

Solon Schools Strategic Plan – Facilities & Enrollment

This report was introduced at the November 17, 2014, Solon Board of Education meeting for information and discussion. Additional changes are included in this final action item based on the public comment received and are indicated in italics.

Background

The recommendations and information included in this report are the result of planning, community input, and data and trend analysis since 2010.

After many years of steady enrollment gains created when major new developments (i.e. Chagrin Highlands, Thornbury, Signature, The Preserve, North Woods, etc.) were built in Solon and Glenwillow, district enrollment peaked in school year 2006-07 with just under 5,400 students. With the majority of available land built out and a maturing community, the Solon Schools have been experiencing a predicted enrollment stabilization. Enrollment for the current school year stands at 4,713, a decrease of 12 percent since the 2006-07 peak.

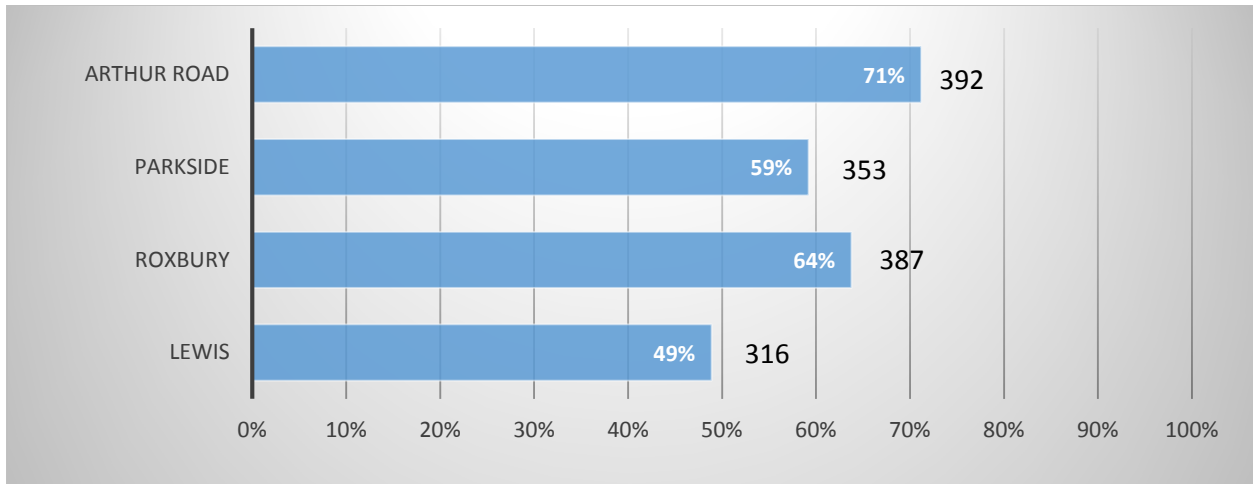
This decrease in enrollment has held steady and with lower kindergarten enrollments (328 in 2005 compared to 259 this year), the effect on the overall enrollment in the K-4 buildings is significant. In the 1999-00 school year, total K-4 enrollment was 1,785. But even as enrollment peaked in 2006-07, the K-4 enrollment districtwide was already declining at 1,772. Since 2010 when the issue of capacity and enrollment was raised during the Strategic Planning process, overall K-4 is down 233 students.

Districtwide K-4 Enrollment Decline	
Even in 2006-07, the year of our highest total student enrollment, K-4 enrollment was already decreasing.	
School Year	Total Students in Grades K-4
1999-00	1785
2006-07	1772
2009-10	1670
2010-11	1636
2011-12	1586
2012-13	1543
2013-14	1479
2014-15	1437

With lower enrollment, building capacities at each K-4 school are all down:

Current K-4 Building Capacity

(2014-15 school year October count week data)



Capacities are determined based on the amount of available classroom space at each building:

Arthur Road – 23 • Lewis – 26 • Parkside – 24 • Roxbury – 26

Overall, the leveling off of enrollment and decreased numbers are not negative. Particularly with the uncertainties of school funding that rest beyond local control, the size of the district currently and going forward provides more predictability and flexibility. The real estate market in Solon continues to be robust and inquiries from prospective families has never been higher.

Although there is no immediate fiscal crisis mandating this action at this time, it is the correct and prudent decision because it aligns to the goals and objectives of our Strategic Plan. This is not a purely dollars-and-cents decision, but the resulting efficiency and projected savings should not be understated or undervalued. The district is accountable to the entire community for using finances wisely and efficiently, while at the same time not jeopardizing the high-quality educational program for Solon students. The recommendation that follows preserves that balance.

