

Prologue:

What to keep in mind during this presentation

- 1) What are the problems being discussed? And, do they need to be fixed?
 - a) Inequity in Monomoy's assessment of the towns, particularly with elementary costs
 - b) The social-emotional/educational impact of a school becoming small (with only one or two classrooms per grade)

- 2) This presentation is a recommendation, not a decision.
 - a) Recommendations are presented to Boards and to the public.
 - b) Decisions that involve the Regional Agreement are ultimately made by voters at Town Meetings.

- 3) What is the role of school administrators?
 - a) To provide the best possible education for children
 - b) While being good stewards of the taxpayers money

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

A response to the guiding question by Monomoy's Administrative Team

Presented to the Monomoy Regional School Committee
April 29, 2021

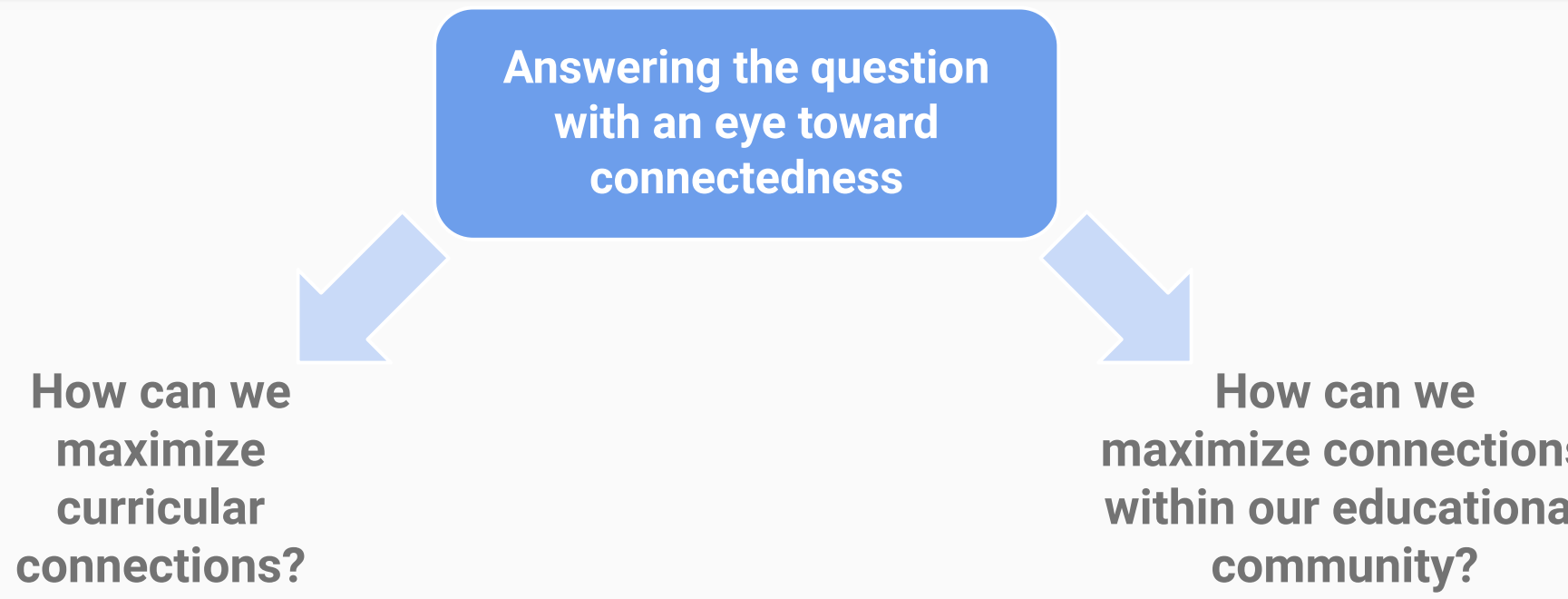


MONOMOY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Answering the question
with an eye toward
connectedness



```
graph TD; A[Answering the question with an eye toward connectedness] --> B[How can we maximize curricular connections?]; A --> C[How can we maximize connections within our educational community?];
```

How can we
maximize
curricular
connections?

