

WCUUSD Mission and Core Beliefs

MISSION: WCUUSD exists to nurture and inspire in all students the passion, creativity, and power to contribute to their local and global communities.

Humanity, Justice, Community and Belonging:

Schools respect, value, and welcome all people. Our schools build belonging by honoring diversity, centering equity, and celebrating the different experiences we all bring to our community. We will continue to learn and adjust our practices to create a more just and humane world.

Rigorous Curriculum and Instruction:

ALL students can learn, thrive, and make a difference in their communities. Schools hold high expectations for all students and ensure they see their lives and the lives of others reflected in a meaningful curriculum. Educators nurture and inspire students so that students can direct their learning, celebrate their developing identities, pursue interests, and create meaningful pathways to graduation and lifelong learning.

Well-Being:

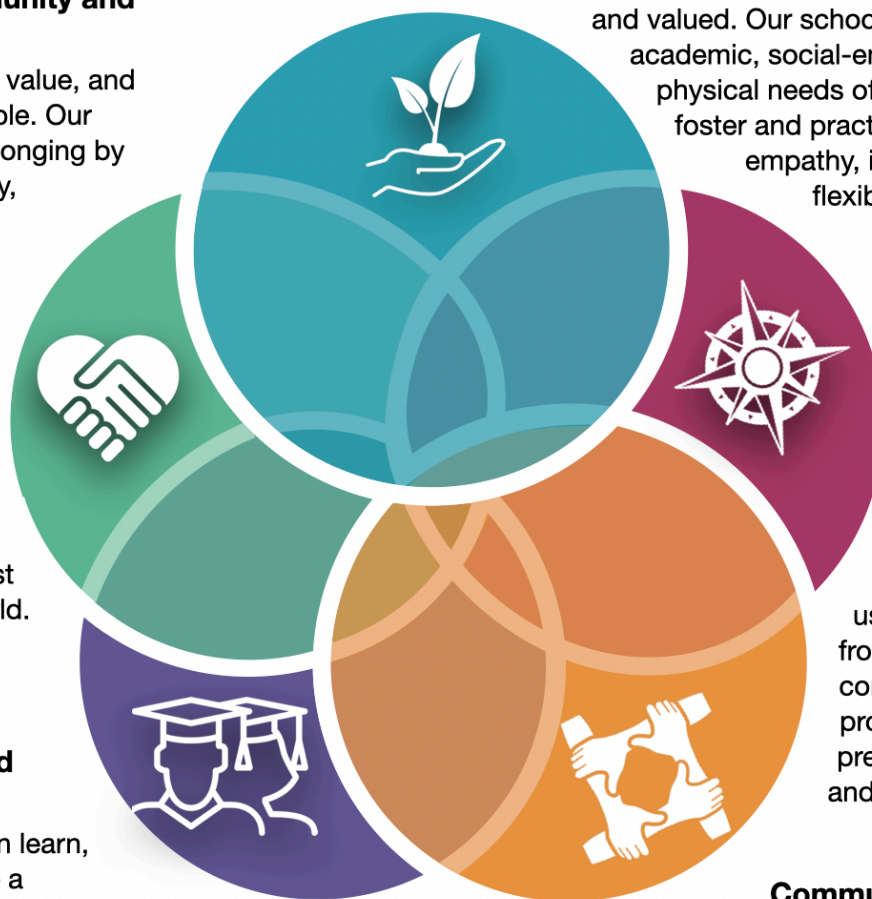
Schools are spaces where people feel safe and valued. Our schools must meet the academic, social-emotional, and physical needs of all students. We foster and practice joy, kindness, empathy, inclusivity, and flexibility.

Transparent and Responsible Leadership:

All decisions about our schools must be student-centered. We make decisions using data and input from students and the community. Our processes are clear, predictable, inclusive, and transparent.

Community Engagement and Relationships:

Strong, positive relationships are essential to our schools, communities, and students. We nurture connections among people and places. The community is engaged in our schools and our students are engaged in the local and global community.



Goals, Action Steps, & Indicators of Progress

Goal #1:

Build and nurture a culture of well-being and inclusivity.

