

Orange Southwest School District Reconfiguration: Identifying Opportunities, Addressing Challenges, and Moving Forward Together.

At the May meeting, the OSSD Board asked a series of important questions; perhaps the most important one: *What challenges or opportunities are we seeking to address through a potential reconfiguration?* While I understand the intent of the question, I believe the framing is important. Asking what "problems" we are trying to solve can unintentionally suggest that something within our current system is broken or unacceptable. I do not believe that accurately reflects the current state of the Orange Southwest School District.

Our communities care deeply about their children and their schools. We are fortunate to employ teachers, support staff, and administrators who are dedicated to ensuring that all Orange Southwest students graduate with strong academic and essential life skills and are prepared to actively contribute to their communities. The Board has consistently demonstrated its commitment to achieving these outcomes while also recognizing the responsibility to be thoughtful stewards of the community's limited resources.

The combination of engaged communities, dedicated educators, supportive families, and responsible governance makes Orange Southwest a strong educational organization and a district where families choose to live, learn, and invest.

As the Board's chief executive officer, the Superintendent is responsible for advancing the Board's Ends while operating within its Executive Limitations. Together, these provide the framework for maintaining a high-performing and sustainable school system.

Part of that responsibility is to anticipate emerging needs, identify opportunities for improvement, and present potential solutions to the Board for consideration. This is the purpose of the current discussion around reconfiguration and other possible approaches. By proactively exploring options, the Board can determine the path that best aligns with its goals and values while ensuring the district is well positioned to meet the needs of students, staff, and the community in the future.

It is also important to recognize that this conversation is understandably emotional. Schools are deeply connected to the identity of our communities, and thoughtful people may hold differing views about any potential changes. There are individuals and groups on all sides of this discussion, each motivated by a genuine desire to serve students and communities well. For that reason, district leadership initiated this conversation in April 2026 to allow sufficient time for a thoughtful, collaborative, and productive process that includes input from students, families, staff, community members, and other stakeholders.

Additionally, no reconfiguration could occur before the 2027–2028 school year. Beginning this discussion well in advance provides the opportunity to carefully examine options, assess impacts, gather feedback, and ensure that any future decisions are informed by data, educational expertise, and community perspectives.

Ultimately, any decision regarding district reconfiguration rests solely with the OSSD Board. The Board—and only the Board—is authorized to determine whether a reconfiguration should occur and, if so, what form it should take.

With that context in mind, the following outlines areas that district leadership believes may be enhanced through a potential reconfiguration, as well as areas that would likely require careful planning and attention should the Board choose to pursue such a path.

Ensure Equitable Access to High-Quality Curriculum, Instruction, and Student Supports Across the District

The purpose of this section is not to suggest that current practices are failing students. Effective organizations routinely engage in reflection, seek feedback, and examine opportunities for growth, regardless of whether significant structural changes are being considered. This section highlights areas where district leadership sees opportunities to strengthen consistency, equity, and organizational capacity. Reconfiguration is one potential strategy among several that could help advance those goals, and this process provides an opportunity to thoughtfully consider the options available to the board.

1. Consistency of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Current State

The district currently operates three elementary schools with different instructional configurations. Depending on enrollment, staffing, and budget considerations, classrooms may be organized as single-grade, departmentalized elementary, or multi-age classrooms. These configurations can change from year to year as schools adjust to local needs and available resources.

While dedicated staff work hard to ensure positive outcomes for students regardless of structure, varying grade-level and program configurations require our staff to adapt their expertise across a broader range of student needs, instructional settings, and resource realities on an ever-changing basis while maintaining a consistent curriculum and instructional experience for all students.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could allow students to be intentionally grouped into more stable grade-level cohorts. This would create greater consistency in curriculum implementation, instructional practices, assessment systems, intervention supports, and enrichment opportunities.