How can we
maximize connections
within our educational
community?

Why connectedness matters ...

Connectedness of a curriculum within an educational community:

- Ideally, a high-quality curriculum provides connections across disciplines, grade levels, and schools
- Provides students with common experiences regardless of which teacher they have or which school they attend
- Prepares all students for what comes next, be it the subsequent grade level or post-graduation life

Connectedness of individuals within an educational community:

- Provides students with opportunities to build supportive relationships with peers who share common interests
- Provides educators with the ability to support each other, collaborate, and share effective lessons and practices
- Gives parents and caregivers wider access to other parents and caregivers to grow mutually supportive relationships

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness



Stronger curriculum and outcomes than when Chatham Public Schools and Harwich Public Schools operated independently, but with room for improvement

Monomoy's Elementary Model Today

Room for Improvement

- Stronger curriculum and outcomes than when Chatham Public Schools and Harwich Public Schools operated independently
- Room for improvement:
 - Having only one or two classrooms at each grade level is not ideal for students, where quality peer connections support learning and success
 - Having no other or only one other grade-level peer is not ideal for teachers too, where professional collaboration and support bolsters the quality of instruction
 - Challenges with grade-level curricular alignment and consistency between two elementary schools
 - Challenges with balancing grade-level class sizes between buildings

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness

If operating completely independently, Chatham Elementary and Harwich Elementary would likely once again lack a unified curriculum, leading to disparate opportunities and outcomes at the elementary level



Disjointed Elementary Operations

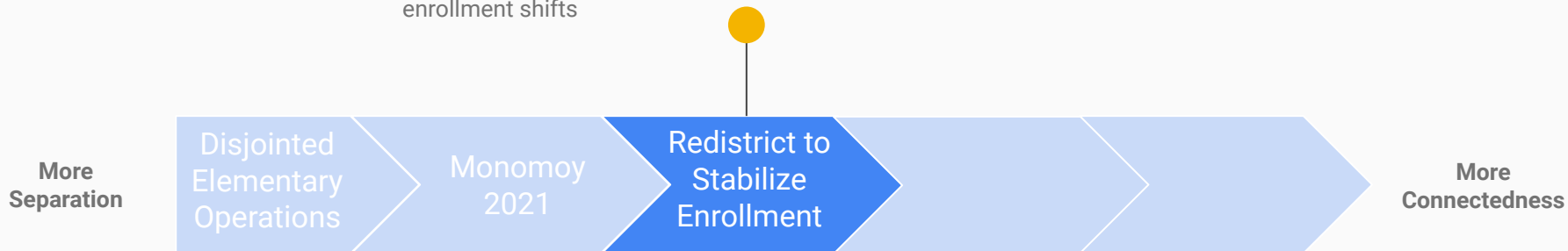
A Giant Step Backwards,
Returning to Chatham Public
and/or Harwich Public schools

- If one or both towns opted to pull their elementary programs out of the region, it would create disjointed opportunities and outcomes at the elementary level
- Reverses the curricular alignment efforts and progress Monomoy has made in elementary ELA and math
- Shifts to the “Nauset Model,” where towns pay for their own elementary schools but have no unified elementary curriculum and pedagogical approach
- This would require a change to the Regional Agreement

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness

A short-term solution ensuring two classrooms per grade at Chatham Elementary, which will periodically need adjustment as enrollment shifts



Redistrict to Stabilize Chatham Elementary Enrollment

A Baby Step Forward with a Short-Term Remedy

- A short-term solution, initially shifting about one bus full of Harwich students to attend Chatham Elementary
- This would ensure there are two classrooms per grade at Chatham Elementary, but will need ongoing adjustment as enrollment shifts
- This maintains the concept of “neighborhood” elementary schools for some, at the expense of some Harwich families
- May help balance class size discrepancies
- Does not achieve an adequate peer group for connection for students or teachers
- Does not address challenges with grade-level curricular alignment and consistency
- This would require a change to the Regional Agreement

Did you know?