Action Steps:

- WCUUSD will design and implement social-emotional learning standards, instruction, and assessments that foster emotional well-being and mental health.
- All WCUUSD schools design and implement plans to engage and build community and connectedness, both within and beyond their school buildings.
- WCUUSD will create a professional learning plan to ensure that all staff can create a safe and welcoming learning and working environment that supports equity, diversity, and inclusion in our schools.
- WCUUSD will expand our comprehensive assessment system to include measures of well-being and belonging so that we can celebrate strengths, provide opportunities for reflection, and hold schools accountable to high expectations for all students.

Indicators and Progress Measures

Existing indicators:

- Common Assessment System
- Board Monitoring Plan/Cycle
- Equity Indicators
- WCUUSD Communication and Engagement Plan

Potential indicators:

- WCUUSD Professional Learning Plan

Goal #2:

Challenge, empower, and engage each student through evidence-based instructional strategies and curriculum and varied educational opportunities.

Action Steps:

- WCUUSD will leverage its Comprehensive Assessment System to improve our proficiency-based system that holds high expectations for all students and is responsive to their strengths, needs, and interests.
- WCUUSD will partner with students to inform curriculum and instruction.
- WCUUSD will audit the opportunities in PreK-12 classrooms that ensure robust engagement in real-world authentic skills in and with the community, flexible pathways, and outdoor/place-based experiences.
- WCUUSD will leverage its professional development systems to support educators in their learning about:
 - ✦ Antibias and antiracist practices that create more inclusive learning environments and more diverse representation across the curriculum.
 - ✦ Universal Design for Learning so all students are engaged in the curriculum, have the supports they need to learn, and are challenged to meet high expectations.
 - ✦ The intentional integration of transferable skills into their instruction.

Indicators and Progress Measures

Existing indicators:

- Common Assessment System
- Education Quality Monitoring Plan
- Youth participation in existing structures (Curriculum Council, for example)

Potential indicators:

- Youth advisory council
- Regular feedback mechanisms
- UDL System and Educator Self Assessments
- WCUUSD Professional Learning Plan

Goal #3:

Foster and commit to responsive leadership that engages the community and communicates transparently.

Action Steps:

- W WCUUSD leaders will propose a financially sustainable configuration plan that supports the curriculum and culture goals.
- WCUUSD leaders will invest in staff and board development to support our three goal areas.
- WCUUSD leaders will create and strengthen existing connections between families, students, and communities.
- WCUUSD leaders will establish structures, policies, procedures, and accountability frameworks that support the implementation of the strategic plan and report on progress.
- The WCUUSD School Board will utilize its Education Monitoring Plan to monitor district progress toward the strategic plan, identify priority areas for investment, and support the work of the Superintendent as they implement the plan goals

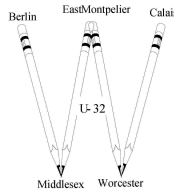
Indicators and Progress Measures

Existing indicators:

- Configuration Study
- Board Goals
- Board Workplan
- WCUUSD Communication and Engagement Plan
- Board Handbook
- WCLT Structures
- Education Quality Monitoring Plan
- Educational Quality Standards



BOARD & COMMITTEE PRIORITIES



Our structure must ensure high quality, enriching instruction for all students

Our configuration should...

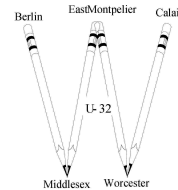
- Allow class sizes that meet Education Quality Standards and are sufficient to provide rich instruction
- Maintain full time nursing and counseling
- Maintain or expand enrichment opportunities that are consistent across the system (music, art, world language, etc)

- Limit (or eliminate) shared positions across schools and very small FTE

Prioritized modeling:

- A middle level program for grades 6-8 that will achieve a quality middle school experience at scale
- Fewer than 5 elementary schools

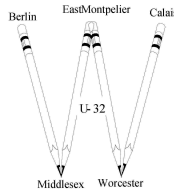
Total Enrollment for the District



	Berlin <i>PreK-6</i>	Calais <i>PreK-6</i>	Doty <i>PreK-6</i>	EMES <i>PreK-6</i>	Rumney <i>PreK-6</i>	U-32 <i>7-12</i>	WCUUSD <i>PreK-12</i>
FY22 <i>(Actual)</i>	209	108	79	239	142	729	1506
FY23 <i>(Actual)</i>	194	97	75	231	124	715	1436
Current (Sep 18)	198	94	78	216	122	708	1428
FY25	185	92	79	193	112	715	1376
FY26	191	90	74	169	111	685	1320