Potential Outcomes

- More consistent implementation of the district curriculum across schools.
 - Increased collaboration among educators teaching the same grade levels.
 - Greater ability to provide targeted intervention and academic acceleration.
 - Improved continuity of learning experiences for students.
 - More equitable access to educational opportunities regardless of school attendance area.
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2. Equitable Access to Social-Emotional and Behavioral Supports

Current State

The district currently utilizes three distinct approaches to supporting students' social-emotional and behavioral needs across its elementary schools. While each school has developed systems that reflect local strengths and staffing, the effectiveness of these supports is often highly dependent on specific individuals and local capacity.

Recruiting and retaining highly trained behavioral and social-emotional support staff remains a significant challenge both locally and across Vermont. Because specialized staff is distributed across multiple campuses, the district's ability to build robust, sustainable support systems can be limited.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could allow the district to concentrate specialized expertise, develop more consistent research-based practices, and create support systems that are less dependent on individual staffing circumstances.

Potential Outcomes

- More equitable access to social-emotional and behavioral supports for all students.
- Greater consistency in student support practices across the district.
- Increased capacity to coordinate, integrate and collaborate with external support providers.
- Enhanced and more timely access to comprehensive coordinated community support.
- Improved sustainability of support systems despite staffing challenges.

- Increased capacity to proactively address student needs before they escalate.
 - Enhanced ability to recruit, retain, and support specialized staff.
 - District wide savings that impact our ability to add specialized staff and create a cohesive plan for students to become learners who can self regulate and access education.
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3. Expanding the District's Capacity to Serve Students with Intensive Needs

Current State

Like many districts across Vermont, Orange Southwest has experienced increasing reliance on specialized out-of-district placements for students whose Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams determine require services beyond what can currently be provided in district programs. At present, OSSD has 17 students in out-of-district placements.

While these placements provide important services, they are often costly and can result in students spending significant portions of their educational experience outside their home schools and communities. Students placed outside the district frequently face barriers to returning to less restrictive educational settings.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could create the scale and staffing capacity necessary to develop more specialized in-district programs capable of providing a less restrictive alternative to out-of-district placement. Such programs would focus on providing intensive academic, social-emotional, and behavioral supports while maintaining strong connections to students' home schools and peer groups.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased ability to educate students within their home district whenever appropriate.
 - Greater access to specialized supports closer to students' communities.
 - Improved opportunities for students to participate in general education settings.
 - Enhanced pathways for students to successfully transition back into their grade-level cohorts (including full and part time models).
 - Ensure access to AOE licensed educators.
 - Reduced reliance on costly out-of-district placements over time.
 - Improved educational and social outcomes for students requiring intensive support.
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4. Transition A Middle Level Model Within a High School To Creating a Comprehensive Developmentally Responsive Complete Middle School I Program

Current State

The district currently operates sixth grade within its elementary schools and serves grades seven and eight within the high school setting. While this structure has served the district for many years, it resembles a traditional junior high model more than a modern middle-level educational model. We have consistently heard the need for a whole child approach to middle school at parent-teacher conferences and that our current state doesn't meet the needs of all students and families.

Research on adolescent development suggests that students in the middle grades benefit from educational environments specifically designed to address their unique academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could create a dedicated middle-level program designed around the developmental needs of young adolescents. Such a model would emphasize relationship-building, interdisciplinary instruction, student belonging, and age-appropriate academic supports.

Potential Outcomes

- Stronger relationships between students and educators.
- Increased student engagement and sense of belonging.
- Improved attendance and reduced absenteeism.
- Reduced participation in risky behaviors.
- Enhanced support for adolescent mental health and well-being.
- Greater opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and team-based instruction.
- Stronger academic performance and improved preparation for high school success.

5. Building Sustainable and Equitable Staffing Models

Current State

The district currently shares a number of specialized staff members across multiple buildings in order to provide educational programming and services. While this approach has allowed the district to meet

student needs, it can create scheduling complexities, reduce the amount of direct service time available to students, and increase staff travel demands.