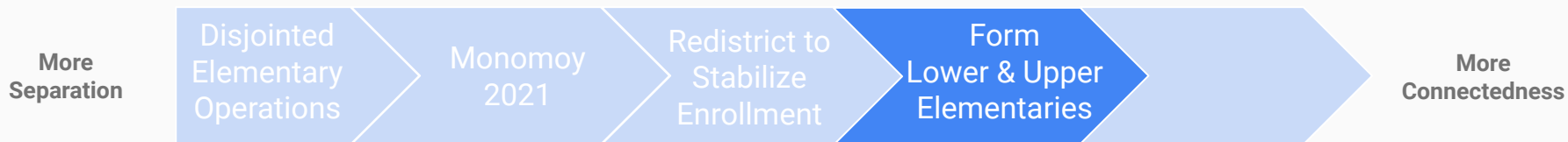
Living in Harwich or Chatham does not necessarily mean that you live near the town's "neighborhood" elementary school.

Most families on the Cape – and throughout our country – do not live near (within walking distance of or a short bike ride to) their elementary school.

- South Chatham is closer to Harwich Elementary School than Chatham Elementary School.
- East Harwich is closer to Chatham Elementary School than Harwich Elementary School.

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness



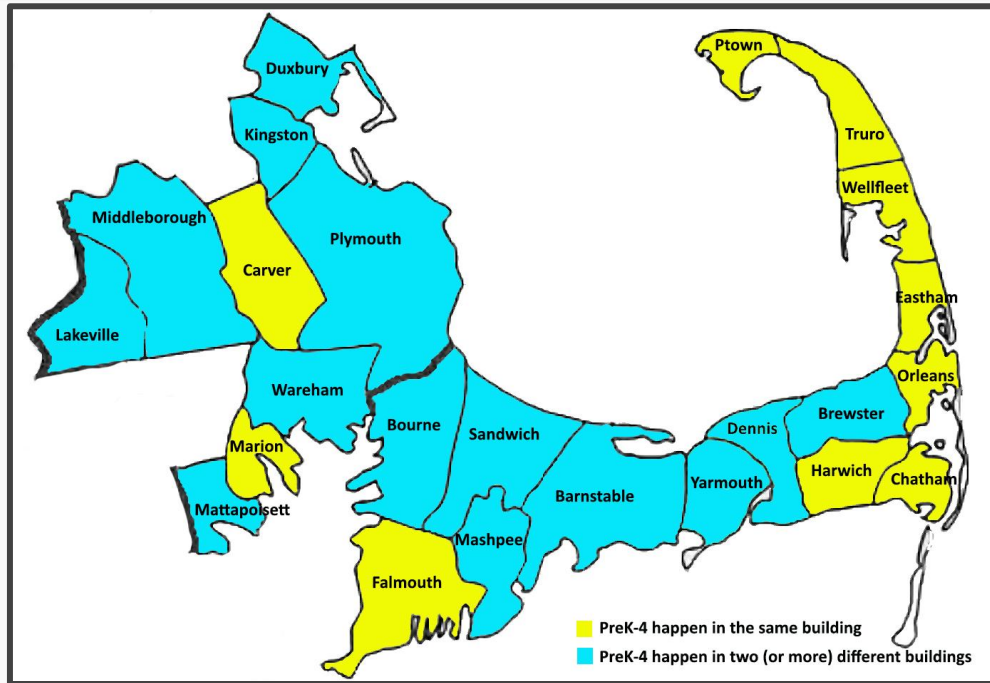
Would bring grade-level students together for better social dynamics and peer connection, and grade-level educators together for better collaboration and consistency

