

South Hadley Elementary Building and Grade Reconfiguration Project Proposal October 2023

Educational Vision

The longstanding and continuing degradation of the Mosier Elementary School building prompted the South Hadley School District's recent submission of a Statement of Interest (SOI) to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) for consideration of a project to replace the existing building. This application has created an opportunity for the district to contemplate both a new educational facility and a reimagining of educational delivery systems and structures to meet student/family needs and contemporary educational goals. The vision animating this proposal is to:

- create the conditions for the strongest possible foundation for our beginning learners
- build upon that strong foundation by rejoining all elementary aged students in one physical space
- create a true middle school model in order to buttress that foundation by supporting students in that developmentally critical stage of the education continuum and
- to build a significantly strengthened pre-vocational and vocational program for middle school and high school students in order to expand the educational and professional opportunities for those students whose vision for their own education and professional future continues to expand beyond the traditional secondary constructs of college readiness.

The Plan-Grade Reconfiguration and Programming Impacts-The Four Pillars

Four pillars support the district's emerging educational vision prompted by the proposed building project, each bearing the weight of the pre-k through grade 12 span of service provided by the South Hadley School District. At one end stands the transformation of Plains Elementary School into an Early Child Learning Center comprising grades pre-k and kindergarten only. In support of the emerging vision in support of contemporary educational goals for South Hadley students and enhanced service for young families within our district community, the proposed Early Child Learning Center provides the following benefits:

- Significantly enhanced opportunities to build foundational supports for our earliest learners by focusing on pre-reading, pre-writing, and early math skills
- Full day pre-k to students who are 4 and will be entering kindergarten the following fall and students who have a full day program in their IEP
- Half day pre-k to 3 year olds or early 4's who will be in pre-k for two years or more
- Availability for ½ day students to remain on-site for care the remainder of the day
- Partnership with YMCA and/or Head Start to provide before and after school care

- Creation of a parent resource center (meetings, heat assistance, food bank, winter clothing, etc.)
- Opportunities for expanded sensory spaces, calm down spaces, and/or indoor play spaces
- Increased opportunities for pre-k and kindergarten partnerships for students and for teachers, leading to smoother transitions between grade levels
- Increased opportunities for play-based learning building-wide
- Continued expansion of pre-k and flexibility to create kindergarten classrooms to welcome increased numbers of new students
- Establishment of pre-vocational and vocational Early Childhood programming at Plains to service the emerging interests of middle and high school students seeking academic and pre-professional opportunities in this critical and growing field.

This vision is an extension of efforts already underway in district to strengthen core literacy and math instruction, exemplified by our recent adoption of an entirely new literacy program based on science of reading principles and our top to bottom review of math practices, supported by our district's recent acceptance into the Math Tiered Academy. Both initiatives began as efforts to re-vision the academic experience of our earliest learners with the intention of creating the conditions for future long term social and academic success by securing a strong early foundation.

The opportunity for the district to contemplate grade reconfigurations based upon its original intent to rebuild an old and dying Mosier Elementary School has led the district to focus, not inconsequentially, on a vision that fundamentally reimagines elementary programming as well, the second pillar in our district revisioning plan. This vision includes the reduction of grade one at Plains Elementary School and grade five at Michael E. Smith Middle School, fundamentally reconfiguring the district's elementary programming, by creating a grades one through five Mosier Elementary School. The benefits of this plan closely align with the district's emerging vision for building, and securing, strong educational and social emotional foundations for all South Hadley elementary students in two ways. First, the development of a one through five elementary building consolidates academic programming in our district at a time when it is undergoing comprehensive curriculum and instructional revisions. The resource and professional development opportunities afforded by this consolidation will lead to significantly enhanced and de-siloed service delivery for students progressing through the elementary grade continuum. Second, the reintroduction of grade five to elementary school programming in South Hadley will, we believe, properly align the social emotional needs of all elementary students, consistent with the district's expanding understanding of the centrality of social emotional health to the overall well being and individual success of each unique student. Further, as with academics, consolidated programming in the context of the district's revitalized SEL coordination and initiatives will allow for uniform and mutually reinforcing SEL programming and professional development made possible by grade proximity within one facility.

As with Plains, the vision for a reconfigured Mosier Elementary School amplifies efforts to re-vision the academic experience of our learners as they move past early childhood to a comprehensive and unified one through five learning environment, once again the goal being to create and reinforce the conditions for future long term social and academic success of our students.

Toward the other end of the district's emerging educational vision stands the pillar of a revised middle school model that will serve students in grades 6-8 only. This pillar extends the district's vision in two specific ways. First, by reducing the grades served to three (down from the current four) this model supports students' academic development. This proposed model would free up space in the middle school to develop a robust pre-vocational program for students who may wish to experiment with an academic trajectory that also includes exposure to a variety of pre-professional opportunities. The pre-vocational opportunities will align with current high school vocational programs in criminal justice, carpentry and culinary and will allow for an even more robust and evolved program of vocational study at the high school, including the introduction of an Early Childhood program, by leveraging and expanding upon early middle school exposure. This proposed plan also allows for the contemplation of possible further future expansion of high school vocational programming, including, for instance, cosmetology.