Additionally, some positions can be more difficult to recruit and retain when responsibilities require travel between multiple schools or split assignments across buildings.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could allow staff to be assigned primarily within a single building or program, reducing travel requirements and increasing opportunities for collaboration among colleagues serving similar student populations.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased direct instructional and student support time.
 - Reduced time spent traveling between campuses.
 - Greater consistency in service delivery.
 - Improved collaboration among educators and support staff.
 - Enhanced ability to recruit and retain qualified candidates.
 - More sustainable staffing models over the long term.
 - More equitable access to specialized services for students across the district.
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6. Strengthening Equity of Student Access and Educational Opportunity

Current State

While all schools work diligently to meet student needs, the availability of programs, services, and resources can vary by building size, staffing configurations, and student enrollment patterns.

As student populations and needs evolve, maintaining equitable access to educational opportunities across multiple campuses can become increasingly challenging.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could create greater consistency and increased offerings in access to services, specialized supports, enrichment opportunities, and educational resources, regardless of where students live within the district.

Potential Outcomes

- More equitable access to educational programs and services.
 - Increased consistency in student experiences across the district.
 - Improved resource allocation based on student needs.
 - Greater opportunities for collaboration among students and staff.
 - Enhanced ability to respond to changing enrollment and demographic trends.
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7. Supporting Multilingual Learners

Current State

The district has experienced growth in the number of multilingual learners (ML students) requiring specialized instructional and language-acquisition supports. Providing these services across multiple buildings can present challenges related to staffing, scheduling, and peer connections among students.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could allow multilingual learners to access more robust instructional services, specialized staff, and peer networks while maintaining meaningful participation in the broader school community.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased access to specialized language acquisition supports.
 - Greater opportunities for peer relationships among multilingual learners.
 - Enhanced collaboration among educators serving multilingual students.
 - Improved ability to recruit and support specialized staff.
 - Stronger academic and social outcomes for multilingual learners.
 - Increased capacity to respond to future enrollment growth.
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8. Expanding and Strengthening Early Childhood Programming

Current State

The district currently operates early childhood programming across multiple locations and within the constraints of available facilities, staffing, and licensing requirements. As enrollment patterns and community needs evolve, opportunities may exist to strengthen and expand these programs.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A consolidated early childhood program could provide greater flexibility in program design, staffing, scheduling, and service delivery while creating opportunities to explore expanded programming options in the future.

Potential Outcomes

- A more robust and comprehensive early childhood program.
- Increased consistency of services and experiences for children and families.
- Improved efficiency in meeting licensing and regulatory requirements.
- Greater opportunities for collaboration among early childhood educators.
- Potential future expansion of programming options, including full-day opportunities for three- and four-year-old students.
- Potential future exploration of transportation and after-school programming options for early learners.
- More equitable access to early childhood services across the district.
- Possible Partnerships to provide childcare for children after their school day.

9. Enrollment Stability and Program Viability

Current State

Enrollment fluctuations can have significant impacts on class configurations, staffing assignments, and program offerings. Smaller cohorts may limit the district's flexibility in designing programs and responding to changing student needs.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could create more stable student cohorts, allowing the district to plan more effectively and provide programming with greater consistency over time.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased stability in staffing and program delivery.
 - More predictable class and cohort configurations.
 - Greater flexibility in responding to enrollment changes.
 - Enhanced ability to sustain specialized programs and services.
 - Improved long-term planning and resource allocation.
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10. Expanded Opportunities for After-School Programming, Enrichment, and Student Support

Current State

Providing robust after-school programming across multiple campuses can be challenging due to staffing requirements, transportation logistics, and varying levels of student participation.

These factors can limit opportunities for enrichment activities, clubs, academic interventions, and tutoring programs.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured system could bring larger numbers of students together in a single location, creating greater opportunities to develop and sustain a broader range of after-school offerings.

Potential Outcomes

- Expanded access to clubs, enrichment programs, and extracurricular activities.
- Increased opportunities for academic intervention and tutoring.
- Greater student participation in after-school programming.
- More efficient use of staff and resources.
- Enhanced opportunities for students to build relationships and engage with peers.
- Stronger connections between academic learning and extracurricular experiences.

- Increased ability to develop comprehensive after-school programming that serves a wider range of student interests and needs.