** Projections based on prior year actuals advanced one grade and estimated K class size based on forecast from Act 166*

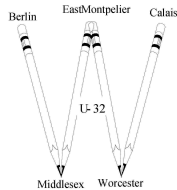
Grade Level Enrollment, PreK-6



	PreK		K		1		2		3		4		5		6	
	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25
Berlin	20	16	27	22	15	27	29	15	20	29	27	20	13	27	29	13
Calais	13	12	12	22	11	12	9	11	12	9	14	12	7	14	9	7
Doty	10	14	8	6	12	8	9	12	9	9	7	9	13	7	5	13
EMES	20	22	22	19	19	22	23	19	31	23	19	31	34	19	33	34
Rumney	12	14	15	7	9	15	21	9	11	21	16	11	13	16	16	13



Grade Level Enrollment, 7-12



	7		8		9		10		11		12	
	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25	FY24	FY25
Berlin	29	29	31	29	26	31	30	26	26	30	21	26
Calais	18	9	19	18	21	19	19	21	21	19	22	21
Worcester	8	5	13	8	10	13	13	10	12	13	7	12
East Mont	37	33	37	37	18	37	36	18	31	36	30	31
Middlesex	16	16	19	16	22	19	24	22	19	24	18	19
Total	108	92	119	108	97	119	122	97	109	122	98	109

1. Why can't we slow down this process?

The short answer is that we can, but it would come at a significant cost. We chose the current timeline (Board adopts a plan in September 2024, voters in affected towns vote in November 2024, and changes take effect in the 2025/2026 school year) for three reasons: it allows adequate time for a thoughtful and successful transition, helps avoid another painful budget increase for FY25, and ensures we can control spending increases promptly. Initially, we aimed to adopt a plan by June, but extended the timeline to allow more community engagement. Delaying further could push the transition out by an additional school year.

2. What are the proposals currently on the table?

The Board has been working with three configurations that grew out of a process to identify their priorities for our future configuration. These have been circulated as “simulations” in order to help the Board understand which are viable for further development.

1. Move all 6th graders to U-32 and create a true middle school structure for all students in grades 6-8.
2. Consolidate elementary education into 3 schools, located in Middlesex, East Montpelier, and Berlin.
3. Consolidate K-5 education into 2 schools, located in Middlesex and East Montpelier, and create an early childhood education center in Berlin, with the district offering pre-K to all district students there and partnering with an outside group to offer childcare from birth to Pre-K.

We can pursue both options 1 and 2, and if we chose option 3 we would have to also move the 6th graders to U-32 to have adequate space.

3. What factors did you consider in determining options to consider?

The committee and the board engaged in several work sessions to identify hopes, dreams, and ideas for a configuration that allows us to realize our strategic planning goals for the foreseeable future. The process yielded the following 4 priorities/criteria that helped us weigh the various options or simulations:

1. Does this produce optimal class sizes for high-quality instruction?
2. Does this limit or eliminate part-time positions, which can lead to lower staff satisfaction?
3. Can we maintain full-time nursing and counseling at each school?
4. Does this allow us to expand offerings?

4. Can you tell us what we will save as taxpayers?

No. We have estimates now, and we'll know more definitively after we complete our modeling, the amount we will save in local spending in the first year of the transition. (We're working on a side-by-side comparison of FY 25's budget 'with configuration changes' and 'without configuration changes') We should also be able to tell you soon how our spending might protect the district from big future increases based on a lower baseline and more built-in flexibility. We would love to be able to say how taxes are reduced by our spending reduction in Year 1 as well as other years, but no one can make those predictions. Our budgets reflect our control over local education spending. Local spending itself is only one of many factors in determining tax rates until the legislature changes the education funding formula.

We can say that, under our current system, decreasing the amount that we spend locally will decrease the local tax rate - both for people who pay the homestead property tax rate and for most people who pay based on their income. Our system uses the local spending per weighted pupil as the starting point for determining the tax rate, so educating the same group of students at a lower cost will in turn reduce taxes.

5. What other options did you consider?

We looked at scenarios where we operated either 4 elementary schools or only 1 school. We focused on scenarios in which the district would operate fewer than 5 elementary schools based on the results of exercises done both by the finance/reconfiguration committee and from work with the full School Board.

The 4 school scenario would have produced some savings in workforce reductions and in building operations, but would not have met the other goals of the reconfiguration work.

The 1 school scenario would have been feasible, though it would have required some additional construction to fit all of the district's students in one school building. It was considered unrealistic given the significant amount of change that it would have entailed. This scenario also would have required significant travel times for some students.