Redistricting and Consolidation

- Redraw district K-4 attendance zones and create three more balanced K-4 schools in the Lewis, Parkside and Roxbury elementary buildings.
- Only students in preschool and grades 1-4 will attend Arthur Road in 2015-16.
- After 2015-16, Arthur Road will house the district preschool only, with an administrator from another building assigned administrative responsibility for the preschool.
- Beginning August 2015, all new school boundaries will be in effect. All newly enrolled students (including all kindergarteners) will attend school based on the new attendance zones.

- *Beginning August 2015, families may choose for their children to start attending school in their new attendance zone based on space availability and maintaining current class sizes. {PARENT INPUT}*
- Students currently enrolled in Roxbury, Parkside and Lewis may finish in those buildings. Sufficient classroom space exists at each building for the multi-year transition. This transition will not drive up class sizes.

Transition to Three K-4 Buildings Will Take Four Years					
Grade levels of Lewis, Roxbury & Parkside					
That May Continue Through Fourth Grade					
Year	Grades				
2014-15	K	1	2	3	4
2015-16	1	2	3	4	
2016-17*	2	3	4		
2017-18	3	4			
2018-19	4				

* Arthur Road will no longer house grades 1-4

- **Transition Enrollment Projections for 2016-17:**
 Given the community commitment that Arthur Road will be a functioning 1-4 building for the 2015-16 school year, not all Arthur Road students will transition to their new attendance zone schools next year. *Questions from parents were submitted during the process asking if “everyone would fit” in the new attendance zone schools if all Arthur Road students opted to move in 2015 and all current Roxbury and Parkside students opted to stay in their current buildings. This rhetorical question is not feasible as the transition enrollment will be controlled to ensure a functioning grade 1-4 building at Arthur Road for next year that preserves a fully supportive elementary building culture and programming (such as book fairs, art shows, assemblies, career days, etc.).*

The following charts demonstrate school-specific enrollment projections for the 2016-17 school year when Arthur Road would no longer house students in grades 1-4. These school and class enrollment projections address:

- 1) all students electing to move to their new attendance zone schools and
- 2) no students at Roxbury and Parkside electing to move to their new attendance zone schools.

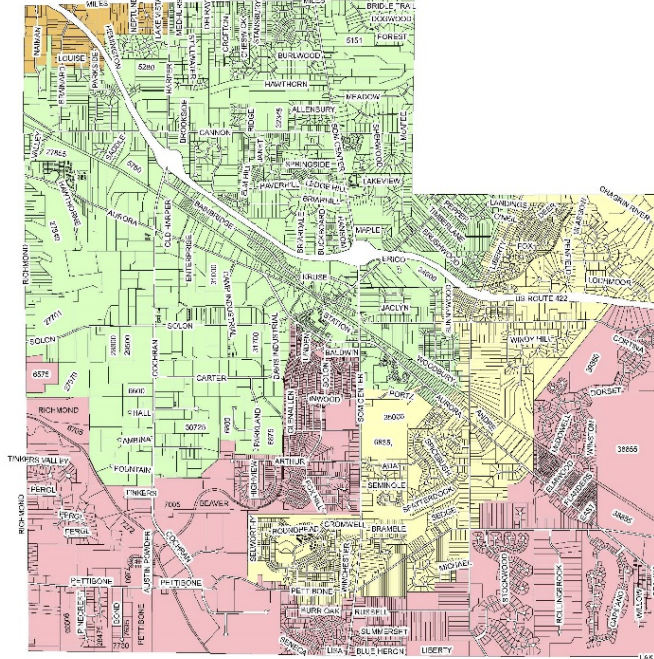
The actual numbers would fall in between the two charts as some students will opt to move to their new attendance schools and new students to the district and students moving out of Solon or even within the city would change the totals as well. All new students to the district, including kindergarten students, would attend new attendance zone schools beginning in August 2015. These estimates assume incoming kindergarten classes of 262 for 2015 and 2016.

A wide range of variables – such as new district enrollment and withdrawals and parent requests through transitional enrollment and open enrollment – will impact the final numbers each year. The buildings can assuredly handle the capacity with transitional enrollment.