11. Aligning Facilities with Long-Term Educational and Operational Needs

Current State

The district recently completed a facilities feasibility study to evaluate the condition and long-term viability of its school buildings. The study found that each campus remains functional and capable of serving students today. None of the district's facilities were characterized as unsafe, decrepit, or in danger of failure.

At the same time, the study identified varying levels of future investment needs across the district:

- The Randolph Union High School and Randolph Technical Career Center campus requires significant modernization, with many major building systems approaching or exceeding their expected useful life.
- The Brookfield Elementary School campus was found to be in somewhat better condition than the high school campus but faces similar challenges associated with aging building systems. Additionally, the building was constructed using a wood-frame truss system and does not have a building-wide fire suppression system.
- Braintree Elementary School was identified as being in generally good condition and capable of serving students well into the future, although modernization and facility improvements would enhance the educational environment.
- Randolph Elementary School, the district's newest facility, was identified as being in good condition. It was designed as a modern elementary school and provides substantial flexibility for educational programming.

The feasibility study further concluded that modernizing the major systems of the RUHS/RTCC campus to current standards would likely cost a substantial percentage of the cost of constructing a new facility, while still leaving students in a building originally designed to support educational models of the 1950s and 1960s.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured district structure would not eliminate the long-term capital improvement needs of the RUHS/RTCC campus. Those facility decisions will remain important regardless of how the district is organized.

However, reconfiguration could allow the district to utilize its facilities in a manner that better aligns building design with student needs and educational programming. For example, existing capital reserve

funds may provide opportunities to modify portions of the RUHS campus to support a dedicated middle-level program without requiring major new construction.

Given current legislative discussions regarding governance structures and the timelines associated with potential district mergers, it is reasonable to assume that any future merged district would initially inherit the educational configuration in place at the time of merger. As a result, a reconfigured middle school program would likely operate for several years before any future governance changes occurred.

In addition to the educational benefits described elsewhere in this report, relocating sixth-grade students to a dedicated middle-level environment could create the space and flexibility necessary to support other programmatic improvements at the elementary level.

Reconfiguration would also transition students from the Brookfield campus into more modern educational facilities that are better aligned with contemporary instructional practices and student support models.

Finally, operating fewer instructional campuses may allow the district to concentrate facility investments and modernization efforts rather than distributing resources across a larger number of buildings.

Potential Outcomes

- Better alignment between educational programming and facility design.
- Increased ability to modernize and improve fewer campuses rather than spreading resources across multiple sites.
- More efficient use of existing capital reserve resources.
- Enhanced flexibility to tailor facilities to the developmental needs of specific student populations.
- Improved access to modern learning environments for students.
- Greater capacity to prioritize future capital investments.
- Reduced duplication of facility-related expenditures across multiple campuses.

Operational Considerations

Current State

Like many districts throughout Vermont, OSSD has experienced challenges recruiting and retaining custodial and maintenance personnel. During portions of the past year, the district was unable to fully staff maintenance and custodial positions across all campuses and relied on contracted services to meet operational needs.

Maintaining multiple campuses requires staffing, supervision, equipment, and operational support across a larger physical footprint.

Opportunity for Enhancement

A reconfigured district could increase operational and maintenance staff density by concentrating personnel and resources across fewer instructional sites. This may allow maintenance and custodial teams to work more collaboratively and efficiently while reducing dependence on contracted services.

Potential Outcomes

- Increased operational efficiency.
- Faster response time for maintenance and janitorial requests
- Greater consistency in facility maintenance and upkeep.
- Improved supervision and coordination of maintenance activities.
- Enhanced ability to recruit and retain facilities staff.
- Reduced reliance on contracted custodial and maintenance services.
- More effective deployment of district operational resources.
- Increased capacity to maintain facilities at a high standard.

12. Long-Term Financial Sustainability and Stewardship of Public Resources

Current State

The Orange Southwest School District has consistently sought to balance two equally important responsibilities: providing all students with a high-quality education and the supports necessary for success, while serving as responsible stewards of the financial resources entrusted to the district by taxpayers and the communities we serve.