6. What is your timeline for making this decision?

We plan to engage the public and gather feedback throughout the summer in order to make a decision in mid-September about which option or options to pursue. We need to make a decision on this timeline in order to get the question on the ballot for the November election. (Board adopts a plan in September 2024, voters in affected towns vote in November 2024, and changes take effect in the 2025/2026 school year)

7. What needs to happen to close a school?

Under our Articles of Agreement, adopted when the unified union school district was created out of the 5 town districts and U-32, the closure of a school must be approved by the voters of the town in which it is located. In order to do this at a time when we believe that a large number of people will come out to vote, we want to be able to put this question to voters in this year's November general election if the Board chooses an option that would necessitate closing schools.

8. What happens to the school building if we stop operating it as a school?

First, we need to consider how we leverage the needs of our communities and see what would be the best use for our buildings. We have many needs as communities, from elderly care to childcare, health care, maker spaces. We can dream together and have them help us meet the needs of our communities.

The school buildings will be first offered to their host towns, which will have the option of purchasing the building for one dollar. The towns will then be able to use those buildings for other public purposes (ie: town offices, community centers, etc).

9. I've heard both that this is about cost savings and that it's really about the quality of education. Which is it?

It's both.

How do we fund our vision of public education and provide educational opportunities for each and every student, especially the ones further removed from opportunity? What is our desired state? How do we actualize our strategic plan goals?

We know that with our continued decline in enrollment it will be impossible to provide the robust and expansive educational experiences our students deserve. We have spent the past year hearing from our communities and developing a Strategic plan that incorporated our communities hopes and dreams. For us to achieve the goals of our strategic plan, we will need to lean on our core beliefs and the work we did and then allocate the resources necessary to achieve them. Our Leadership Team has been clear that we are increasingly limited in our ability to provide equitable experiences across the system in our current configuration.

It has become evident that we have reached the point where the cost of providing a high quality education is increasing at an alarming rate. We need to continue to consider the opportunities we have as a unified district. In our current configuration with our current enrollment it is not sustainable. We need to find fiscally responsible ways to maintain and even grow the programs and curriculum we have.

9. What are the expected cost savings from merging schools?

We currently have preliminary estimates that are very conservative: we have identified some concrete savings, particularly in staffing and building operations, but have not fully planned out how reconfiguration would impact things like special education.

Create 6-8 Middle School		
FTE Reduction	\$530,000	
Reconfigure Elementary Schools		
Factor	3 Elementary Schools	2 Elementary Schools + Early Childhood Center
Building Operations	\$343,452	343,452
Classroom FTE Reduction	\$881,920	\$987,920
Capital Spending	\$2,673,500 (6 years) \$455,583 annual avg.	\$2,673,500 (6 years) \$455,583 annual avg.
Non-Classroom FTE (Principal, nursing, counseling, allied arts)	Unknown at this time	Unknown at this time
Additional Unknowns		Transportation Impacts Potential rent from Early Childhood partner

10. Why are we discussing this now if we don't know the full financial impact yet?

We know that the following three things are true:

1. We will see significant cost savings from a reconfiguration
2. We will be able to improve the operations of the schools by reconfiguring
3. We need to get public input on the impacts of the different scenarios that we are considering independent of the cost impact.

If we wait until we have completed full cost estimates to start gathering public input, we would either need to significantly curtail the public input process or push reconfiguration out further into the future. We instead plan to do the two in parallel, and will have more complete financial

estimates by the end of the summer. This will allow the Board to consider both the cost and quality impacts together when making its decision on which scenario to pursue.

11. How much capacity do we currently have?

U-32 currently has capacity for 1,319 students and currently serves 708, and our elementary schools have a combined capacity of 1,458 while also serving 708. The individual school capacities and enrollments are below:

	Classrooms	Student Capacity	Current Occupancy	% of Capacity Used
Berlin	13	336	198	59%
Calais	9	252	94	37%
Doty	7	189	78	41%
EMES	15	413	216	52%
Rumney	9	268	122	46%
U-32	55	1319	708	54%

12. Why aren't we talking about merging the high school with Montpelier and beyond?

We are beginning to talk to Montpelier about potential consolidation, but that will be a long process and the reconfiguration that we are considering now will still be needed. Consolidating with Montpelier will require that we create a new merged district, and will require that we create new articles of agreement, determine what a new Board will look like, and consolidate into a single central office.

