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Osseo Area Schools pushes back schedule for management and capacity studies

By Kevin Miller Oct 17, 2017 Updated Oct 20, 2017

After Osseo Area Schools kicked off a series of studies related to potential attendance area adjustments, construction of a new school and additions to existing schools, the district has pushed back the study schedule and expanded its scope of data gathering before any recommendations for action or non-action will come before the board.

The move was announced at an Oct. 10 work session and comes as part of the district's collaborative work with Wold Architects and Engineers, a firm assisting and advising the district with its capacity studies.

Broadly, these study questions emerged out of work done by the district's Enrollment and Capacity Management Advisory Committee, which was first assembled in 2016. The committee is part of a larger framework that the district has adopted to grapple with questions of facility and student management. As part of this framework, the district has moved conversations that would have been formerly held internally into a public meeting format.

While the district is studying a variety of options it could undertake to alter its student management tactics, engaging in a study does not necessarily mean that the district will actually undertake any particular actions or changes.

Since the board was presented the advisory committee's initial work on May 9 and decided to move forward with its studies, the district has worked with Wold Architects to better understand each of the district's schools' student management trends.

Wold has recommended the district slow down its study process to gather and later analyze a larger data set than the district previously thought to be necessary for this sort of study. Wold has spent summer 2017 gathering data beyond the scope of the district's original charge.

The district had previously planned to focus on specific schools that were projected to have issues or changes in enrollment, but now has expanded that scope to look at capacity and management at all of the districts schools, and will use that data to better understand what could be done at the schools that were previously identified.

As a large picture, the district is studying attendance area adjustments that would potentially increase area size at Cedar Island, Crest View and Zanewood and would reduce attendance size at Basswood, Fernbrook, Garden City and Rush Creek. Potential building additions at Basswood, Fernbrook, Garden City, Rush Creek, Maple Grove Senior High, Osseo Senior High and Park Center Senior High are a study topic.

The construction of a new elementary school on district property in northwest Maple Grove in the current Fernbrook attendance area is also being studied, along with strategies to increase enrollment at Birch Grove Elementary.

The capacity of any individual school is not a fixed number, said Patricia Magnuson, executive director of finance and operations for the district. That is, capacity is dependent on a number of factors that the district or an individual school must determine. For instance, target class sizes, the number of grade levels served in a building and available funding can impact a school's capacity. Likewise, specialized courses such as music, arts, technology science, physical education, vocational training, special education and English learner classrooms have different needs in a learning space than other types of classes.

Wold has asked that, for elementary schools, the district come up with a set of assumptions for what sort of spaces all elementary schools ought to have.

Specifically, the district and Wold have decided that for the purpose of these studies, every school ought to have a cafeteria, a gymnasium, a media center, music classes, a technology lab, a staff break room, special education classrooms, talent development academic challenge and gifted classrooms, English language learner classrooms, academic intervention or Title 1 classrooms, pre-kindergarten classrooms and two to three flexible space rooms to accommodate needs.

These assumptions will be used to better measure each schools' capacity, as well as to measure current enrollment status at elementary schools in the district.

Any given school in the district could decide to give up a space included in the assumptions in an effort to increase the school's classroom space, and thereby increasing a school's capacity.

These assumptions do not apply to secondary schools or magnet schools, where needs may be different or more nuanced.

Wold and the district applied the assumptions to Basswood Elementary for the 2017-18 school year. Basswood does not have a technology lab, a talent development academic challenge and gifted classroom, an academic intervention or Title 1 classroom, or any flexible space, and is thereby deficient in its assumptions.

At Basswood, only one section of pre-kindergarten programming is available due to the elimination of a second classroom two years ago. There is currently a wait list for pre-kindergarten courses at Basswood. The staff lounge serves a volunteer coordination space, and there is only one special education classroom available.

Further data gathering will need to occur before district has a full understanding of its needs.

Based on existing preliminary data and interpretations, Basswood, Fernbrook, Garden City and Rush Creek are projected to be at or above capacity by the 2021-22 school year. Basswood and Garden City are operating at deficiencies per elementary assumptions. Basswood, Fernbrook and Rush Creek also have smaller cafeterias than would be ideal for their enrollment.

While Maple Grove Middle School may come close to capacity by the 2021-22 school year, the school is not expected to exceed its capacity. Other middle schools in the district are also not projected to have enrollment exceed capacity.

Maple Grove Senior High is currently at capacity and is expected to be over capacity by 2021-22.

Capacity at other high schools in the district appear to be near capacity, and could be over capacity by 2021-22.

The district will continue to update its projections based on fall 2017 data and will also consult with demographers, city development staff, developers, and the real estate community to better understand future housing and population trends.

Data gathering and interpretation is projected to continue through February or March 2018. At this point, the district will pause to build a shared understanding of the district's needs.

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Kevin Miller

Community Editor

Kevin Miller is Community Editor for the Brooklyn Park Sun Post.