2016-17 School Year						
Arthur Road Students Move to Their New Attendance Schools & All Roxbury and Parkside Students Opt to Move to New Attendance Schools						
	K	1	2	3	4	Total
Roxbury	88	88	85	82	104	447
Lewis	88	88	109	79	95	459
Parkside	86	86	63	81	94	410

2016-17 School Year						
Arthur Road Students Move to New Attendance Schools & All Other Students Stay In Current Schools						
	K	1	2	3	4	Total
Roxbury	88	88	116	119	150	561
Lewis	88	88	72	45	58	351
Parkside	86	86	69	78	85	404

- In August 2016, all current Arthur Road students will begin attending their new schools based on the redrawn attendance zone map.

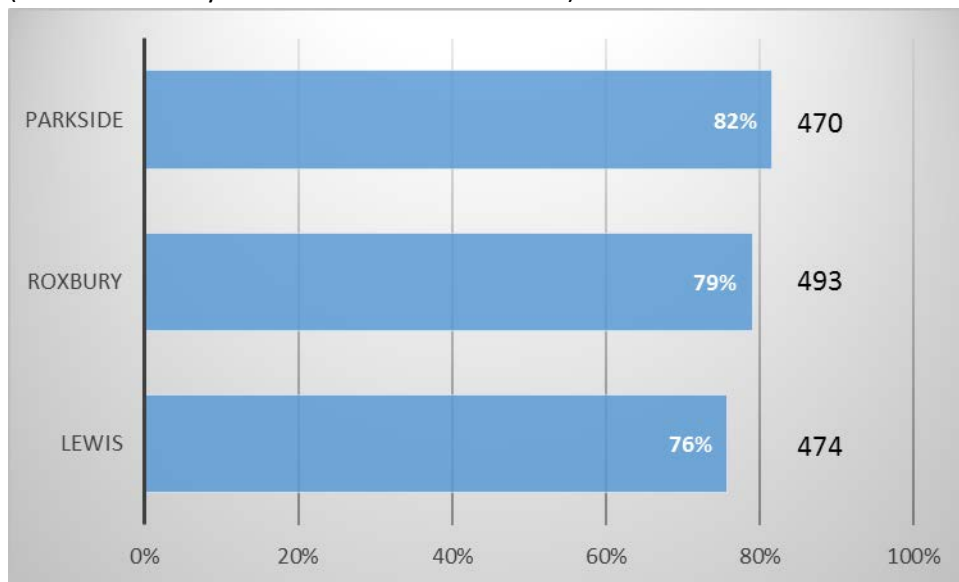


- The final map includes refinements based on community and parent input during the public comment period and maintains the dual goals of increased efficiency and rebalanced subgroups among the three K-4 schools. The most significant change to the map was made in response to community input to keep all neighborhoods together, including the entire neighborhood encompassing the ABC streets. {PARENT INPUT}

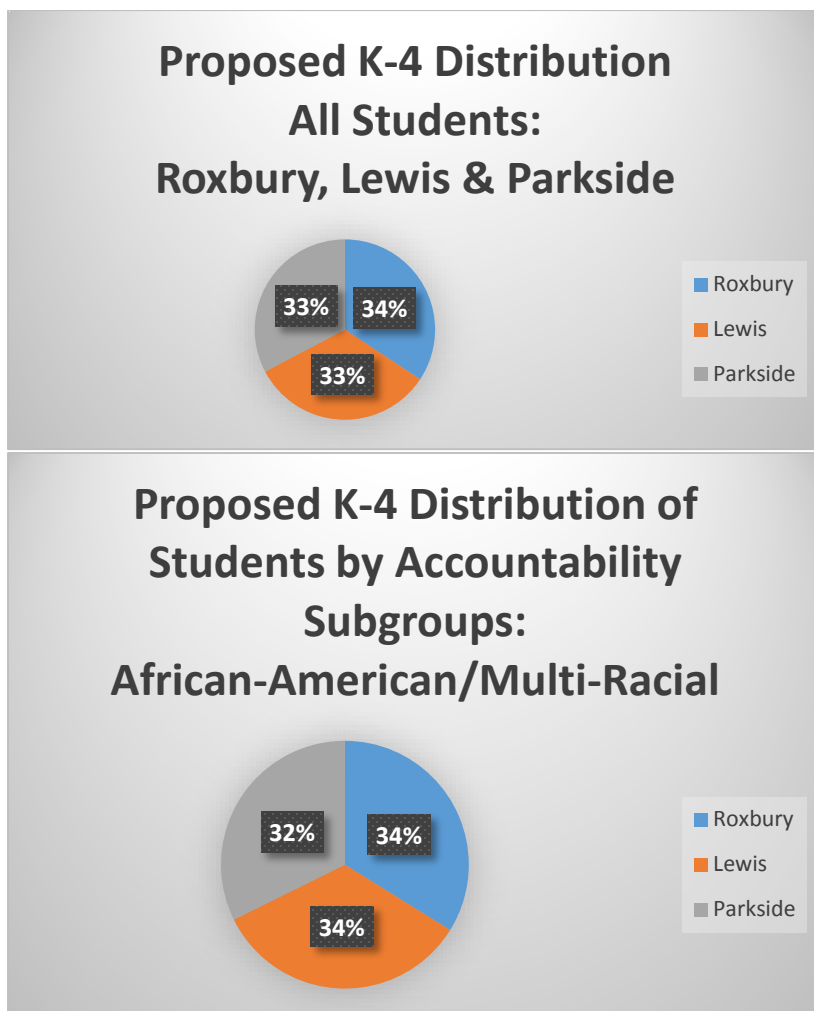
- The overall building capacities based on the new attendance zones are:

