



# Morris County Schools

*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.*

From Doug Conwell,  
Superintendent

## Answers to Questions Asked at July 28 BOE Meeting (And Answers to Other Questions)

September 8, 2014

- Why not use all of our school facilities and move students from Council Grove to the Prairie Heights schools to “balance” the revenue/expense ledger? I have heard this comment several times in the past month in regards to addressing the low enrollment numbers at Prairie Heights. This “idea” misses the point of why this work/discussion is taking place. The bottom line is the district has a declining enrollment and a shrinking budget. We are projected to continue to decline in the future though we will experience times where our overall enrollment trend line rises, only to have it continue the downward slope a year or two later. This is a fiscal and opportunity issue for our district. I won’t go into detail here, anyone who wants to see the information regarding finances can gather this information from our district website (it has been handed out to all BOE members). I do want to focus on the opportunity, and need, issue just a bit. As the BOE has discussed and prioritized, there are needs our district has that can make our district stronger/better whether from an employee perspective or from a student achievement/services perspective. Here is a list of these needs that the BOE has discussed in the rank order of importance that they assigned to them at the July 28 BOE work session:

Opportunity/Need	Rating (ranked by priority)
Improve compensation for teachers and staff	1.6
Provide <b>long-term</b> financial stability	3.0
Optimize efficiency with staffing	4.1
Add a counselor	4.3
Tech initiatives (1-to-1, full time director, improve network system, professional development for technology)	4.6
Keep facilities in good condition (upgrades, maintenance, security)	5.1
Expand our after school program	6.7

Keep a local presence w/ schools	7.7
Continue to invest in professional development	7.9

- If we close a Prairie Heights School, what personnel changes will have to be made? Of course this really depends the configuration of the school that remains in the Prairie Heights area. Just the closing of a facility will result in the reduction of a school cook, custodian, and secretary. If the district were to close the two schools then these same classified positions at each school would be reduced.

Should the school be a K-6 configuration, I believe that the district teaching staff can be reduced by 1 person (maybe 2) with no other structural changes to how the district is organized. I base this reduction figure on the staffing pattern used at CGMS in the past few years. Adding 23 students to the CGMS now puts that school at an enrollment level on par with much of what the enrollment has been over the past 12 years. Should the PHMS become a K-8 configuration, the same staff would stay in place unless the BOE chooses to look at distance learning opportunities to reduce staff.

As the population shrinks in the coming years, the idea of combined classes at PHES becomes an option that does not quite exist yet. I will talk about this more later in this document but the BOE will need to keep an eye on the revenue/expense figures to make sure it remains cost effective to keep these school(s) open.

- If at all possible, trying to reduce staff through attrition would be preferable. Listed below are those employees who are currently eligible for retirement. For each of the positions where reduction would occur, there is at least one employee in the same category that is already able to retire. In fact, we already have one of these employees\* announce his retirement effective this fall.

Deborah McDiffett - Custodian

Kathy Litke - Secretary

Nancy Furney – Secretary

\*Jim Ehrlich - Custodian

Jan Troxell – BOE Clerk; Director of Transportation

Carol Peterson - Custodian

Jolene Werner - Secretary

Shirley Ehrlich - Custodian

Don Platz - Custodian

Pam Ackley – Director of Food Service

Pam Olson - Cook

Linda Kelly - Aide

- The same approach might be able to occur with our teaching staff. We currently have 7 teaching staff members who would be eligible for retirement at the end of the current school year (see below). There may be a way to shift personnel, depending on who chooses to retire, in such a

manner that the reduction is handled through attrition. Further, in each of the past couple of years we have seen employees choose to leave USD 417 for reasons other than retirement so that too would be a factor in any staffing reductions.

Jean Johnson

Deryl Jimerson

Joyce Heilman

Anita Mahaney

Jill Mayer

Terri Goodell

Martha House (?)

- When were the temporary classrooms at CGMS built? This is the information I received in regards to the CGMS facilities. Two of the modular classrooms were installed in 1988-89. I do not know if they were new or used at the time. The third modular was installed for the 1989-2000 school year. The brick portion of CGMS was built in 1996 I am told.
- What happens with staff if we combine grades 7-12 in one building? Again, anything I would say at this time would be speculation. The BOE has authorized us to study a schedule that would allow for the combining of high school and middle school staffing, whether that is through a combined 7-12 building or by sharing teachers between buildings. Depending on all of the special features that would be built into such a schedule, I believe that there is potential savings (one to two teachers) from sharing staff. We will begin the work of looking at schedules at the start of September. I also plan to have Mrs. Gentry provide a report to the BOE looking at the pros and cons for having grades 7-12 in a single building (and/or sharing a similar schedule). By the way, looking at districts around us, Herrington, Rural Vista, Chase County, and Mission Valley all have 7-12 configurations.

