WPS Space Usage Update

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March 3, 2025 — Presentation to School Committee

Space Usage Working Group:
Superintendent **Chris Chew**, Director of Facilities **Jeff Goodwin**, School Committee Chair **Valery Young**

Motivation

- Continuation of WPS Master Plan
  - Strategic District Improvement Plan 2.1, 2.2
  - SY24-25 Superintendent Goal #3
  - SY24-25 School Committee Goal #3
  - Follow-on from 2023 SMMA Facilities Assessment
- Preliminary work of Mass. School Building Authority / Robinson Project
- Space usage concerns raised during FY25 Budget/Override
  - “Enrollment is down, are we using our spaces efficiently?”
- Hasn’t been formally evaluated since an internal 2014 Utilization Report

Process

1 Evaluate Floor Plans

Reviewed the floor plans of each building with principal

Understand current usage of spaces

Initial conversations of what reconfiguration entails

2 Tour Building

Validate spaces visually with floor plan

Document photos for a catalog of each building

3 Summarize Data

Count of total rooms that could fit a section

Count how many are necessarily designated for Programs/Services/IAs

Usage => class sections ÷ available rooms

Assumptions/Definitions

Section: Can be thought of as a homeroom, ranges from 22-25 students

"Category A" Classroom: A room large enough for a section

- *Actual size varies widely from ~650 sq ft at Abbot/Robinson to ~975 sq ft at JAC*

Designated Classroom: A 'Category A' room that is required for programs and services based on the building layout

- *Ex. Nab/Abbot use a Cat A room for Art; Miller uses Cat A for MTSS because all small group spaces utilized for other (Speech, ELL, BCBA, Psych, Counselors)*

Alternative Use: A 'Category A' room being used in a variety of ways

- *Ex. Conference rooms, Calming/sensory room, copy rooms, open*

How are we using our PK-2 spaces?

91% Usage – [43 sections in 47 available "Category A"]

- Designated: Ex. 2 Preschool Rooms Each, Special Education Programs (SSS, REACH, Medically Fragile), 1 OT/PT
  - Depending on building, may include Specials (ex. Music, Art @ Nab)
- Alternative Uses: Ex. Sensory/Calming/Mindful Spaces, MTSS, Conference Room, Open

	Category A Classrooms in Floor Plan			*Current Utilization Percentage*		
	TOTAL "Category A"	– Designated "Category A"	**= Available "Category A"**	Current Gen Ed Sections	Current Alternative Uses	**Usage**
Miller PK-2	**29**	- 14	**= 15**	12	3	**80%**
Nab PK-2	**24**	- 9	**= 15**	15	0	**100%**
Rob PK-2	**27**	- 10	**= 17**	16	1	**94%**

How are we using our G3-5 spaces?

78% Usage – [46 sections in 59 available "Category A"]

- Designated: Ex. Special Education Programs (SSS, REACH, Pathways, SAIL)
  - Depending on building, may include Specials (ex. Library, Art @ Abbot)
- Alternative Uses: Ex. Sensory/Calming/Mindful Spaces, MTSS, Conference Room, Open

	Category A Classrooms in Floor Plan			*Current Utilization Percentage*		
	TOTAL "Category A"	– Designated "Category A"	**= Available "Category A"**	Current Gen Ed Sections	Current Alternative Uses	**Usage**
JAC G3-5	**27**	- 6	**= 21**	15	6	**71%**
Day G3-5	**25**	- 7	**= 18**	14	4	**78%**
Abbot G3-5	**26**	- 6	**= 20**	17	3	**85%**

How are we using our G6-12 spaces?

Blanchard Middle: 2 teams of 4 homeroom/advisories + 2 SSS rooms each per grade

- **Designated:** Health, Art, STRIDE, CLICKS & 4 World Languages
- Current Alternative Usage: 1 – Rm 45 as Conference Room

Stony Brook: 2 teams of 4 homeroom/advisories + 2 SSS rooms each per grade

- **Designated:** Health, Art & 3 World Languages* (4th WL is in a slightly smaller space)
- Current Alternative Usage/Open: 1 - B105

Westford Academy:

- **84** "Category A" spaces (79 are used for 5 of the 7 schedule blocks)

	TOTAL "Category A"	– Designated "Category A"	Used Most of the Day	**Usage**
Blanchard G6-8	**39**	- 8	38	**97%**
Stony Brook G6-8	**36**	- 5	34	**94%**
WA G9-12	**84**	—	79	**94%**

How does this compare to the 2014 Report?