Form Lower and Upper Elementary Schools

A Giant Step Forward

- Provides a long-term solution that keeps elementary schools in both towns
- Brings grade-level students together for better social dynamics and peer connection
- Brings grade-level educators together for better collaboration and curricular consistency
- Provides better efficiency and effectiveness in providing special services for students
- Provides improved flexibility in configuring classrooms, equalizing class size, and providing student supports
- This would require a change to the Regional Agreement

Prevalence of Lower/Upper Elementary Models in Southeastern MA



Most communities (highlighted in blue) in Southeastern MA utilize some form of lower and upper elementary schools, with the youngest students spending part of their PreK through Grade 4 years in one building and part in another.

PreK-2 models: Brewster, Mashpee, Bourne, Sandwich, Wareham, Kingston, and Duxbury

PreK-3 models: Dennis, Yarmouth, Mattapoisett, and Lakeville

Early Childhood models: Plymouth - PreK then 1-5; Barnstable - PreK then K-3 then 4-5; and Middleborough - PreK-K then 1-5

Did you know?

A PreK-2 structure for a lower elementary school is very common in many towns in Southeastern Massachusetts, including Brewster, Mashpee, Bourne, Sandwich, Wareham, Kingston, and Duxbury.

On the contrary, true lower and upper elementary schools is quite rare within regional school districts.

- If Monomoy adopted a PreK-2 lower elementary structure, it would be forging a very unique and progressive approach to elementary education with a regional school district, as examples of lower and upper elementary models within regions is rare in Massachusetts.
- Quabbin Regional School District is the only regional school district in the state with a true lower/upper elementary school structure where younger students cross town lines; however, this only happens within two of the five towns in that region.
 - Within Quabbin, New Braintree and Oakham students spend PreK-1 in New Braintree's elementary school and grades 2-5 in Oakham's elementary school.
 - While small, the towns of New Braintree and Oakham combined are geographically 13% larger (in terms of square miles of land) than Harwich and Chatham combined.
- Nearby, the towns of Bourne, Sandwich, and Wareham each operate lower and upper elementary schools, where students attend a lower school in one part of the town, then the upper school in another part of the town. All three of these towns are larger (in terms of square miles of land) than Harwich and Chatham combined.

Any change in configuration will have facilities and transportation challenges to manage.

Facilities

Did you know?

Chatham Elementary School is 61,245 square feet and has 16 general purpose classrooms.

Harwich Elementary School is substantially larger, with 144,000 square feet of space, supporting 33 general purpose classrooms.

- Monomoy currently has up to 7 classrooms of students per grade level in our elementary schools (5 of those classrooms at Harwich Elementary and 2 at Chatham Elementary)
- With 16 classrooms, Chatham Elementary can only support 2 grades in a lower/upper model.
- Given classroom constraints, the lower/upper elementary structure that would logistically make sense for Monomoy would feature this alignment:
 - Harwich Elementary – PreK, Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2
 - Chatham Elementary – Grade 3 and Grade 4
- This adds a transition between Grade 2 and Grade 3, compared to the current PreK-4 model; however, the model also creates an important benefit of a less disruptive transition to middle school at Grade 5, as students will have already been learning together.

Transportation

Did you know?

Monomoy Regional currently has a fleet of 13 buses, with two tiers of busing (an elementary run followed by a middle school and high school run)

- Harwich Elementary (K-4) requires 10 buses.
- Chatham Elementary (K-4) uses 3 buses.
- The middle school (5-7) needs 7 buses.
- The high school (8-12) only uses 6 buses, as some high school students drive themselves.