As for the question of whether it is even possible, from a space perspective, a review of our current configuration tells me that we would need up to 5 classrooms to accommodate staff for the 7 & 8 grade students. The count that I have for available classrooms at CGHS is 8 to 9 rooms. This would easily accommodate all 7 & 8 grades students. In addition, there are currently 340 lockers available for use for a potential population of 333 students. As for the separation of students, it would be possible to some extent to separate students. However, if there is a desire to include electives into the MS schedule for our students then there will be times when 7-12 students “mix”.

- Another scenario to consider with moving grades 7 & 8 to CGHS – It is quite possible to move grades 7 & 8 to CGHS and to close two schools, one of the Prairie Heights schools and the CGMS facility. There is enough room in the CGES facility to move 6<sup>th</sup> grade into the main facility. This is a scenario that I have not shared with the BOE but would in fact save additional funds. In this case, there would be a K-6 school at both Prairie Heights and at Council Grove with a 7-12 facility at Council Grove. A very quick review, using 2012-13 numbers, shows an additional operational savings of approximately \$100,000 (not counting any

savings from a reduction in teaching staff). This is only looking at reduction in classified staff, utility and insurance costs, and other minor expenses for that school facility.

- What costs might there be for PHMS 7 & 8 grade students attending CGMS? The truth of the matter is that I cannot think of any that immediately come to mind. We already buy curricular materials for all students, regardless of where they attend school. If furniture is needed, we can move the furniture from PHMS to CGMS. When it comes to busing, we already run two buses this direction so we would not have to add any routes for general busing either before or after school. We should be able to find savings by not having to run the athletic bus after school from PHMS to CGMS since students would already be here.

The question of space came up in regards to whether it would be necessary to add space at CGMS. If we were to keep all 7 & 8 at CGMS, the total number of students would actually be a normal enrollment figure for the school. We would be able to accommodate these numbers in the school as it is currently configured. Here is a look at the enrollment history for CGMS:

Year	Total Enrollment
2002	183
2003	165
2004	137
2005	137
2006	132
2007	137
2008	132
2009	137
2010	142
2011	154
2012	142
2013	127
2014	134 (6-8 CGMS= 111 & 7-8 PHMS=23)

As you can see, space for this configuration is not a problem.

I do want to share some additional information that you might find useful. Over the past 2.3 years (includes the fall of 2014) we have combined our athletic teams at the MS level. We have approximately 172 actual school days in the school year. Approximately half of our PHMS students are bused to CG 134 days of the year to participate in sports. This amounts to 80% of the school year at least half of the PHMS students are being transported to CG. Here are participation figures by sport.

Sport Season	2012-13	2013-14	2014
Total PHMS 7/8 students	22	22	23
Fall (football, cross country, volleyball)	12	11	12
Basketball	14	12	?
Wrestling	2	3	?
Track	11	8	?

A similar question came up regarding the issue of whether new space would be needed if we had a single K-8 attendance center in CG. This of course is a different matter, one that could be easily addressed by utilizing the space at CGHS for grades 7 & 8.

In a configuration where all K-8 students attended CGES/MS, using just this year's early enrollment figures, we would have enough space though things would be very tight. In my conversation with Mr. Estes, who took time to calculate classroom needs based on this scenario, he believes we can accommodate these numbers with some adjustments to how space is used in the school. Certainly, moving the district's current 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class through the system would make a difference as they would require 4 sections due to the enrollment numbers. Let's take a look at space, from a historical perspective, for CGES/MS by looking at enrollment numbers. The following is a look at the 2003 through 2014 enrollment numbers for CGES/MS. This should give a historical perspective as to the population these schools have held.