The reconfiguration work that we are proposing now is both needed and something that we can take action on in the short term, and because of this we want to move forward with it while also exploring longer-term changes. Even if we do merge with other districts in our area, the factors - both for education quality and cost - that are pushing us to propose reconfiguration now would still be true. We believe that a future merged district would still pursue reconfiguration because of this.

We met briefly with Montpelier to debrief where we are now and get an idea of what are the steps needed to take to map out a possible merger. We could have a joint meeting with Montpelier, Barre and other Central Vermont Districts to discuss. Here is a link to the possible

process that all communities would need to agree on:

<https://education.vermont.gov/documents/governance-study-committee-worksheet>

Middle School Related Questions:

13. Will moving the 6th graders to U-32 prevent us from merging with other schools (ie Montpelier and/or Twinfield) in the future?

As you can see from the table above, U-32 has a significant amount of additional capacity. Additionally, for the 2025-26 school year the departing 12th grade class is significantly larger than the incoming 7th grade class, so adding 6th graders will actually add very few total students to the building. We would still have enough space to add high school students from Montpelier in our current building.

14. Why move the 6th graders to U-32 when we have lots of space in our elementary schools?

Bringing 6th graders to U-32 would allow us to create more of a true middle school within the building. The middle grades are their own distinct period for students, and these students will benefit from this more direct focus on their needs.

Additionally, bringing 6th graders to U-32 will afford them additional opportunities in co-curricular activities that they do not currently have access to in the elementary schools, in the arts, in clubs, and in sports.

15. Will 6th graders be overwhelmed/lost being mixed with older students at the high school?

Creating a distinct middle school grouping will allow for those students to create a stronger separate identity, and will allow teachers to focus more on either middle or high school, whereas some now teach across the age range. Middle school students will be concentrated in their own area of the school building rather than being spread across it, which will also help to create this separation. Both of these elements will help to create a feeling of a “school within a school” which will help to buffer the younger students from older high schoolers.

16. Who will be teaching middle school if the 6th graders move up to U-32? Where do the current 6th grade teachers go?

Most teachers currently teaching middle school age students (6th - 8th grade) will have to get additional endorsements on their licenses to teach the full range. Many of our elementary school teachers are currently licensed to teach grades K-6 and many middle school teachers at U-32 are licensed for grades 7-12, so teachers from either group will need to add a certification for the full range of middle grades. This means that there is currently no significant group of teachers with current middle school licensure that is expected to take over the middle school teaching at the expense of another group. Our administrators will be working with teachers to help them understand what they will need to do to add the necessary certifications to be able to teach middle school, but we understand that for current active teachers adding the endorsement should not be onerous.

Elementary School Related Questions:

17. What are the educational benefits of combining elementary schools?

There are a number of benefits of combining our smallest schools. These include:

- **Class sizes will be more stable and consistent.** With very small class sizes, even small fluctuations in the number of students that we have in a grade level can create challenges for grade configuration. When this happens we sometimes have to create grade configurations that either don't make sense or that change from year to year, creating an insistent experience for students. Consistently offering a combined 1st/2nd grade class can be done very well, but switching between K/1st, 1st/2nd, and 2nd/3rd configurations as a large group of students moves through can be challenging. Additionally, changes to the grade configurations for specific cohorts of students makes it a challenge to offer a consistent curriculum for science and social studies/global citizenship. In these areas we want to be able to offer a set progression (or to consistently loop through subjects in mixed grade classes), and changes to the grade configurations can make that impossible.
- **Opportunities to expand course offerings.** We would like to bring world languages back to our elementary schools, and expect to be able to use some of the savings from consolidation to bring these classes back to all students.
- **Expanded opportunities in the arts.** In our smallest schools we are not able to offer the full range of arts programming that we can in the larger elementary schools because these opportunities require a critical mass of students to be viable. In one of our elementary schools, a very small number of students want to take choir but cannot do so because choir needs a group of students for the musical arrangements to make sense. In another, we are unable to offer band for similar reasons. In both of these cases we want to be able to offer equal opportunities to all of our students, but no amount of money will turn one child into a choir.

