



School Closing Study

Richmond Ninth Grade Academy Closing and Relocating Monroe Avenue

With

Addendum for Closing James Building

October 22nd, 2024

Background

Richmond County Schools has fifteen schools currently serving 6,315 students. The district has seven elementary schools, four middle schools, one alternative school, one early college high school, a ninth-grade academy, and a traditional high school. The Richmond Ninth Grade Academy (NGA), located at 804 County Home Road, Hamlet, North Carolina 28345, was built in 2000 and currently serves 408 students. The school was originally named Richmond Primary School and was built for elementary students, K to 3rd grade. The school is built on twenty-five acres of land and was originally 80,914 square feet.

In 2008, the district decided to close Richmond Primary School (# 347) and re-open the Richmond Ninth Grade Academy (# 351). To accomplish this task, a football field, a field house, a baseball field, a softball field, and a 14,400 square foot gymnasium were constructed. Enrollment at the school its first year as the Ninth Grade Academy was 605 students. In addition, lockers were added to the school for the students. The school is currently in very good shape. During the fiscal year 2023-2024, the school was maintained at a price of \$42,415.84.

In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the federal government awarded \$38,000,000 to the Richmond County School system for the district to operate during a pandemic. Federal ESSER rules allowed for the school system to mitigate learning loss, feed children, and purchase cleaning supplies among other things. In addition, the grant allowed PSU's to use the money to build schools to promote social distancing. Richmond County Schools' leadership decided to embark on three building projects; a Mineral Springs classroom addition, a Fairview Heights gymnasium and a Richmond Senior High School auxiliary gym and classroom addition along with a renovation of the JROTC rifle range to create a weight room and two classrooms. The ESSER money dedicated to the expansion of Richmond Senior High School was \$8,500,000. The thought behind the high school expansion was to allow for social distancing in the immediate timeframe. However, the goal was to get our 9th grade students to the traditional high school.

The genesis of the idea to combine the two schools, was in large part developed due to two major factors: a decade long declining population which will allow for the school system to unite all 9th – 12th grade students under one roof and the need to begin the process of closing some of our older sites which are very costly to operate and maintain. At this time the total number of ninth grade students is 442, which is 163 less than the school started with in 2008. Additionally, Monroe Avenue, built in 1953, is seventy-one years old and is approaching the end of its service life.

This study is exploring the option of closing the Richmond Ninth Grade Academy as a school (# 351), moving all the school's students to Richmond Senior High School (# 348) and then moving Monroe Avenue (# 346) to the current Richmond Ninth Grade Academy site.



GEOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS

The Richmond Ninth Grade Academy staff and students will move from the Richmond County Ninth Grade Academy site in Hamlet, North Carolina, to Richmond Senior High School in Rockingham, North Carolina, a distance of 3.1 miles.

Monroe Avenue Elementary staff and students will move from the Monroe Avenue Elementary site in Hamlet, North Carolina to the Richmond County Ninth Grade Academy site in Hamlet, North Carolina, a distance of 2.4 miles.

Welfare of the students to be affected by the proposed closing and consolidation of Richmond County Ninth Grade Academy and Richmond Senior High School and the transfer of the Monroe Avenue students to the Ninth Grade Academy.

FACILITY CONDITIONS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IMPACTING CURRENT STUDENTS ATTENDING RICHMOND NINTH GRADE ACADEMY AND STUDENTS COMING FROM MONROE AVENUE

- * Plumbing fixtures are currently too low for some NGA students
- * Plumbing fixtures would have to be adjusted, and in some cases, re-installed for MOA students
- * Halls are currently too narrow
- * Large portion of student body having to shuttle to RSHS during the day
- * Communication is challenging for students attending both schools
- * Athletic fields at NGA are not being used for athletics
- * A Pre-K playground must be installed at NGA for MOA students
- * Playground must be installed for K-5 at NGA for MOA students
- * Maintenance estimated cost for moving NGA to RSHS - \$15,000



FACILITY CONDITIONS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IMPACTING CURRENT STUDENTS ATTENDING RICHMOND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

- * Construction at the school is limiting access for some traffic and walking patterns
- * Less crowding at the school due to lower total ADM
- * RSHS students do not know the NGA students that are being shuttled to their building
- * Some overcrowding due to small classroom dimensions

Welfare of the students to be affected by the moving of Monroe Avenue to the current Richmond County Ninth Grade Academy site

FACILITY CONDITIONS AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS IMPACTING CURRENT STUDENTS ATTENDING MONROE AVENUE ELEMENTARY

- * Building was constructed in 1953 and is approaching the end of its service life
- * Is in a persistently dangerous neighborhood
- * Very difficult to attract great staff due to age of building and location
- * School needs A \$2,000,000 roof
- * Maintenance costs for this site are high
- * Reduction of school (NGA) will allow the closing of the building to reduce costs in utilities
- * Longer travel time for parents in Hamlet to drop off and pick up students (2.4 miles)
- * Maintenance estimated cost to move MOA to NGA - \$20,000



ANTICIPATED INCREASE OR DECREASE IN SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

The district anticipates a slow but steady decline in enrollment based on the last fifteen years of data that is available. To that end, the study of possible school closures to reduce district operating costs is essential.

