has been occurring annually I am told.

Prairie Heights Middle School:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| (12) Furnace replacements (2014) | $48,000 |
| Carpet/Tile Replacement, $5,000 per year (2014-2019) | $30,000 |
| HVAC Controller Replacement (2017) | $7,000 |
| (12) A/C units replacements  | $36,000 |
| (5) Gym Furnace & AC replacement  | $35,000 |
| Security System | $21,749 |
| Total | $177,749 |

Reviewing the list of HVAC systems in this building, there are 7 HVAC units (furnace and split A/C systems) in the gym and the cafeteria/lunchroom that do not show up on this maintenance list. The installation of these units is dated as 2003.

Council Grove Middle School:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |
| --- |
| Roof replacement 95' addition (2015) |

 | $19,500 |
| (7) Furnace & AC replacements 95' addition (2015) | $28,000 |
| Replace carpet 2 rooms (2014-2019) | $30,000 |
| Replace decking around burbs and bridge (2017) | $4,550 |
| HVAC controller replacement (2017) | $3,500 |
| Total  | $85,550 |

Keep in mind that the total costs of similar capital outlay projects for the rest of the district over the same time period have an estimated projected cost of $1,114,450. Here is some other information that should be of value concerning capital projects for our other facilities based on information from Rick’s HVAC spreadsheet that is not included in the $1,114,450 projected cost figure.

CGES: All classroom HVAC systems (34 units) show an installation date of 2003 (11-years old). There are 5 unit ventilators located in our cafeteria dated 1985 (29-years old).

CGHS: The heating and cooling system for the old gym shows an installation date of 2003 (11 years old).

Stadium: There is nothing included in the list of improvements covering the stadium or locker room facility. Further, there is nothing specified for repair work for the storage space underneath the home bleachers which I am told leaks when it rains.

* Note that all of these projections come from work that Rick Evans did prior to my arrival here. So, these projections are at least 2 years old.

Plan Options:

I worry that trying to rush a decision on a 7-12 facility could cause more problems than if more amount of time was given to discuss and study the idea of combining 7th & 8th grade students with 9th-12th grade students. While I professionally do not see combining grades 7-8 with grades 9-12 as a problem, we do not want to shortchange the time that is needed for parents to get behind and support the idea. Under this configuration I believe there could be an elementary school presence in the Prairie Heights area for many years to come. Thus, this would be, in my view, the ideal approach for a long-term solution.

However, I worry about making sure there is enough time to study this option adequately. So here are two plan options for the BOE to consider:

Plan Option #1 – Two Stage Approach:

Stage 1:

* Step 1: September 2014/October 2014 - Complete the current work which has led to a majority of the BOE to believe closing one of the Prairie Heights Schools needs to occur for the 2014-15 school year. Use the next two meetings to decide which school to close and what grade configuration to have at the remaining school.
* Step 2: October 2014/November 2014 - Take official action in the form of scheduling a hearing and then presenting an official resolution on which the BOE votes. If the vote is an approval then there is a lot more work to come for the district. If the vote is no then determine if there is any scenario where the whole BOE could see something passing then move that direction with a new plan.
* Step 3: November 2014/March 2015 – Address personnel regarding those staff, both classified and certified, who are slated for reduction in force. This will be completed no later than January. I want to spend time with each employee (including those eligible to retire who work in Council Grove) to see what their plans are for the next year or two. Based on what is learned, the BOE and I will meet to decide how we wanted to approach the personnel decisions that may need to be made.

In addition, planning would start on the move. Included in the planning is what gets moved, what gets sold, what do we want to do with the property now that it is vacant (do we keep insurance, do we allow any community usage, can we sell it or turn it over to the community for their use, do we keep any utilities on, etc.). Have principals determine placement of teachers in their new classrooms.

* Step 4: May 2015/Summer 2015 – Help teachers with their packing of classrooms and get them in to their rooms as early as possible so they can set up their new space. Help custodians with the move they will need to conduct with furniture and equipment. Provide tech support to get spaces operational.

Stage 2: If the BOE decides that you want to look further into the issue of consolidating grades 7-12 into one building then this is how I see it playing out. Keep in mind that people think that this type of consolidation is as easy as closing one building and moving into another. This will take more work than probably expected and more money. However, remember that this type of a move is without question a long-term commitment.

* Step 1: October 2014/January 2015 – Pull together a committee including teachers and administrators to look at school schedules to determine if there is any efficiency we can find. As any changes to the HS schedule would need to be negotiated, including a team of people is an appropriate way to address this issue.

While finding staffing efficiencies can make a difference, we have also spoken of the potential savings from just closing the middle school facility. In another piece of information I had shared and estimate of approximately $100,000 in savings from closing CGMS. Of course, this is just like any other building, when we say it is closed that means it is shut tight and everything is turned off and there is no insurance coverage.

* October 2014/April 2015 – Develop a community committee that includes parents, administrators, and teachers, to study the benefits of a 7-12 configuration and to answer fears that parents hold. This would include visiting other districts to see schools in operation and to speak with parents and teachers. This committee would look over the current facility and develop plans on how the physical operations would be set up. Included in this work is where classrooms and lockers would be located, how to have possible electives, use of locker rooms, how would lunch operate, etc.

At the same time I would be studying the operational aspect of the school. This would include the bell system operating with potentially two different schedules. What preparation work would need to take place to make classrooms that have been closed off for several years operational again? What capital projects may need to occur to make the school operate as designed by the committee. Etc.