Year	Total Enrollment
2003	448
2004	438
2005	446
2006	445
2007	434
2008	419
2009	423
2010	412
2011	427
2012	418
2013	414
2014	524 (CGES/MS=406 & PHES/MS=118)

As you can see, an enrollment under this scenario would mean the largest enrollment in the past 12 years at these schools. Doable but cramped. If however, as we said before, 7 & 8 moved to CGHS then this campus could easily hold all K-6 students (we would not close the CGMS facility but use it for the

space needs of our K-6 population). Remember, there are currently (by my count) 8 to 9 rooms that are open for use at CGHS.

- What about space considerations at Dwight or Alta Vista? Again, this would depend on the grade configuration of the school. Under a K-6 configuration, either school could hold this population without too much change in classroom usage. Each school has space that could be re-purposed so that 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades would have a classroom without much disruption to current usage. When looking at a K-8 configuration, things become tighter at either of the two schools. Mrs. Schrader and I discussed the two facilities under this configuration and while she says it could be done, at either location they would do without a library and/or a room devoted solely to SPED/Title I and/or a computer lab. The loss of a computer lab is not a concern since we are almost at a one-to-one situation at these schools. We would purchase what we need to have a one-to-one setup for this school.

If a K-8 setup was the option selected then I would encourage the BOE to consider moving in a couple of modular units in order to create some additional space for the school. I would have to do some research on what something like this might cost. However, there was a time when both of these schools, at their current size, were K-8 buildings so it can be done.

- What are our out-of-district numbers for our schools? The following is a look at these numbers for this year and last. I believe that these figures have been shared previously with the BOE.

School	District	2013-14	2014-15
PHES	Mill Creek	3	3
	Manhattan	1	2
	Geary Co.	1	3
	Rural Vista	1	1
	Total	6	9
	PHMS	Mill Creek	4
Manhattan		2	1
Rural Vista		3	2
Total		9	7
CGMS	Total	3	2
CGHS	N. Lyon Co.	2	2
	Chase Co.	3	3
	Mill Creek	3	3
	Geary Co.	3	3
	Rural Vista	1	1
	Herrington	1	1
	Other	1	
	Total	14	13

- Long-term, will the district have to build if both Prairie Heights schools are closed? No, I do not believe that the district would have to build anything. See earlier narrative for more information. I will say that under a K-6 and 7-12 configuration there is plenty of room in the Council Grove schools to accommodate future enrollment numbers. If the BOE chooses to keep a presence in the PH area for several years, then we may find that by the time it comes to close that school the class sizes will be such they can easily be accommodated at CHES/MS.
- What are typical end of the year dollar amounts for a district our size? I have spoken with finance people from KSDE and the bottom line is that there is no easy answer to this. Each district is different from staffing patterns to the number of facilities they use. When I made the statement regarding “end of year” dollars, my reference was to the “cushion” most districts try to have built into their budget to cover unplanned general operational costs. For USD 417 this means having enough funds to purchase technology equipment for the district. The operating budget I inherited did not have a line item specific to technology purchases. Then and now, we use any “cushion” to purchase technology for students and staff. We typically purchase between \$125,000 to \$150,000 worth of equipment or other equipment for our classrooms. This “cushion” continues to shrink due to our enrollment situation. This year I expect that we will hopefully have around \$100,000 to meet these tech/equipment needs.

Another way to look at this question is to look at per pupil spending. For the 2012-13 school year, state records show USD 417 standing 165<sup>th</sup> in the state (\$11,712) on per pupil spending out of 286 districts. Again, we are not quite at the mean (\$12,024) for spending on students. I took a very quick look at the schools that bracket us in terms of student FTE (a range of 600 to 850 FTE). The range for per pupil spending of these schools was \$9,671 to \$17,463. There are many reasons for such disparity including the relative wealth of the district itself.

What I wanted to see though was how many actual school facilities each of the schools in this range operated. Here is the breakout of what I found:

2 buildings	6	6 w/ jr./sr. high bldg.
3 buildings	18	2 w/ jr./sr. high bldg.
4 buildings	6	0
5 buildings (USD 417)	1	0

I wish I could tell you that there was a correlation between the number of buildings and whether that district was above or below us in per pupil spending. There is no correlation that I can see. It does tell me that our district is spending wisely when it comes to spending on our classrooms. However, from briefly looking over information from these districts, several have already consolidated schools while there are several others in the process of doing so (they have either passed a bond issue or have one in the process for the purpose of

downsizing buildings). What I do know, and believe, is that USD 417 can do even better in this department if we were not operating 5 school facilities.

