

**Summary of School Board Discussion 2/28/13- Reply to Questions**



Date: February 14, 2013

To: County School Board of Albemarle County, Virginia  
Dr. Pam Moran, Superintendent

From: Long Range Planning Advisory Committee

Re: Request for Further Direction

The Long Range Planning Advisory Committee has convened again for a new session. The goal of this committee is to provide a recommendation in June to the Superintendent & School Board for the Capital Improvement Program (CIP). To make the work of this committee useful to you, we would like to receive some direction before proceeding

**1. Priorities:**

Projects are often categorized as maintenance, infrastructure, capacity or parity projects. Historically, maintenance & infrastructure projects have been prioritized above other projects. Also, capacity projects (those that build additional seats) have been ranked above projects addressing parity. As a result, parity projects have been repeatedly cut or delayed. The modernization of several elementary schools in the southern feeder pattern is an example.

**Under what circumstances would a parity project rank above a project that builds immediately needed seats?**

***Reply Summarized: When a capacity need is addressed through an addition, that is an opportunity to also address parity. Parity should be addressed for its own sake when instruction suffers due to facility deficiencies.***

**2. Guiding Principles/ Common Goals**

It is evident that new seats will be needed in the future.

**How should the LRPAC prioritize the principles/goals listed below?**

- Utilize existing seats
- Locating classroom additions in the district where growth occurs
- Parity among schools (addressing parity while adding seats)
- Keeping a community intact as opposed to Re-districting
- Size of school as it related to disparity in school sizes  
(Agnor-Hurt - Woodbrook, Stony Point - Stone Robinson, Murray - Brownsville)

- Feeder Patterns
- New considerations from the School Board

**Reply Summarized: Although all the principles are important and a balance is preferred, there times when one precludes another. Discussion focused on community desires, fiscal responsibility, and trade-offs. The redistricting process can create a lot of emotional pain for modest physical gain, yet if seats are available without transportation issues they should be utilized. The County has supported small Community schools, and one Board member expressed support for building a new 200-seat school in a walkable community. The County’s Comprehensive Plan focuses on new facilities in Growth areas, and Board expressed consensus on increasing school capacity in Growth areas. Additions to existing schools are less expensive than new schools. All the principles have some type of cost, so the LRPAC needs to make their best short- and long-term planning recommendations and let Board make the difficult decisions.**

### 3. New Schools versus Redistricting:

Albemarle High School is projected to be over capacity by 100 students within five years and by almost 200 students in ten years. This Board came to a consensus last year that the school should not be made any larger. As a result, the capacity conflict at Albemarle HS can be addressed by either a new school or additions to Monticello HS or to Western Albemarle HS. The additions may be more fiscally responsible.

**If the LRPAC makes a recommendation based on fiscal restraint, will the Board be willing to make the difficult redistricting decisions to fill the addition at Monticello HS?**

**Reply Summarized: Responses varied from a simple yes, to letting the new “academy programs” and virtual instruction address the enrollment disparity. The academy programs are gaining momentum. One Board member acknowledged her previous opposition to moving students from Albemarle to Monticello, but stated the Board may need to do it. Albemarle High’s enrollment projections should be modified downward to reflect students that go to CATEC and other off-site locations every day. There is a sound redistricting process in place that should be trusted to provide a valid recommendation.**

### 4. School Sizes:

The desired size of schools (both minimum & maximum sizes) is always part of the LRPAC planning process & discussion. Maintaining feeder patterns and communities tends to increase the discrepancy in school sizes.

**What is too big and what is too small?**

**How much flexibility is there in size ranges?**

**Reply Summarized: The Board recently agreed with proposed changes in the County’s draft Comprehensive Plan. Those changes now define capacity ranges and increased the upper limit for new or modified schools. Elementary capacity**

**changed from maximum of 600 to between 400 and 750 students. Middle school capacity changed from maximum of 900 to between 600 and 1,000 students. High school capacity changed from maximum capacity of 1500 to between 900 and 1500 students. The Board agreed these are good guides for new or modified facilities.**

There are two examples we would like input on:

Henley (current capacity: 928)

With the anticipated growth in the Western Feeder Pattern, it is likely that recommendations will be made to build additional elementary seats and possibly high school seats. Henley will be the bottle neck when elementary and high school seats increase.

**Is it acceptable to make the division's largest middle school even larger?**

**Or is 928 the maximum capacity so that other alternatives need to be explored?**

**Reply Summarized: Multiple approaches were discussed, but the Board did not reach a consensus on the best course of action if Henley's enrollment grows beyond 928 students.**

Stony Point (current capacity: 225; utilizes 4 mobile classrooms as well)

Stony Point is over capacity. Typically, utilizing existing seats is recommended before a capital project is endorsed. However, if enough students were redistricted to remove the need for mobile classrooms, Stony Point's enrollment would be reduced from 287 to 225.

**Is a small Stony Point (at 225) acceptable?**

**If not, would you endorse investing capital funds for an addition when 'free' seats are available at another school?**

**Reply Summarized: Although all members of the Board may not support a new school at a 200-student capacity, there are several small schools in the County that provide excellent instruction. Opinions for how to address the Stony Point overage varied from changing the capacity calculation to include the educational cottages (since community does not want to redistrict), to redistricting. An addition did not appear to be supported, but there was no clear direction.**

## **5. Physical Spaces to support Teaching Curriculum:**

Ideally the physical facility planning and the curriculum programs should be integrated.

Does the Board have suggestions for how to better integrate the program/curriculum planning with the building planning?

***Reply Summarized:*** Several options to include instructional voices in long-range planning were suggested. They included appointing a member from the central office educational leadership, providing an update on instructional trends from an instructional consultant, and having school principals present to the LRPAC.

## 6. Mobile Classrooms:

Last year the Board stated that mobile classrooms should not be used as a long-term facility solution. Is the Board willing to take this a step forward and make a policy statement regarding the use of mobile classrooms?

A standard or policy goal would guide future LRPAC and redistricting committees. Two redistricting committees have now recommended no move, but both schools continue to rely on mobile classrooms (Stony Point & Meriwether Lewis).

What guidance do you have for the LRPAC at this time, specifically for Meriwether Lewis and Stony Point?

For instance, what time frame to use mobile classrooms as classrooms, build a new addition, redistrict or leave as is?

***Reply Summarized:*** There was consensus to put Trailer Policy on the Board agenda to create a policy. The policy discussion would include options such as “sun setting” the existing trailers, setting a time range for the use of trailers, replacement due to condition/age versus another solution. Staff is currently reviewing how existing mobile classrooms are used, i.e. are they required for classrooms or desired for storage or flexibility.

## 7. Security:

School security has come into the spotlight after the crisis at an elementary school in Connecticut.

Does the LRPAC need to set up a project for Security Improvements?

***Reply Summarized:*** There is no need for a new project, but there should be annual funding in the Maintenance Budget to make improvements. Generally it was agreed that the schools should remain an open and welcoming environment without stringent security measures. A few schools might benefit from physical changes to improve sight lines. There is both a State Task Force and a County evaluation in progress that will make recommendations and prioritize improvements. The County’s evaluation will be a continual improvement process. The Maintenance Budget should include projects to address the recommended improvements.