Like many districts across Vermont, OSSD is operating in an environment characterized by rising costs, changing enrollment patterns, workforce shortages, increasing student needs, aging facilities, and uncertainty regarding future state education funding systems. These realities do not indicate that the district is in crisis. They do, however, require district leadership and the Board to continually evaluate whether current structures remain the most effective and sustainable way to deliver educational services.

Recent budget cycles illustrate these challenges. During development of the 2025-2026 budget, administration presented a level-service budget that would have increased expenditures by more than 10 percent. The Board determined that level of increase was not supportable. The board ultimately selected \$1.1 million in reductions identified by administration. Those reductions included administrative restructuring, proportional allocation of nursing services across the district, reduction of a prekindergarten classroom resulting in larger class sizes, reductions in library staffing, elimination of a late bus, and other operational changes. The final budget represented a 6.3 percent expenditure increase; however, because of

declining Long-Term Weighted Average Daily Membership (LTWADM), the cost per LTWADM increased approximately 22 percent.

During development of the 2026-2027 budget, administration again sought to limit expenditure growth through approximately \$550,000 in administrative reductions, technology changes, and other operational efficiencies. These efforts limited expenditure growth to approximately 3.07 percent. Due in part to increased enrollment, cost per LTWADM declined by approximately 1.22 percent.

These budget cycles demonstrate several important realities:

- Significant reductions have already been made in administrative and operational areas.
- Opportunities for future reductions that do not directly affect students are increasingly limited.
- Enrollment trends have a significant impact on district financial metrics.
- Maintaining current programming and services becomes increasingly difficult when costs rise faster than enrollment and revenues.

As future budgets are developed, the Board will likely face some combination of the following options:

1. Continue increasing expenditures to maintain current organizational structures and services.
2. Reduce expenditures through budget reductions, recognizing that many of the most accessible reductions have already been implemented and future reductions may increasingly affect positions and services that directly support students.
3. Explore whether reconfiguration could provide opportunities to maintain or enhance educational services while creating greater operational efficiency.

None of these options are without challenges. Each requires balancing educational quality, community priorities, staffing considerations, and financial sustainability.

The district has also received many questions regarding the financial implications of reconfiguration, including:

- What would be the full cost of implementing a reconfiguration?
- What facility modifications would be required?
- How would transportation costs change?
- What staffing changes would occur?
- What administrative restructuring might be necessary?
- What impact could reconfiguration have on out-of-district placement costs?
- How much money, if any, would be saved and over what timeline?

These are important questions. At this stage, however, they cannot be answered with certainty because reconfiguration remains in the idea and exploration phase rather than the proposal phase.

Everything presented to date has been conceptual in nature. The earliest a reconfiguration of this scale could reasonably occur would be the 2027-2028 school year. Significant work would be required before any formal proposal could be developed, including educational planning, financial modeling, transportation analysis, staffing analysis, facility planning, and extensive stakeholder engagement.

It is also important to recognize that any reconfiguration involving the closure of a school is ultimately a Board decision. Under the Articles of Agreement, the Board has sole authority to determine whether a school should be closed and must follow the required public process, including public hearings, an advisory vote from the affected community, and approval by a two-thirds majority of the Board. Board Governance Policy 4.2 identifies school closure decisions as a Board responsibility, and Executive Limitation 2.6 specifically prohibits the Superintendent from closing any building as a public school.

As a result, district leadership can identify opportunities, provide information, and facilitate community discussion, but only the Board has the authority to determine whether reconfiguration should be pursued.

Opportunity for Enhancement

The underlying premise of reconfiguration is not simply to reduce costs. Rather, it is to explore whether the district can provide equal or enhanced educational opportunities for students while utilizing available resources more effectively and sustainably.

District leadership believes it is appropriate to consider whether a different organizational structure could:

- Improve educational opportunities for students.
- Increase consistency and equity of services.
- Better align staffing with student needs.
- Improve operational efficiency.
- Expand in-district programming and student supports.
- Create greater long-term financial sustainability.