Enrollment has decreased…

	2014 Report	*2025*
PK-2	818 (w/o PK)	877 (inc PK)
G3-5	1225	1013 *(-212)*
G6-8	1288	1087 *(-201)*
G9-12	1648	1507 *(-141)*

…but our usage has changed.

	2014 Report	*2025*
PK-2	62%	91%
G3-5	83%	77%
G6-8	89%	96%
G9-12	105%	94%

2014 Report Assumptions: Usage was calculated by finding 'Maximum Functional Capacity'

- **Assumed 12% of students receive Special Ed services compared to current 18.7%**
- **Designated 1 full-size OT/PT room & 1 half-size Speech/Language room per building**
- **Assumed Special Education space needs: 7 rooms district-wide [4 full-size rooms for Autism Spectrum Disorder (1/each grade level), plus 2 rooms for Language-based Disorders, and a WA Life Skills room]**

What has changed in ten years?

Our spaces have evolved to meet the needs of our students.

- Spaces required for Counselors, Interventionists (MTSS), English Language Learners, Psychologists
- Expansion of specialized Special Ed programs since 2014
  - Currently 15 “Classroom A” spaces districtwide for 8 REACH, 2 Medically Fragile, 1 SAIL, 1 Pathways, 1 Life Skills, 1 Alt Ed, 1 Therapeutic Student Center
  - FY26 → +1 REACH at Nab, +1 Medically Fragile at Day, +1 SAIL at G6-8
- Spaces for Student Centers at G6-12 to support students
- Early Education: Added 6 Pre-K rooms; instituted Full Day Kindergarten
- FY25 Students w/Disabilities: 18.7% *(vs 12% in 2014) – up 240+ students*
- FY25 English Language Learners: 3.5% *(vs 1% in 2014)*
- FY25 High Needs Students: 28% *(vs 16% in 2014)*

Can we close a school right now?

- While we do have some elementary “Category A” spaces currently being used in alternative ways, the openings do not match the sections needed within our current grade-level structure
  - *Ex. Day’s 14 sections do not fit into JAC/Abbot’s 9 “open” rooms*
- If remaining schools were reconfigured to be PK-5…
  - Would require facility investment to accommodate age range 5-11yo
  - No future flexibility - limited room for growth; risk of overcrowding
  - Significant impact on the current educational environments
  - Significant capital needs at remaining buildings
- Note that closing a school is a complicated and lengthy process
  - Once closed, a building is no longer “grandfathered” for building and safety codes
  - Possibility of refunding money if closed within ten years of any state reimbursement
  - Likely a disadvantage to compete for state reimbursement in following ten years

What would Reconfiguration look like?

Some schools could handle or with minimal work (Miller, Nab, Crisafulli).

- Robinson open-plan suites are no longer appropriate for G3-5
- Most significant adjustments: Abbot was built to be a High School and Day was built to be a Middle School
  - Modifications of facilities to accommodate age range 5-11y
    - Bathroom fixtures, playground equipment
- Would include natural redistricting of boundaries