- **Greater opportunities for high performing students, likely better experience for lower performing students.** In a larger class, it is more likely that students at the extremes will have peers who are performing at or near their own levels. For higher-performing students, this means that they can be paired with students at their own level (i.e. in reading groups) so that they can continue to push each other. Students who need extra help may be able to receive that help in small groups and not feel singled out.
- **Ability to better shape class dynamics.** In schools with multiple classrooms per grade, teachers and administrators will be able to use class configurations to improve the learning environment for all students. Sometimes it is great for students to be able to be in class with their best friends, and in other cases certain combinations of students can be disruptive and make it hard for both themselves and everyone else to focus on their learning.
- **Greater likelihood that students will find “their people.”** Greater opportunity for students to engage with peers academically at their level and different levels. In a larger class, students will have access to more peers who learn similarly to them, and differently from them. This means there are more options for similar-ability groupings as well as different-ability groupings. Both are important for instructional purposes but are difficult to achieve in very small class sizes.
- **Fewer part-time teachers.** Our current configuration requires us to employ many of our arts teachers on a part-time basis, and to split their jobs across multiple schools. This makes these jobs more difficult than they would be in larger schools that could support full-time employees, and makes it more difficult to retain teachers.
- **Classes meet minimum class size guidelines.** In addition to maximum class sizes set by the district and by state standards, our school district also sets a minimum class size for purposes of education quality. We are not currently meeting those minimums in all of our schools.
- **Sustainable nursing and counseling.** We want to have nurses and counselors available at all of our schools on a full-time basis, but this will likely be impossible over the long-term at very small schools. Vermont’s education quality standards call for us to have at least 1 nurse per 500 students and one counselor per 300 elementary school students. While there are some questions about whether these numbers are still optimal (especially for counselors), we are currently very, very far from them.

18. What will happen to the teachers at the schools that are closing? Which teachers will be let go?

We function as a single district, so while positions at specific schools would be eliminated, which actual teachers are no longer employed by the district would be determined by the seniority rules in the teacher’s contract.

Although the teachers’ contract ultimately determines how vacancies will be filled as defined by seniority and reduction in force language, advance planning can allow the district to be strategic

about vacancies to minimize the impact of reductions and maximize the ability for teachers to move around within the district.

19. How big will the class sizes be?

Class sizes will increase, but will stay well within the range at which we can provide a good education, and in some cases will increase from instances where the class size is actually too small from a quality perspective to one where it provides a better learning environment. A lot of the narrative around class size in public education is shaped by stories about very large classes in much larger districts. We are not in any danger of seeing these kinds of classes, and our classes are likely to actually benefit from being a little larger, particularly in those cases where they are currently below the district's target minimums.

The table below shows the expected class sizes in the first year of operation under each scenario as well as our projected enrollment for next year. Note that the current state class sizes are based on next year (2024-25) while the scenario projections are for the potential first year under a new configuration (2025-26). In some cases we expect to see very little change in average class size because combining schools will offset decreasing enrollment.

Current State (2024-25 school year - uses different class years than reconfiguration scenarios)

Location	K-3 Class Sizes	4-6 Class Sizes	% of Capacity Used
Berlin	16 avg	19 avg	55%
Calais	13 avg	21 avg	37%
Doty	15 avg	17 avg	42%
East Montpelier	20 avg	18 avg	47%
Rumney	15 avg	14 avg	42%

Operate 3 Elementary Schools

Location	K-3 Class Sizes	4-5 Class Sizes	% of Capacity Used
Berlin	15 avg (range: 13-15)	16 avg (range: 14-21)	46%
East Montpelier	16 avg (range: 15-22)	19 avg (range: 17-22)	58%

Middlesex	16.5 avg (range: 13-23)	21.5 avg (range: 20-23)	60%
-----------	-------------------------	-------------------------	-----

Operate 2 Elementary Schools and 1 Early Education Center

Location	K-3 Class Sizes	4-5 Class Sizes	% of Capacity Used
East Montpelier	16 avg (range: 16-24)	25 avg (4 classes of 25)	71%
Middlesex	16 avg (range: 12-18)	17 avg (range: 17-18)	71%

20. What will happen with multi-age classrooms?

We haven't made final decisions on multi-age classes, but we do know that in larger schools we will be able to be more intentional about using them. Multi-age classrooms can work very well when they are done thoughtfully and intentionally. In these cases, we can really make sure that the grades that are combined make sense together, and can provide a well-planned progression. They are less effective when a school needs to use them reactively to address fluctuations in enrollment, which can require us to use them in grade combinations that we might not have selected if the student numbers didn't dictate it. We are much more likely to see these kinds of fluctuations in enrollment in small schools (and we are seeing that now).

