

From the desk of the Superintendent

Frequently Asked Questions About Consolidation

As we head into a period of great change in our district, we want to keep you informed about the progress of consolidation by sharing with you a list of Frequently Asked Questions and their answers. If you have additional questions or you need clarification, feel free to contact me or attend any of the public meetings that will be held in the coming months. A complete list of meeting times, dates, and locations will be published in the January 19 Monitor which will be posted on the district website. The Frequently Asked Questions are divided into the following categories: History, Making the Decision, Next Steps, Costs and Savings, Consolidation Planning, and Communications.

To get you started here are three Quick Facts about consolidation. For many more details click on the link below.

- The elementary buildings that will close are James E. Hanna, Lt. Colonel John Glenn, Pearl Road, and State Road.
- Many students in the district will be in new buildings next year because of building closings and redistricting. Students and parents will be given the name of their new building for 2012-2013 next month.
- The estimated cost saving of closing the buildings is over \$1.7 million per year.

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History of Consolidation in the Parma City School District

Why are we closing buildings?

PCSD once had over 25,000 students. There are now about 11,700. There are simply too many school buildings to operate in a cost efficient and educationally sound way. Consolidating buildings will allow greater access to course offerings and educational opportunities. In this day and age, making sensible use of building space is important, and that means that some buildings are no longer necessary.

Has the district closed buildings before?

For those of you who have lived in the Parma City School District for a long time, you have watched other consolidation plans unfold. Our first school closings came in the 1970's and some buildings have been closed and then reopened again as our enrollment either dipped or grew. After each consolidation the school communities took a deep breath and worked through all of the changes. We are prepared to do that again.

When did we start this current consolidation process?

We began studying facilities in mid-2009 and spent over two years before making a final recommendation. Several committees, made up of citizens, parents, educators, and experts, studied everything from enrollment trends to construction costs, best practices, options, costs and more. The result was a final community recommendation of two possible options.

Making the Decision

Who was involved in the consolidation study?

Hundreds of citizens and experts reviewed data including enrollment projections, cost estimates, educational best practices and building-by-

building specifics. Dozens of public meetings were held where comments and questions were answered. The committees reviewing the plan agreed with the recommendation to close four elementary buildings. They acknowledged that while change is difficult, it is necessary in order for us to secure a healthy financial future for the district which in turn, will allow us to provide a quality education while being respectful to our taxpayers.

How was a final decision made about which option to recommend?

The Superintendent, administration, staff, parents and community members spent several months studying the committee's work and recommended moving to a K-4; 5-7 and 8-12 grade configuration. This meant keeping three high schools. With the shift in grades we will need fewer elementary buildings. The plan offered the greatest educational opportunities to our students in the most cost-effective way. This information was then shared with the Board of Education whose responsibility it was to make the final decision.

How did the Board of Education make its final decision?

The Board of Education independently reviewed the assumptions and cost-analyses used by the community committees. They heard all of the recommendations, took public input and ultimately voted to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to close four elementary buildings.

What buildings will be closed?

The elementary buildings that will close are James E. Hanna, Lt. Colonel John Glenn, Pearl Road and State Road.

What was considered in selecting these specific buildings to close?

The selection of these elementaries has been a long and careful process and included a facility evaluation of the following

1. Costs to operate
2. Safety issues

3. An assessment of enrollment balance throughout the district for the purposes of
 - a. transportation
 - b. space
 - c. infrastructure
 - d. maintenance needs
 - e. money recently spent on the buildings
 - f. the degree to which the building configuration and design lends itself to the education of elementary age students
 - g. the ability of our remaining schools to have adequate space to effectively house the students and teachers who will be coming to them

How sure are we that all of these students will fit into the remaining elementary buildings?

We're positive. The elementary school buildings were crowded before we recommended closing four. However, we freed up space by moving 5th and 6th graders up to the middle school. In preparing this recommendation we took into account a number of important factors. We began by designating space for special education, art, music, and auxiliary services in the buildings that will remain open. Next we counted the remaining rooms for general education assuming class sizes of the low-20's in grades K-1 and the mid-20's for grades 2-5.

When will the consolidation start?

Consolidation plans are in motion right now as described in the NEXT STEPS section. Everything will be completed by the start of school in August, 2012.

Next Steps

What steps will the district follow?

The next steps include:

1. Forming a Restructuring the School Day Committee to make recommendations.
2. Finalizing a construction schedule that outlines renovations at affected buildings in the least intrusive way (Parma Senior High, Valley Forge High, Normandy High, Hillside, Shiloh and kitchen facilities).
3. Redistricting for the first time in 25 years to ensure balanced student enrollment. The decisions about relocation will be driven by which schools are closing, and the current distribution of students as identified by the 2010 census. Although we do not know yet exactly how this will look, we do know that populations have shifted over the years and we will be looking at restoring a balance in enrollment.
4. Providing updates and opportunities for public input throughout the process.

The process moving forward will be based on maintaining quality educational practices and protecting our taxpayers and our educational excellence. We will continue updating the public and be open, accessible and transparent in the process.

Costs and Savings

How will this plan help to save money for the district?

This plan is the best way to maximize educational opportunities with our available resources. With fewer buildings we will need fewer principals, custodians, cafeteria workers, secretaries, and other personnel. The district will save on utilities and general building maintenance.