- Currently Monomoy uses a two-tiered transportation approach (having two bus runs each morning and afternoon)
 - Tier 1: Harwich Elementary and Chatham Elementary on separate buses
 - Tier 2: Middle school and high school on separate buses
- Many school districts with lower and upper elementary systems require a third tier of busing, which often increases transportation costs by about 30% (which would equate to about \$300,000+ for Monomoy)
- It is possible to transport Monomoy students to lower and upper elementary schools under a two-tiered transportation system – without adding costs – by having:
 - Tier 1: Grades 3-7 on 13 buses taking all riders to Chatham Elementary for Grades 3-4 and middle school for Grades 5-7
 - Tier 2: Grades K-2 on 7 buses and Grades 8-12 on 6 different busses
- Based on feedback from PreK-2 districts, there may be minor increases in transportation costs if K-2 buses require the addition of bus monitors

Could Chatham Elementary be a PreK-1 school, within an Lower/Upper Elementary Model?

Short answer: Yes, but there would be challenges with CES holding the lower grades

Physical space challenges:

Chatham Elementary has 16 classroom spaces, and the district currently needs at least 7 classrooms per grade level, plus at least two preschool classrooms.

Preschool, Kindergarten, and First Grade fills Chatham Elementary School, with little to no room for growth if enrollment increases.

Transportation challenges:

To maintain two-tier transportation (two bus runs), this would find K-1 and 5-7 sharing the same buses.

Having them on different buses likely adds a tier of busing at a cost of \$300,000+, and will impact school start times (e.g., 7:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m., and 9:30 a.m. starts), which can be challenging for parents with students in multiple schools.

How Monomoy elementary staff responded to the question...

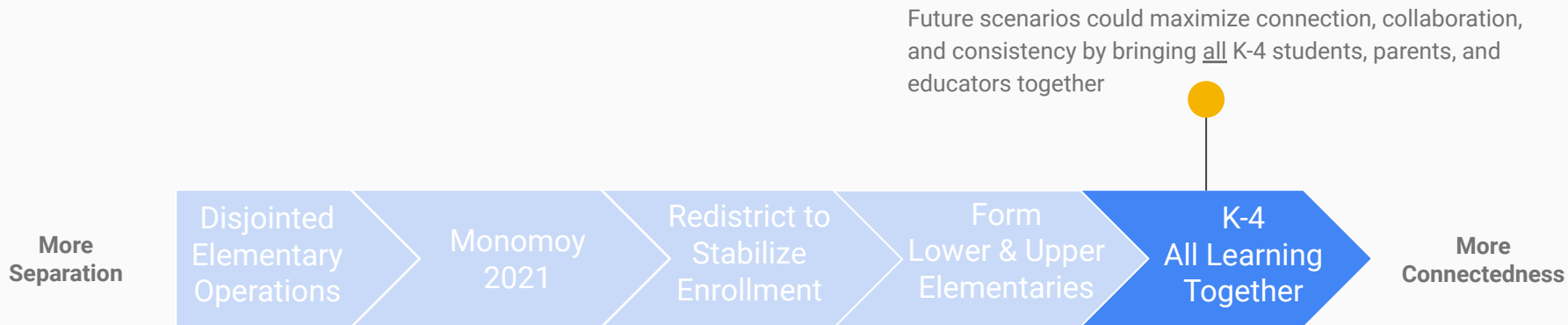
The district has conducted two surveys (Nov. 2017 & Dec. 2020) to get opinions from families and staff on elementary school configuration options.

Both surveys found the majority of Monomoy staff favoring a lower/upper elementary school configuration. December's survey found **75% of staff preferring grade-level children and staff being together in some configuration** (with 57% preferring lower/upper and 18% advocating for all elementary students and teachers being in one building).

[In teacher's own words... \(a 6-minute 43-second video\)](#)

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness



K-4 All Learning Together

A Vision of Great Possibilities in the Future

- Requires a long-range vision to realize and plan for future possibilities
- Brings all elementary-aged students together for better social dynamics, peer connection, and role modeling
- Brings all elementary educators together for better collaboration, curricular consistency, and vertical alignment of the curriculum
- Maximizes the ability to efficiently and effectively provide special services for students
- Provides optimal flexibility in configuring classrooms, equalizing class size, and providing student supports
- This would require a change to the Regional Agreement and may require additional Town Meeting fiscal support

Did you know?