This vision is also an extension of efforts currently underway at the middle school to reimagine its service delivery, consistent with our core goal of strengthening and extending academic foundations for all students. Just this year the middle school implemented an entirely new schedule, extending instructional periods, accommodating the inclusion of its first ever advisory program, world language classes (Spanish) and Family and Consumer Science offerings.

The second extension of the district's vision allowed by this proposed model supports students' social emotional and behavioral needs by increasing administrator and counselor oversight achieved through the reduction of one full grade from the current middle school configuration. This grade reduction will directly support efforts currently underway in the district to address the behavioral and social emotional needs of students across the district, and in particular the unique behavioral and emotional needs of the middle school student. Beginning this year, the district now employs a full time Mental Health Coordinator whose impact on the middle school advisory program development and implementation has already yielded tangible improvements in addressing student need. The proposed plan will extend progress made in this critical area by increasing administrator and counselor student contact time. Additionally and consequentially, it will allow increased time for purposeful oversight and continued development of student centered programming for students whose own academic and social emotional development requires unique focus and attention.

The fourth and final pillar of the district's emerging vision recognizes the fundamental fact that, sitting as it does at the end of the pre-k through twelve continuum, South Hadley High School bears responsibility both for its own contribution to student achievement and the consequences of all the curriculum, instruction and programming shaping students through the years leading up to their

tenure at the high school. Recognizing this reality, the educational vision proposed here impacts South Hadley High School in two ways. First, by proposing an early child learning center, a consolidated elementary school, and a reconfigured middle school, the district recognizes the absolute necessity of creating a firm and reliable foundation for all its learners. Supported as they will be by innovative programming informed by contemporary best practices in academic content and social emotional wellness, students will enter their high school years beneficiaries of a firm, coherent and comprehensive educational foundation, upon which the high school can and will build to create the conditions for individual student achievement based on the needs and interests of students as unique learners, thus strengthening the final pillar of the district's pre-k through twelve educational vision. Second, high school vocational programming itself will be directly and positively impacted by lower grade reconfigurations. Benefitting from a vigorous pre-vocational program at the middle school, vocational programming at the high school will transform to next phase instruction, significantly advancing the professional goals and aspirations of a large and growing segment of its population as they look toward post-secondary employment or education. In addition, the development of an early child center will provide a unique opportunity to create and implement an Early Childhood Program for high school students by leveraging a reconfigured Plains Elementary School into both an early childhood instructional space for learners and a lab space for students at the other end of the pre-k through twelve continuum interested in that vocation and seeking practical, and local, ways to engage in it.

The Building Vision

Since the vision described above articulates a clear separation of elementary and middle school grades, the South Hadley School District proposes, at a minimum, the consolidation of grades one through five into one completely new school building. This proposal reflects the following core beliefs: Mosier Elementary School cannot be renovated AND a one through five elementary model is consistent with a contemporary and results driven educational vision for all students in our district. At most, the district proposes consideration of a grades one through eight school, with elementary and middle school grades separated within the facility, thus creating two distinct schools under one roof. Among the expected benefits of this proposed facility, the district highlights the following:

- Maintenance of new programming currently available to grade five students (Spanish, advisory, FACS) made possible by proximity to programming within the same facility
- Enhanced economies of scale for maintenance and custodial services, counseling supports, joint elementary and middle school programming and professional development

Since the district contends that the current Mosier facility is not repairable, this proposal prompts consideration of renovation of the current middle school facility to allow for the introduction of up to five pre-vocational programs and adding onto the current middle school facility to accommodate the new one through five Mosier Elementary School. The district recognizes that if it is invited into the feasibility study that process will determine the ultimate merits of this minimum and maximum

building and grade reconfiguration proposals outlined in this letter. The district also recognizes the possibility, if not even the likelihood, of other designs and configurations not contemplated here. In all cases, we affirm our commitment to working diligently, flexibly and collaboratively alongside the MSBA to develop and implement a plan that secures the best outcome for the students, families, taxpayers and other stakeholders of this community.

Funding Preparation

In anticipation of demonstrating its commitment to this process, the Town of South Hadley has for the last five years built a significant fund, now in excess of 850 thousand dollars, to support the feasibility study whenever the district is invited to participate.

Conclusion

The South Hadley School District and town have worked hand in hand to develop the proposal before you. The collaborative nature of this partnership, extending well past this particular project, makes now a uniquely opportune time to engage in the complicated and transformative work before us. It is our sincere hope that the South Hadley School District and Town of South Hadley is provided the opportunity to work with the MSBA on behalf of the students and families of this community to create a once in a generation opportunity to transform its educational landscape.