While detailed financial modeling has not yet occurred, reconfiguration could create opportunities to reduce duplication and improve efficiency in areas such as staffing, student support services, facilities operations, maintenance, custodial services, educational programming, and administrative support.

One particularly significant opportunity may be the expansion of in-district programs designed to support students who currently require specialized out-of-district placements. If successful, staffing efficiencies created through reconfiguration could potentially be redirected toward these programs, allowing the district to serve more students within their home communities while reducing reliance on costly outside placements.

Staffing represents both the district's largest expenditure and its most important investment. At this stage, no staffing plan has been developed because no reconfiguration proposal has been developed. However, several factors warrant consideration:

- Reconfiguration may create opportunities to reduce duplication of services and improve staffing efficiencies.
- The district has experienced staffing shortages and vacancies in multiple positions over recent years.
- Some staffing adjustments could potentially occur through attrition, retirements, reassignment opportunities, and existing vacancies.

- Vermont continues to experience educator shortages across many regions and job categories, creating employment opportunities both within and beyond district boundaries.
- District leadership would work to minimize disruption and negative impacts on both students and employees regardless of the path chosen.

It is equally important to acknowledge that reconfiguration would involve costs and operational changes. Potential costs could include facility modifications, transportation adjustments, furniture and equipment relocation, technology and infrastructure changes, professional development, and transition planning.

Potential Outcomes

Should future analysis support the concept, reconfiguration could potentially create opportunities to:

- Better align educational programming with available resources.
- Improve long-term financial sustainability.
- Reduce duplication of staffing and operational expenditures.
- Increase staffing efficiencies and professional density.
- Expand in-district programming for students with specialized needs.
- Reduce reliance on costly out-of-district placements over time.
- Improve utilization of facilities and district resources.
- Increase the proportion of resources directed toward direct student services.
- Create greater flexibility in responding to future enrollment and funding changes.
- Maintain or enhance educational opportunities despite increasing financial pressures.

Whether these opportunities ultimately result in measurable savings, cost avoidance, or improved educational outcomes would require detailed analysis and community engagement.

Addressing the questions raised at the May Board Meeting

1. *Brookfield has approximately 100 students. Braintree has approximately 100 students. These are functioning schools serving intact communities. The proposal asks the families of those 200 students to accept extended daily bus rides for their youngest children, the closure of a school that is the primary community anchor in Brookfield, the fundamental repurposing of a school that the Braintree community has built a distinctive educational culture around over many years, and all of the uncertainty and disruption that comes with a reorganization of this magnitude.*

This question highlights one of the most significant considerations associated with any potential reconfiguration. Brookfield and Braintree are not failing schools. They are functioning schools staffed by dedicated educators and supported by communities that care deeply about their children and their schools. It is entirely reasonable for families and community members to ask whether the potential benefits of reconfiguration justify the disruption, uncertainty, and changes that would accompany it.

District leadership recognizes that reconfiguration would have impacts beyond educational programming and finances. For Brookfield, the school serves as an important community institution and gathering place. For Braintree, the school has developed a distinctive culture and educational identity that is valued by students, families, and staff. Reconfiguration would require careful consideration of what those communities might lose, not just what the district as a whole might gain.

At the same time, the purpose of the reconfiguration discussion is not to evaluate whether these schools are functioning today. Rather, it is to consider whether a different organizational structure could better position the district to address the opportunities and challenges identified throughout this report. Those include providing more consistent access to curriculum and instructional programming, strengthening social-emotional and behavioral supports, expanding in-district services for students with specialized needs, creating a dedicated middle-level program, increasing staffing capacity and professional density, improving equity of access to services and resources, better utilizing facilities, and supporting the long-term financial sustainability of the district.

Ultimately, this is a question of tradeoffs. Reconfiguration has the potential to create educational, operational, and financial benefits, but those benefits must be weighed against the impacts on students, families, staff, and communities. Determining whether those tradeoffs are justified is not an administrative decision; it is a decision for the Board, informed by community input, data, and the values of the district.