* Summer 2015/December 2015 – Plan and coordinate any capital projects that we initiated by the district’s work in the spring. Have administrators fine tune a schedule and plan staffing accordingly. Make plans for moving.
* Summer 2016 – Finish any unplanned items and coordinate the move to CGHS.

I understand that this lays out longer than what you might think it would take. The primary reason for this is that to give ample time for the study of this change, it will take us into the spring of 2015. By that time it is too late to address personnel changes and to prepare for all of the work that may need to take place to get space at CGHS ready for an influx of eighty plus students.

Plan Option #2: Address the Closing of Two Schools at One Time

If the BOE is insistent on one master plan to close two schools then I would say settle in for a time while a thorough review of the 7-12 school option is conducted. As I stated earlier, this is a viable option however if we want it to be successful then we need to take more time working with our community. This approach will push back any action on a Prairie Heights closing until next summer or early fall. My professional opinion is that this approach would be a mistake. Between a changing Board of Education this next summer and then educating new BOE members on all of the work done on this issue, the delay of action could be awhile. There is no reason that this cannot be a two-step process but if the BOE should choose this option then this is the timeline I would suggest.

Stage 1:

* October 2014/January 2015 – Put off any more time being spent on the topic of closing a school until we can pull together a committee including teachers and administrators to look at school schedules to determine if there is any efficiency we can find. As any changes to the HS schedule would need to be negotiated, including a team of people is an appropriate way to address this issue.
* October 2014/April 2015 – Develop a community committee that includes parents, administrators, and teachers, to study the benefits of a 7-12 configuration and to answer fears that parents hold. This would include visiting other districts to see schools in operation and to speak with parents and teachers. This committee would look over the current facility and develop plans on how the physical operations would be set up. Included in this work is where classrooms and lockers would be located, how to have possible electives, use of locker rooms, how would lunch operate, etc.

At the same time I would be studying the operational aspect of the school. This would include the bell system operating with potentially two different schedules. What preparation work would need to take place to make classrooms that have been closed off for several years operational again? What capital projects may need to occur to make the school operate as designed by the committee. Etc.

* April 2015/June 2015 – After hearing the report from these various groups, discuss the idea of a 7-12 facility. Decide what actions the BOE will take by addressing the Prairie Heights Schools (see stage 1, step 1 above) and the 7-12 facility issues. Follow the legal steps and take action to close schools and consolidate grades if so desired. Keep in mind all of this would really need to take place before July 1 when new BOE members come onboard.
* Summer 2015/December 2015 – Plan and coordinate any capital projects that we initiated by the district’s work in the spring. Have administrators fine tune a schedule and plan staffing accordingly. Make plans for moving.
* Summer 2016 – Finish any unplanned items and coordinate the move to CGHS.

My recommendation to the BOE is work from Plan Option #1.

What Should Tell Us That We Need To Close Another School:

What would be the trigger to tell the school board that it is time to close a school again? This question, though put another way at our last meeting, is one that the school board has been chasing for several years it seems to me. In my opinion, each of you has had the answer in your hands for many months now. You just are not asking the right question. Let me explain.

One of the first spreadsheets that I gave to each of you was the one titled, “2012-13 Expenses by School.” On page 9 of this particular report (I have included that page with this document) you will find the revenue per student, expense per student, and the difference per student figures. In my opinion, what each BOE member is not asking himself or herself is this, “At what point does the inequity of what we spend per student in this district cause me to say that under current circumstances we are being unfair to a segment of our population?” This is a values issue that each of you has to answer for yourself. I will give you my opinion but the answer will be biased towards my value system. Let’s review the data.

Here are the facts as I know them. When it comes to any high school in Kansas, the costs per pupil will be higher than that of an elementary and middle school student because the state requires electives such as CTE classes to be offered. Too, our communities have come to expect that the high school offer athletics and student activities. Last, we have an expectation of offering advanced classes to what amounts to a few students in some subject areas, i.e. math and science. While the state does offer some dollars for vocational weighting, it does not cover all of these expenses. The state does not offer any additional funding for high school students for athletics/activities or for the advanced classes. So, our high school costs more than our other schools to operate. So, in this case, we take money from our elementary/middle school students to supplement the operations of our high school. Again this is typical for all school districts in the state.

Next, comparing our revenues between elementary schools and middle schools we see that the CGES/MS brings in more revenue per student than the PHES/MS. This is because there are more at-risk students, more students who are transported, more special education students, preschool students attend CGES, our bilingual students attend CGES/MS, and federal dollars follow the poverty level of students for which there are more at CGES/MS. Both PHES and PHMS spend more money per student than does CGES/MS. The difference on a per pupil basis is quite significant when you look at what is being spent on a child who attends PHES compared to a child who attends CGES (or even PHMS compared to CGMS). I find it very difficult to place a numerical value to what is ultimately a values question.

In the end, the BOE as a whole probably has never had this discussion. What level of discrepancy in spending on students at one school compared to another school within the same school district allows the BOE as a whole to be comfortable? At what point does the opportunity cost (educational sacrifice) for the majority of students outweigh the desire to keep open schools that do not cover their own expenses? Ultimately, it seems to me, that these are the questions to be answered. And, these are values questions that I am unable to quantify for you.

Gathering this discrepancy information takes a little time but is doable. Perhaps the BOE needs to request this information as an annual report so the BOE always has an eye on this equity issue. By the way, this inequity issue is the same that the courts ruled on back in the early 90’s when the state had to develop a new method for funding public education. The difference here is that this inequity exists by choice rather than by state law.