- Facilities –I have spoken with Mr. Estes, Mrs. Schrader, and Mr. McDiffett regarding space in their schools. While where I have shown classrooms to be located on these diagrams may not be how they actually assign them, what I have provided here will illustrate space utilization within these facilities.
- PHES (Dwight) – There should be no problems with fitting K-6 to this building. Yes, we may have to “reopen” one of the mobile units for some purpose but there is enough space to accommodate grades 5 & 6 in this school. When it comes to a K-8 configuration, this building will become cramped. As the diagram shows, the school will come up short in regards to having a library and having a dedicated classroom for Title I and SPED students. My understanding is that back when it once was a K-8 building, library books were actually located in teacher classrooms with these books matched to grade levels. Too, both special education and Title services were provided in the classroom or in an office. It should be noted here that the classrooms at PHES are larger than the classrooms at PHMS.

If the idea is to make a long-term commitment to this location for a K-8 school then I would encourage the BOE to bring in a couple more mobile units to help with this space concern. In the end, the cost for doing this would likely be less than what would be saved by closing one facility the first year.

- PHMS (Alta Vista) – There should be no problems with fitting K-6 to this building. When it comes to a K-8 configuration, it can be done but the school would have to choose between a dedicated space for a library or a Title I/SPED room. Again, please note that adding in a couple of modular classrooms would provide some space relief if there is a long-term commitment to a presence in the PH area. Also, to repeat, it would cost less to add modular space here, I believe, than the savings derived from closing a school the first year. So, a one-year sacrifice of savings to invest in long-term comfort would be an option.
- The last year that Dwight had a K-8 enrollment was 1997-98. The enrollment for the school at that time was 113 including pre-school. This same year was the last year as well for K-8 at Alta Vista and the enrollment at that time was 107. The enrollment this year for K-8 for PHES/MS is 118.

The first year that Alta Vista was a grade 5-8 facility (1998-99) the enrollment was 95. This year the enrollment is 48. The first year that Dwight was a K-4 facility (1998-99) the enrollment was 83. This year the enrollment is 70.

If the district configured the one PH school as a K-6 school, the enrollment using this year's numbers, would be 95 students.

The last year that Wilsey Elementary was open (1999-2000) the school was a K-6 facility. The enrollment this last year was 68 students not



counting pre-school (we believe there were 9 pre-school students that year).

- CGES/MS – As I have stated before, if all of our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were to be moved to CGHS, this complex (CGES/MS) could handle grades K-6 from PHES/MS in this space. Also, if only the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades from PHMS came to CGMS, this facility can handle this number of students. In fact, current numbers would be normal for this school. If K-8 from PHES/MS came to CGES/MS then things would get a little tight. In speaking with Mr. Estes, he believes that he can accommodate all of these students. A quick review of the diagram shows that we would be one SPED classroom and a computer lab short which means we would have to figure out some scheduling issues to allow for one classroom to “double up” with two teachers, i.e. music. I would say that if there was a 1-to-1 computer initiative, this would change the space issues as the current elementary computer lab is no longer needed.

However, since the all K-8 students at CGES/MS is not an option because there is a commitment to keep a presence at Prairie Heights, I do not have to spend time on this configuration option.

- CGHS – Here is where there is a lot of space that would allow a viable option for the district to have two K-6 facilities (PH and CG) with a 7-12 facility at CGHS. Here are a few benefits to having grades 7 & 8 at CGHS:
  - This would allow for the greatest savings to the district if one goal is to keep a presence at PH. The district would be able to close two facilities.
  - It would allow for the most efficient use of personnel, not just teachers but also the reduction of one administrator.
  - It would allow for our 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to have elective options.
  - There is a way to place all of the grade 7 & 8 students in an area where we could minimize (but not eliminate) “mingling” between our 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade and high school students.

Some additional comments for you to think about regarding “long-term”:

- When you think about providing for an education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what are we not doing now that we could be doing if we found the resources?
- When you think about the needs/opportunities priority list that the BOE created at the July 28 meeting, what options provides the best opportunity to meet these priorities?
- When the BOE talks about providing long-term financial stability for the district, what exactly is “long-term”? How bold is the BOE willing to be to find this long-term solution? Let’s look at the various options on the scale of “long-term” stability solutions, starting with the solution that provides the most years of stability and efficiency.
  - Have a single K-12 facility – At this time this is not feasible unless the BOE wants to build a K-12 facility somewhere. There may well come a time in the future (though it may be way out in the future) that CGHS

becomes a K-12 school. At this time though, this option is really not feasible as CGHS is too small to hold all students and there is no inclination to try a bond issue for a new K-12 school.