That is one of the primary reasons this conversation was initiated well in advance of any potential implementation. With no reconfiguration possible before the 2027-2028 school year, the Board has the opportunity to carefully consider both the benefits and the impacts, engage with stakeholders, and determine whether the opportunities identified in this report are significant enough to warrant moving from an idea to a formal proposal.

2. *A teacher at the April meeting made the point that the mixed-age model at Braintree, where older students mentor younger ones and read to each other, is genuinely valuable and would be lost (1:08:41). A Braintree fourth grader said the same thing directly and movingly (1:10:02). How has the proposal accounted for what is lost, not just what is gained? Is there a version of this proposal that preserves some of what makes these schools distinctively valuable while still addressing the district's legitimate concerns?*

The teacher and student who spoke at the April meeting highlighted one of the strengths often associated with smaller schools and multi-age environments: opportunities for older students to mentor younger students, develop leadership skills, and build relationships across grade levels. Those experiences are real and valuable, and they should be acknowledged as part of any discussion regarding reconfiguration.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that peer mentoring, leadership opportunities, and cross-age relationships are not solely products of a particular building configuration. These experiences can be intentionally designed and supported within a variety of educational settings. In fact, one of the questions educators would need to consider as part of any reconfiguration planning process is how to preserve and strengthen those opportunities that communities value most.

If the Board were to pursue reconfiguration, district leadership and educators would need to work collaboratively to identify the unique strengths of existing programs and determine how those strengths could be incorporated into a new structure. This could include intentional peer mentoring programs, cross-grade learning opportunities, leadership experiences for older students, and partnerships between schools and grade levels.

More broadly, this question reflects an important consideration throughout the reconfiguration discussion. The goal is not to suggest that current schools lack value. Each of our schools has strengths, traditions, and characteristics that contribute positively to students' experiences. The question for the Board is whether the educational, equity, student support, staffing, facilities, and financial opportunities that may be created through reconfiguration outweigh what could be lost and, if so, how the district can intentionally preserve the most valuable elements of our current programs as part of any future transition.

- 3. Brookfield sits at the northern edge of this district, geographically closer in many ways to Williamstown than to Randolph or Braintree. Before the board proceeds on the assumption that Brookfield's future lies entirely within OSSD, should any consideration be given to whether Brookfield students might be better served by alignment with the supervisory union to the north? What would that process look like? If we are genuinely open to all options for Brookfield's future, that should be one of them.*

This is a reasonable question and one that should be acknowledged as part of any discussion regarding Brookfield's future. If the Board is considering significant changes to the role of the Brookfield campus, it is understandable to ask whether alternatives outside of Orange Southwest should also be considered.

At present, however, there appear to be significant practical and legislative obstacles to such an option. Recent legislative action put a moratorium on governance changes independently during the current restructuring process. As a result, it is unclear whether a transition of Brookfield to another supervisory district would be legally available even if there were local interest in exploring it.

Additionally, if such a process were available, Brookfield would likely become part of a substantially larger governance structure. Under the current regional groupings being discussed at the state level, Brookfield's student and town populations would represent a very small percentage of the overall enrollment and town population of the resulting district. While representation structures would ultimately be determined through a future governance process, it is reasonable to conclude that Brookfield's influence within a much larger district could be considerably less than it is within Orange Southwest today.

More importantly, the question before the Board is not simply one of governance. The challenges and opportunities identified throughout this report, including equitable access to curriculum, student supports, staffing capacity, specialized programming, facilities utilization, and long-term financial sustainability, would still need to be addressed regardless of the governance structure in which Brookfield participates.

For that reason, district leadership's focus has been on identifying whether there are opportunities to better serve students within the existing Orange Southwest School District structure. If, at some point, changes in state law or governance options create additional alternatives for Brookfield, those options could

certainly be evaluated on their own merits. At the present time, however, reconfiguration within OSSD appears to be the option most directly within the Board's authority and control.