What are the actual cost savings of closing four elementary schools?

The estimated cost savings of over \$1.7 million per year associated with building closures has not changed since the recommendation in April.

Are Transportation costs known?

For the past eight months, we have had very solid estimates on transportation costs that are based on current population densities. Those numbers have not changed.

Should we move forward if we do not know the costs associated with the changes in how we serve students with disabilities?

This issue is totally independent of consolidation. The Ohio Department of Education is requiring us to provide services that conform to the law. Regardless of which plan was selected or if we chose not to consolidate, the construction related costs associated with any plan would be negligible.

How can we move on with the consolidation plan if we don't know how much it will cost because we don't know which delivery model we're going to use in the middle school?

This issue is totally independent of consolidation. We need to be more consistent in how we provide instruction to our students as the delivery model varies within and among our schools. We need a common philosophy on how to educate children that is based on best practices and research. However, these needs exist whether we consolidate or not and are in no way dependent upon a particular consolidation model.

What else is the district doing to save money?

Our district, like our citizens, must do more with less and we know that. The staff took pay freezes and changes to their benefit plan which resulted in an increase in costs to the employees for benefits. The district as a whole has already cut \$18 million. We have worked hard to rebuild trust and transparency while identifying current practices that are efficient and cost effective. We are also looking at possible further cuts to the budget.

Details of the Consolidation Plan

Who has started to work on the details surrounding the implementation of this plan?

The plan involves a number of committees made up of staff from around the district. The committees and their tasks are outlined below:

- **COMMUNICATIONS**

The Communications Committee will be responsible for preparing updates to staff and the community about the progress of this multi-faceted project. They will develop and distribute specific transition plans for parents and students so that they are not caught by surprise by any of the changes.

In addition there will be written communications as well as the distribution of information through the district website. The public will also have a chance to voice their questions or concerns at public forums like Town Hall meetings and City Council meetings. In addition to distributing information from the district side, this committee will be responsible for collecting information from the staff and public through appropriate community engagement such as surveys, polls, focus groups, and meetings with community leaders.

- **RELOCATION**

The Relocation Committee's first task is to tackle the complexities of redistricting. Every effort is going to be made to have more balanced enrollments in each building. The decisions about relocation will be driven by which schools are closing, and the current distribution of students as identified by the 2010 census figures. Although we do not know yet exactly how this will look, we do know that much has changed since the district last changed enrollment boundaries more than 25 years ago.

Their second charge is to identify and rectify needs that are on-going in the buildings that will remain open. This includes Special Education, Food Service and Cafeterias, and specials such as music, physical education, and art that share staff between buildings.

The third charge of the Relocation Committee is to plan and then oversee any physical changes that must be made for buildings that will be housing new programs or grades. The construction is all connected to being able to create spaces that properly support the educational programs in the building.

- STAFFING COMMITTEE

The Staffing Committee's charge is to determine what each school needs to properly provide services for its students. This will involve teacher and administrator reassignment as well as the best placement for certified support staff. In order to get the right mix of staff, the members of this committee will need to be experienced educators who know this staff and the educational needs of an entire building. As these changes take place for staff, they may come to feel that they are starting all over again especially if they are in a new building AND have a new assignment. The district will be working with the Parma Education Association in making these reassignments.

- ACADEMICS

The Academics Committee will have the important job of coordinating the delivery of educational models in each building and from building to building. They will need to pay particular attention to the legal requirements for students with disabilities who must be educated in the least restrictive environment.

- OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

The Operations Committee will work closely with other committees in order to make decisions about building capacity and utilization, remodeling and construction, traffic, and moving classroom furniture and building equipment. They will also investigate all transportation needs including parking and capacity.

- PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMITTEE

This committee will provide leadership in the area of professional development. They will organize appropriate staff training including Teacher Based Teams, Special Education, Professional Learning Committees, and Response to Intervention. These are all programs which should be common to all buildings.

- FINANCING COMMITTEE

This committee will serve as a thread that runs through all of the committees as we make every effort to provide excellent educational programs while maintaining cost-effective practices.

As you can see from the committee list, we have much to do before the start of the 2012-2013 school year. All of this work is vitally important so that we can keep the Parma City Schools fiscally and educationally sound well into the future.

Communications

How will parents and the community keep informed about the consolidation process as it moves forward?

Since so many people are going to be involved in this process, we need to develop a two way communication system. The district will provide progress reports on a regular basis to the staff and community and in turn, staff and community must come and talk with us so that we are all on the same page. Parents and community will be kept informed through Town Hall Meetings, Open Door Sessions with the Superintendent, the district website at parmacityschools.org, Facebook, the monthly newsletter, the Monitor, and by attending meetings of the Board of Education or watching the video of the meetings on PACT TV.

What consideration has been given to the impact this plan will have on children, staff, parents and the public?

Closing these veteran buildings will be an emotional time for students, parents, and staff especially for those of you who have a long term connection to the school. Teachers may have been in their building for many years; parents and grandparents may have attended the school and, of course, current students will feel a loss when the buildings close. We hope to involve everyone in preparing respectful closing ceremonies for each building in light of their long and distinguished history in the district. Please take comfort in the fact that these closings are vital to the financial health of the Parma City Schools and will mean that students can be educated here for many years to come.