- The second most efficient option would be to have one K-6 facility and one 7-12 facility. This is doable at this time though the BOE has expressed an interest in keeping a presence in the PH area. Space wise this can be done now without the expenditure of any money for space. The district saves by closing two schools, consolidating staff, etc.
- The third most efficient option would be to have two K-6 facilities and one 7-12 facility. The space is available now for this configuration. This would keep a presence at PH and the district would not have to spend any money on space needs. In fact, this option allows for additional money savings since the district would essentially close two schools, consolidate staff, etc. This option actually provides a longer timeline to the BOE for having to discuss closing facilities again. It may also be the best way to ensure a long-term solution for keeping a presence in the PH area (this is just my opinion).
- The fourth most efficient option would be to have a K-6 at PH, a K-8 at CG, and a 9-12 at CG. Space is available at all locations. The district saves by closing one school, eliminating one teaching position, etc. It is important to note that under this configuration, at some point in time in the not too distant future, the USD 417 BOE will be having more discussions of closing a school(s) due to declining enrollment and shrinking budget.
- The fifth most efficient option would be to have two K-8 facilities (PH, CG) and a 9-12 at CG. While Mrs. Schrader has said that she believes a K-8 will fit in either school, it appears to me that either school will be cramped. So, we might need to invest in moving in some modular units to allow for needed space. Under this scenario as well, at some point in time in the not too distant future, the USD 417 BOE will be having more discussions of closing a school(s) due to declining enrollment and shrinking budget.

Under the premise of a declining enrollment and decreasing budget, USD 417 will be revisiting the issue of closing schools every few years until enrollment stabilizes and there is one to two facilities left. Now this final solution may not happen until 25 years or more from now but the truth is this will happen at some point in time unless the communities find a way to attract businesses and more young families. This is the trend in rural America right now. Rural schools across Kansas are getting smaller and are consolidating by closing school buildings. Some are simply building K-12 facilities as the final solution for their communities.

So again, one question that I think is very important for you to consider is this, "When you say that your second highest rated opportunity/need for the district is to provide long-term stability, what does long-term really

mean?" Does it mean the most expedient now or the easiest option now? How many years constitutes long-term? Just know that this district will be revisiting this topic again at some point in time, how long from now depends on what this BOE chooses to do this year.

- One last item I want to share for your consideration. Let's revisit enrollment data looking at a 10-year period of time. The chart below shows the enrollment numbers for each of our schools compared to the enrollment number is schools as of last week. I then calculated the the % loss and applied this to our current enrollment numbers. If the loss of enrollment numbers for the next 10 years mirrors the loss from the past 10 years, you see what enrollment will look like in 2024 (hard to think that far into the future). Just for reference sake, I have included where KASB projected our future enrollment (5-year projection) for each school in parentheses for comparison:

Building	2004-05	2014-15	% Change	2024-25 (KASB 2018-19)
PHES	72	70	3%	68 (76)
PHMS	60	48	20%	38 (46)
CGES	300	295	2%	289 (278)
CGMS	138	111	20%	89 (142)
CGHS	325	231	29%	164 (180)
Headcount Total	895	755	16%	648 (722)

These enrollment numbers for the ten-year projection are not scientific. They are simply a reflection of what we will look like should we experience the same percentage loss as we did the past five years. Of the schools shown here, CGMS appears to me to be a little extreme. I say this because we are currently experiencing two of our smaller classes in our 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades (enrollment in the 30's). We bounce back to class sizes in the 40's once these two pass through the system. Keep in mind though that this is the process of decline. All of a sudden you see classes in the 30's which is simply a prelude to more classes of that size coming in the future.

If you think about this 10-year drop in enrollment in terms of dollars, the change from 2014-15 to 2024-25 (107 students) represents a loss of \$412,164 (using the current BSAPP dollar amount of \$3,852). This represents a loss only figuring student FTE. It does not account for the loss of the weightings, i.e. at-risk, vocational, transportation, etc., or the loss from the LOB. Including these could put the revenue loss at over \$500,000.