According to the [Condition of America's Public School Facilities report](#), the average age of a school building in our country, from the date of initial construction, is 44 years; however, schools are periodically updated.

The average age of a school building in the United States since it was last majorly renovated (or from when it was constructed if no renovation has happened) is 19 years.

At some point in the near future, there will need to be a major renovation (like roofs, HVAC systems, windows, external siding and/or internal finishes) of Monomoy's elementary schools and middle school.

- Chatham Elementary School was built in **1955** and is 65 years old, and has seen renovations in 1984, 1992 (windows), and 1997 (most recently, 24 years ago).
- Harwich Elementary School was initially built in **1948** and is 73 years old, and was last renovated in 2003 (18 years ago).
- Monomoy Regional Middle School was built in **1964** and is 57 years old, and was renovated and a large addition added on the south side of the building in 1998 (23 years ago).
- Monomoy Regional High School opened in September **2014** and is in its 7th year of operation.

Possible Models to Consider in the Future

Given that the school-aged population has and will continue to trend downward on the Cape and in our towns

Five Years from Now or Beyond:

As elementary enrollment drops, all K-4 students will soon fit within Harwich Elementary School with class sizes at 18 students or below.

Chatham Elementary School could be (partially) used as an Early Childhood Center for Monomoy and area preschool programs (YMCA, etc.), as these might not fit in a K-4 HES.

Some districts operate Early Childhood Centers providing focused PreK supports for families (Barnstable & Plymouth); Middleborough includes both PreK and kindergarten within its Early Childhood Center.

There would be one-time costs associated with this model, including facilities/bathroom addition and moving expenses.

Over 10 Years from Now:

Given the age of CES and HES, at some point there will be a need to replace one or both elementary schools.

Potentially one centrally located PreK-4 elementary school (of approximately 150,000 sq. ft.) could be built on 10 to 13 acres of land.

There would be land acquisition and construction costs and offset an MSBA grant, with over \$1M/year in additional by consolidating all PreK-4 under one roof.

For comparison, Wareham is currently finishing construction of a new PreK-4 elementary that will unify its lower and upper elementary schools in a 160,000-square-foot facility that cost \$78M, offset by a \$50M grant from MSBA.

Monomoy educators
answer the question ...

What is the best configuration of Monomoy's elementary schools for student learning?

Looking at the question across a continuum of connectedness

The Monomoy Superintendent; Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Director of Students Services; the Harwich Elementary Principal; and the Chatham Elementary Principal unanimously agree with the majority of our teachers that the best configuration for our elementary schools for the foreseeable future would be a **Lower/Upper Elementary Model**. Logistically, Harwich Elementary could become a PreK-2 school and Chatham Elementary a Grade 3-4 school.



This is a fiscally responsible and logistically viable long-term solution. It requires support of our School Committee, Select Boards, and, ultimately, of a revision to the Regional Agreement at Town Meeting in both Chatham and Harwich.

With support of the boards and of voters at Town Meetings, this could begin as early as the 2022-2023 school year.

With elementary schools that are 65 and 73 years old, but well-maintained, consideration might be given to building a unified elementary school to provide more connectedness at some point in the future.

Epilogue:

What to keep in mind after this recommendation

- 1) Many will disagree.
 - a) [Surveys](#) have twice shown that parents in Chatham and Harwich feel differently about reconfiguration
 - b) 25% of Monomoy's educators differ with this recommendation
 - c) Three teachers shared videos (not included in this presentation) with concerns about a lower/upper system, including:
 - i) An added transition, having siblings (in different grades) at different elementaries
 - ii) Bus ridership times might increase for some elementary children
 - iii) Change means that children won't have the same memorable five-year experience at CES or HES that their parents had
- 2) It's alright to disagree. Ask yourself if the disagreement is on educational grounds or on personal or family preferences.
- 3) Be mindful of the impact of NIMBY (not in my backyard) on others.