Proposed K-4 Building Capacity

(2014-15 school year October count week data)



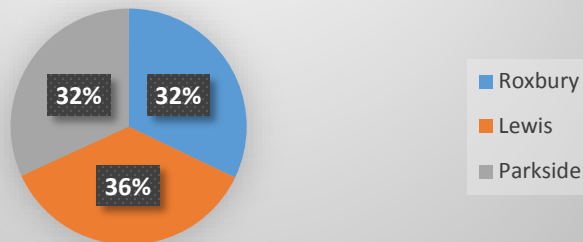
- These balanced and more efficient capacities leave room for any potential growth or enrollment spikes that could occur. Attention was paid in the Lewis attendance zone for future growth as that is the area that contains several possible areas of residential building, including several that have already broken ground and the apartment/townhome complex being proposed for the former University Hospitals land near 422. *That project has not yet made it to the ballot or been approved, but was considered in the map configuration among the various contingencies.* {PARENT INPUT}
- The new attendance zones create the improved balance among accountability subgroups.



Proposed K-4 Distribution of Students by Accountability Subgroups: Asian



Proposed K-4 Distribution of Students by Accountability Subgroups: Economically Disadvantaged



The Rationale for Selecting Arthur Road

- This was never a case of Arthur Road being an unfit or unsafe school structure. However, in comparing the four existing schools currently housing K-4 students, Arthur Road stands out as the least conducive building for elementary students.
- The district's excellent teaching and educational resources remain in Solon.
- The multi-level building creates challenges instructionally, especially the inability to house an Intensive Resource room for special education students. Students must use separate staircases to access each different part of the building. Adding an elevator to the west side of the building would only partially alleviate access issues and would result

in the loss of two classrooms. A building with this design would never be built today, regardless of the grade levels being served.

- The building could be easily segmented for additional uses in the future. With more than 10,000 square feet of rentable space on the west side of the building at a market value of approximately \$8/square foot, the space could generate revenue up to \$100,000. *The district would retain control over the building repurposing. Specific decisions on potential programs would occur in the next phase of planning once the initial transition is complete.* {PARENT INPUT}
- **None of these issues alone is a reason to close a school, but the comparison of space and building design highlights Arthur Road as the most obvious choice.**

Transition Planning

- Detailed transition planning commences with Board of Education approval of this recommendation. Timeline:
 1. **January 16, 2015** – Letters mailed to families in redistricted areas outlining options for students to remain in current school for 2015-16 or to request transition enrollment at the new school. Approval granted at superintendent's discretion. *Limits on numbers of students who will be granted permission to move in 2015-16 will be based on maintaining the commitment to the community that Arthur Road will be a fully functioning grade 1-4 building next year and the commitment that Lewis, Parkside and Roxbury will not be overcrowded during the transition. Criteria for granting transition enrollment changes will be based on several factors, including priority to families with kindergarten students entering a new school in August 2015, families with more than one sibling who wants to move to the new school and date application is received.* {PARENT INPUT}
 2. **January 2015** – Open Houses at Lewis, Parkside and Roxbury.
 3. **February 6, 2015** – Deadline for transition enrollment choices to be returned to the Board of Education offices.
 4. **March 4-5, 2015** – District Kindergarten Registration
 5. **May 1, 2015** – Final approvals on transition enrollment choices communicated to families. *Waiting lists may be created as necessary to maintain minimum sections at Arthur Road for 2015-16 (at least two sections for grades 1-4) and maintain balanced class sizes among elementary buildings.* Requests for changes to a transition enrollment request after initial selections are submitted would be made only at the superintendent's discretion based on the district's current open enrollment policy. {PARENT INPUT}