ADM Year	NGA	RSHS	Monroe Avenue
*2024	442	1334	366
2023	487	1361	335
2022	493	1278	367
2021	546	1296	344
2020	496	1257	350
2019	451	1340	398
2018	479	1349	388
2017	501	1393	413
2016	511	1378	398
2015	506	1410	441
2014	502	1424	445
2013	542	1433	399
2012	536	1333	360
2011	558	1329	316
2010	583	1385	381

Source: NC Average Daily Membership (ADM) from October PMR reports

*Numbers are drawn from 10-day count

POSSIBLE INCONVENIENCES OR HARDSHIPS TO STUDENTS AFFECTED BY SUCH CLOSING, CONSOLIDATION, AND MOVING

Monroe Avenue Elementary

- * Students will have a slightly longer bus ride to and from school.

Richmond Ninth Grade Academy

- * More difficulty in assimilating to high school
- * Possible overcrowding in some areas (particularly at lunch)

Richmond Senior High School

- * Possible overcrowding in some areas (particularly at lunch)

POTENTIAL EFFECT ON SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Richmond Ninth Grade Academy students will be fully immersed into the high school experience. Since the ninth-grade students will not have to be shuttled back and forth to



school, they will be on campus full-time allowing them to join all clubs, sports, organizations, or other groups.

Monroe Avenue students experience should be improved drastically. The building is almost 50 years newer and in a much safer area.

STAFFING AND CLASS SIZE

Monroe Avenue staffing and class size should not be altered.

We do not anticipate class sizes changing at the high school in core classes. There may be an increase in CTE classes. Staffing will be altered with a RSHS and NGA consolidation. We expect the following changes to staff to occur:

- 1 less principal
- 1 less bookkeeper
- 1/2 less assistant principal
- 1 less media teacher (NGA)
- 1 less ISS (NGA)
- 1 less nurse
- 1 less receptionist

*Important Note: These positions will be eliminated over time through natural staff attrition. No staff will lose their jobs as a result of the facility closing.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS OF CONTINUING TO OPERATE MONROE AVENUE ELEMENTARY

Estimated Expenditures for Needed Repairs for MOA		
Deferred Maintenance	Painting	\$ 60,000
Capital Renewal	Roof	\$2,000,000
Capital Improvement	Remodel Bathroom	\$ 75,000
Energy and Sustainability	Replace Boiler	\$ 80,000
Scheduled Maintenance	Replace Boiler/Chiller Pipes	\$ 110,000
	Total	\$2,325,000

Source: Projections from RCS Maintenance Department



Definitions

- Deferred Maintenance – Maintenance or repair that is past due.
- Capital Renewal – correct unacceptable conditions caused by aged building components which will exceed their useful life cycle within the next 10 years.
- Capital Improvement - Installation or upgrades to the facility systems and components improves or enhances the performance or functionality of the facility.
- Energy and Sustainability – Repairs or replacement of systems and equipment improve the energy and sustainability of the facility.
- Scheduled Maintenance – Major maintenance required to maintain effective operation.

Current Replacement Value			
Building	Square Footage	Current Replacement Value	Unit Rate per Square Foot
NGA	85,314	\$24,741,060	\$290
Monroe Avenue	63,575	\$18,436,750	\$290
District Total	-	-	\$290

Source of unit rate per square feet: Axias Financial Summary of Condition Assessment Findings prepared for Warren County Board of Education

Based on the amount of money necessary for maintenance at Monroe Avenue, the cost of a new roof to protect the building, and the declining attendance across all grade levels, the RCS administration looked to the 2024 Richmond County Facility study for viable options. Jim Watson with WSRR questioned in his facility study report, “To promote efficiency and cost savings should consideration be given to close one of the older schools and relocate to the 9th Grade Academy building once those students are relocated to the high school?” The benefits of doing this are many and includes his assertion that this option once implemented would remove from the footprint inventory, a building built in the 1950’s and replace it with one built in 2000.

In the table above the current replacement value for the Richmond Ninth Grade Academy is \$24,741,000. The current replacement value for Monroe Avenue would be \$18,436,750.

COST OF MOVING RICHMOND NINTH GRADE ACADEMY TO RICHMOND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Richmond County Schools will incur no building costs associated with a NGA move, except what is already being constructed at the high school gymnasium site. The costs associated with the move are limited to the amount of money it will take to move each classroom teacher’s materials, the weight equipment, classroom furniture, the storage of the lunch tables, as well as security devices, library resources, CTE materials and other items to be determined.



COST OF MOVING MONROE AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO RICHMOND NINTH GRADE ACADEMY

Richmond County Schools will incur a moderate amount of costs associated with a Monroe Avenue Elementary move to the existing NGA site. The identified costs include the amount of money it will take to move each classroom teacher's materials, classroom furniture, the lunch tables, security devices, library resources, smartboards and other items to be determined. In addition, it will be necessary to replace the front entrance sign as well as build a playground.

Other important factors

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE USES OF MONROE AVENUE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BY THE DISTRICT

It is essential that if Monroe Avenue Elementary School is relocated to the NGA site, that the current site be offered to the county commissioners, sold, or repurposed by the district. The cost for heating, cooling, maintaining electricity, insurance, basic maintenance, the persistently dangerous area geographically in which it is located and the necessity for replacing the roof at a cost of \$2,000,000, make the site a very undesirable property.

Potential use of the property include:

Richmond County Schools auxiliary services

- Maintenance
- Technology
- School Bus Garage

Office Space

Senior Facility

Community Spaces

Conclusion

The proposed closing of Richmond Ninth Grade Academy and the consolidation of those students with Richmond Senior High School, as well as the closing of Monroe Avenue's current physical site and the moving of those students to the NGA site would strengthen our school district in the following ways:

- * Would remove a 1950's structure from our facility footprint
- * Reduce operating costs for the district
- * Improve the safety and security of Monroe Avenue Students
- * Unify students, families, and community behind one high school
- * Provide a much newer facility for our elementary school students at Monroe Avenue