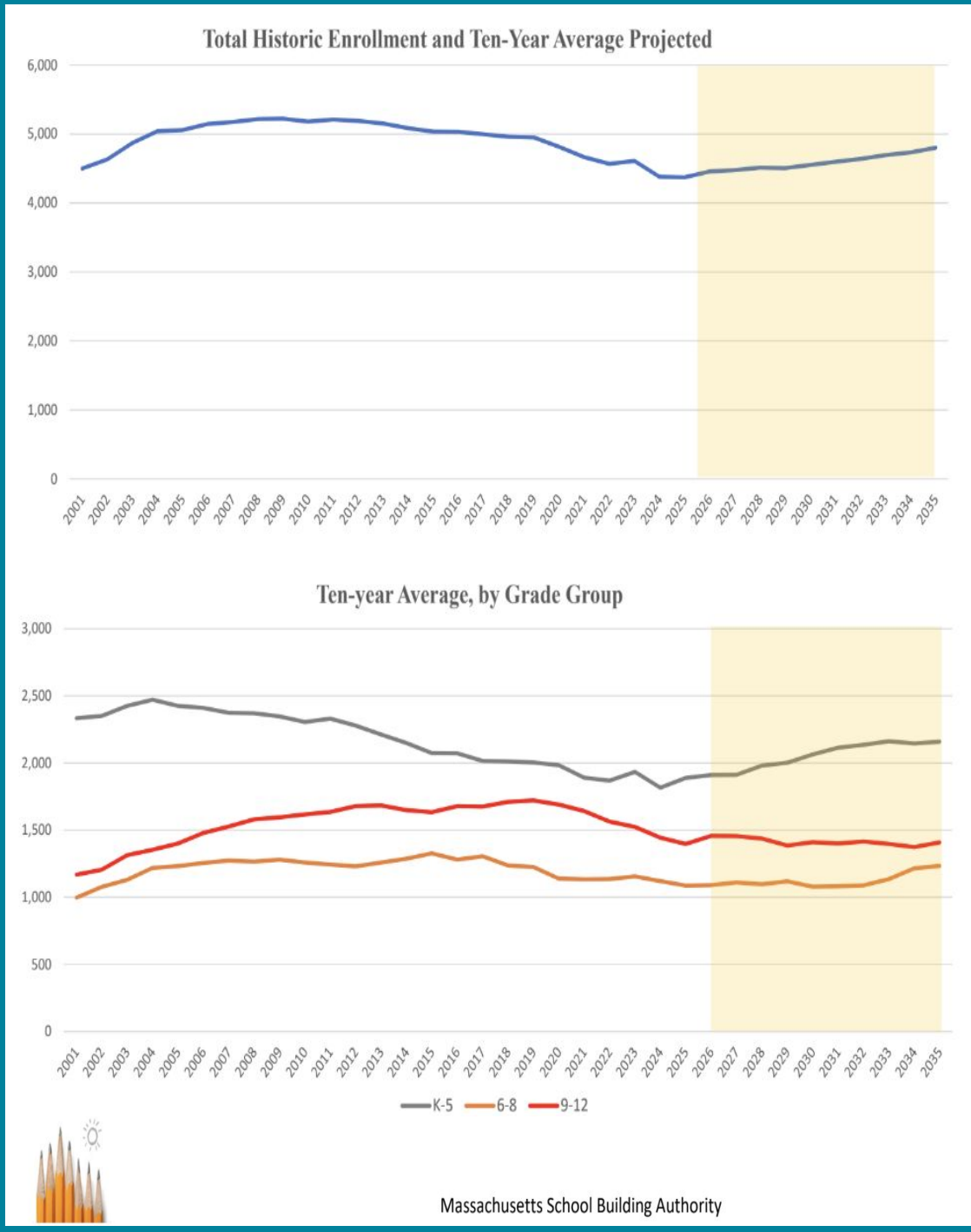
Further considerations to adapt a PK-2/3-5 school to PK-5:

- Number of sections per grade at each school
- Managing staff movements and licensures
- Redistributing library materials
- Space for band/strings
- Transportation impacts

Enrollment

MSBA's base enrollment projection indicates that
Westford's total enrollment declined in the past 10 years
but had a turn in 2024 when it started to increase and
is projected to increase through 2035.

Enrollment for grades K-5 followed a similar trajectory but are projected to stabilize near the end of the projection period. Middle/high grades had similar trend and projected to stabilize going forward, then increase after 2034.



Using current spaces to meet student needs...



A Category A classroom at Day used for Special Education



A Category A classroom at Abbot used for Special Education



At Robinson, interventionists use one Cat A classroom ‘pod’ within a large open plan suite shared with 3 class sections

...compared to those designed for small groups



English Language Learners space at Crisafulli school



Speech/Language room at Miller