- Comprehensive and coordinated orientation programs will be launched to help students and families become acquainted and feel at home in their new schools.
- Comprehensive and coordinated logistical programs will be launched to ensure parents are able to easily make school selections during the transitional enrollment period, provide support from our school psychologists and guidance counselors to families and students in discussing the transition, and set up clear transportation procedures in neighborhoods that will have students attending different schools during the transition to be certain all students ride the correct buses each day. *Students' current school staff will provide placement input as appropriate to the new school.* {PARENT INPUT}
- Transportation in accordance with district policy will be provided to all students who opt to move to their new attendance zone school or remain in their current school throughout the transition. **This transitional transportation policy is in effect for transitional enrollment only.** Families who pursue and are granted open enrollment to an elementary school outside their assigned attendance zone must provide their own transportation to and from school for their children in accordance with current district policy.
- The process for staff assignment to the three K-4 buildings will be handled in accordance with the district's collective bargaining agreements. Because all Arthur Road staff must relocate to a new building beginning in August 2016, those staff members will have first choice to bid on open positions. **Class sizes will remain the same as current district guidelines.** No classroom teaching positions are being eliminated as a result of the consolidation. Reductions in positions over time would be due to decreased enrollments.
- The district and buildings will review and make modifications as necessary to avoid potential parent conflicts for all K-4 programming and events, including curriculum night, PTA fun nights, concerts, conferences, etc.
- *School equipment, such as playground structures, will be assessed and redistributed as necessary among the three K-4 buildings.* {PARENT INPUT}
- *The Solon Council of PTAs and the individual K-4 building PTA units have already begun research and discussions regarding consolidating and funds transfers.* Other school districts have worked through these issues before and there is excellent guidance to ensure this process is fair and proceeds smoothly. {PARENT INPUT}

Financial Implications

- By consolidating all K-4 students into three buildings, the district will continue saving \$500,000 in staffing efficiencies currently being achieved through manually displacing

students who register late among the K-4 buildings. This savings is at risk without consolidating to three K-4 buildings.

- The district will save an additional \$500,000 in position reductions by removing Arthur Road as a K-4 school:

Position Reductions & Savings Achieved By Removing Arthur Road as a K-4 Attendance Zone Beginning FY17	
Proposed Positions Reduced	Total Position Cost Per Year Saved
1 Principal	\$163,056
1 Guidance Counselor	\$97,538
1 Secretary	\$62,603
1 Custodian	\$68,425
1 CGR Teacher (Gifted)	\$97,538
1 Media Aide	\$50,000
TOTAL = 6 Positions	\$539,158

- *Beginning in August 2015, a new district transportation policy will go into effect lowering the transportation limit for all K-4 students from 1 mile to .5 miles. This change will be made possible by leveraging a portion of the savings achieved through the consolidation plan. {PARENT INPUT}*
- Beginning in FY19, an additional \$700,000 (six positions) in approximate annual savings is predicted based on the impact across the district and grade levels of the enrollment stabilization.
- *During the four years of the transition, some inefficiencies, for example in bus transportation, may occur. The decision to absorb these inefficiencies was made to ease the transition as much as possible for families. {PARENT INPUT}*
- *The district will look closely at the capital budget beginning in 2016-17 to determine the feasibility of adding air conditioning to both Lewis and Roxbury. {PARENT INPUT}*

Conclusion

In crafting these recommendations, the needs of our students remained at the forefront. Considerable care was taken to make as many accommodations as possible based on community and parent input provided through the online survey tool, parent participation at PTA meetings, and parent and community member phone calls and email contact. Input from parents and community members has been encouraged and considered throughout the process this fall. Any member of the community was welcome to provide input.

The Strategic Planning team could have recommended these changes three years ago, but opted instead to set the 275 student trigger point for kindergarten enrollment for two

consecutive enrollment cycles to allow for additional time and study of enrollment trends. It is key to remember that the 275 trigger number was a generous data point.

During this current process and the three years since the last report was issued, the trends identified have continued and align to district enrollment projections.