21. Have you considered bringing in other community organizations to use the buildings while continuing to operate them as schools as an alternative to closing the schools?

We are looking to meet two goals with the reconfiguration proposals: 1) reduce costs, and 2) improve quality. To offset the foregone cost savings from consolidation by partnering with a community organization (and presumably receiving rental income from the community partner), Doty and Calais would each have to bring in more than \$30,000 per month in rent to offset only the operations costs and the planned capital spending for these schools. This does not address any of the savings in teaching, administration, and support staff FTEs that we would also be unable to realize.

The small size of the student body in our smaller schools may not justify the costs associated with implementing and maintaining the comprehensive services that define a community school. Many community school programs benefit from economies of scale that aren't possible with a very small population. Establishing and maintaining partnerships with community organizations, service providers, and businesses can be resource-intensive. Our small schools may struggle to attract and sustain these partnerships due to its limited reach and influence.

If we continue to operate all 5 elementary schools we will also continue to struggle with the educational challenges presented by such small classes. We will continue to have unstable class configurations, class sizes below the district recommended minimums, students who cannot access the full spectrum of arts programming, etc.

22. What will these mean for kids socially?

There will certainly be a transition for students who are switching schools, though they will be switching with their peers so this will be less disruptive than for students who move between schools now and have to form all new peer groups.

This will also provide additional social opportunities for students who may now struggle to find “their people” – while our small schools work well for most of our students, there are some who have had a hard time finding close friends within very small cohorts. We also have classes in our smallest schools where gender ratios can get skewed in small classes.

Larger cohorts which can support multiple classrooms per grade will also help teachers and administration to shape the dynamics of individual classrooms. When class sizes are small enough that a group will only ever support one class, students who either have trouble being in class together are stuck together (often for multiple years), and students who may be disruptive to the rest of the class when placed together can be separated into different classrooms. Both of these improve classroom dynamics for all students, and the first be a significant benefit to individual students who are in conflict with their peers.

23. How will this affect higher and lower performing students?

A: With more students at a grade level, there are more opportunities to find peers for students to work with. For higher performing students, this means that they’re more likely to be able to be matched peers who will push them further (ie to have well-matched reading buddies), and for students who need more help they are more likely to be able to get that help in small groups than by being pulled out individually.

24. How will this affect programming in the arts?

We expect to be able to provide more arts offerings to our students, particularly those currently at our smallest schools. All students currently have art and music classes, but not all have access to band and choir: we would like to be able to offer these options, but both of these are group experiences, and we have schools where we don’t have enough student interest to run them. One student is not a choir (and we have had a case where a school had one student who wanted to do choir).

25. We talk about equity a lot in how we want to operate our schools. Is it equitable that we're talking about closing our two smaller schools in our district?

We started the process of looking at reconfiguration without thinking about which schools would be closed - the factors that we looked at (class sizes, increasing offerings, limiting part time positions, maintaining nursing and counseling, reducing cost) drove us to look at a 2 or 3 school model regardless of location. Which locations made sense to continue using were driven by the existing capacity at our schools.

The current configuration also creates some equity challenges. Our smallest schools are not able to offer everything that our larger ones can, and the small number of students makes it more likely that these schools will see sub-optimal class configurations and will be unable to access many of the other benefits that a slightly larger school will see.

While there is evidence that our students furthest removed from opportunity benefit from attending smaller schools, in all of the proposed configurations all of our schools remain small. We expect our students to continue to have the benefits of attending a small school in these scenarios, while also gaining the benefits of having enough scale to offer increased services, programming and greater stability.

26. Are there things that we do not offer now that you would like to?

We used to offer Spanish at all of our elementary schools, and that has slowly been cut back for budgetary reasons, with the last remaining program being cut this year. We would like to be able to offer a robust world language program to all students, but realistically won't be able to do it without realizing savings elsewhere in the budget. Consolidating schools can help give us the room to do that.

27. What will happen to school identity?

We will need to rebrand our district as a whole. We will create new identities for the merged schools – they will not simply be the old schools with additional students. We will need to have a larger sense of community and take the opportunity to dream together and rename schools and select new mascots so that all students feel that this is “their school.” We also expect to see a shifting of staff, so while the buildings will be the same buildings that existed as the town elementary schools, they will operate as new entities.