- 4. Board member Rachel Fish raised at the April meeting a fundamental question about the educational and ethical premise of this proposal. She stated directly that segregating students into alternative programs is ableist, that it represents segregation of disabled students from non-disabled students, and that the research supports more inclusive services rather than more restrictive ones (2:23:52). She indicated this is her area of professional expertise. Should the board formally commission an independent review of the proposed alternative program model from a special education law and inclusive education research perspective before proceeding further?*

This question raises two separate but important issues: whether the concept being discussed is educationally sound and whether the Board should commission an independent review at this stage of the process.

First, it is important to recognize that federal and state special education law require students to be educated in the least restrictive environment appropriate to their needs. The intent of the in-district alternative programming concept described in this report is not to create permanent or separate educational tracks for students with disabilities. Rather, the concept is based on creating an additional layer of intensive, individualized support within the district's continuum of services, offering a less restrictive in-district option for students whose needs might otherwise require an out-of-district placement. The program would provide targeted academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports while maintaining opportunities for participation with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, as determined by each student's IEP team.

One of the challenges identified throughout this report is OSSD's increasing reliance on out-of-district placements for students whose needs cannot currently be met within district programs. Students placed outside the district are often educated in settings that are significantly more restrictive than their home schools and, in many cases, have limited opportunities to reintegrate with their peers and may be educated by individuals who are not licensed by the AOE. District leadership believes there may be value in exploring whether some of those students could be better served through programs located within their home district and, when possible, within their home school.

A key distinction is that an in-district program located within a school building creates opportunities for flexible participation in general education settings. Students may be able to continue participating in academic classes, specials, extracurricular activities, lunch, recess, and other aspects of school life while receiving targeted supports. The goal would be to maximize inclusion and facilitate a return to full participation in general education settings as quickly and successfully as possible.

The Vermont Agency of Education has also identified the limited availability of in-district programming options as a contributing factor in many districts' reliance on out-of-district placements. One potential benefit of developing additional in-district capacity is the ability to serve students closer to home and in less restrictive settings than might otherwise be available.

With respect to the question of an independent review, it is important to recognize that no specific alternative program model has been proposed. At this stage, the report identifies an area of need and a potential opportunity for enhancement rather than a fully developed program design.

It is also important to consider this question through the lens of the Board's Policy Governance model. Under that model, the Board's role is to establish the outcomes it expects the district to achieve, establish limitations within which the Superintendent must operate, and make those decisions specifically reserved to the Board through policy, statute, or the Articles of Agreement. The operation of the district, including program design, staffing structures, instructional models, and the implementation of student support services, is delegated to the Superintendent.

The question currently before the Board is not whether to approve a specific alternative program model. No such model exists today. Nor is the Board being asked to approve the operational details of how student services would be delivered in a reconfigured district. Those decisions would fall within the Superintendent's responsibility and would be developed, if necessary, through a collaborative process involving district educators, special educators, administrators, families, and outside experts as appropriate.

The decision that would ultimately be before the Board is whether the educational, operational, facilities, and financial opportunities identified throughout this report justify pursuing a reconfiguration that may include the closure of a school building. That authority is explicitly reserved to the Board through the Articles of Agreement and Board policy.

Should the Board determine that reconfiguration is a direction it wishes to pursue, administration would then be responsible for developing implementation plans that comply with all applicable federal and state laws, including special education requirements related to the least restrictive environment. As with any significant initiative, district leadership would utilize the expertise of district staff and seek outside expertise when necessary to ensure students are appropriately served.

For that reason, the question before the Board at this stage is less about evaluating a specific alternative program model and more about determining whether the district should continue exploring a reconfiguration concept designed to address the educational and operational needs identified throughout this report.

5. *The financial case for this proposal rests on the alternative programs successfully reducing out-of-district placements. The educational case, as articulated by board member Fish, suggests that the research supports moving toward more inclusive services rather than more restrictive ones. These two positions are in direct tension. How does the board reconcile the financial argument for alternative programs with the educational argument against increased restrictiveness? Is there a risk that creating a more restrictive environment generates institutional pressure to fill it in ways that undermine both the educational and financial goals of the proposal?*

This question assumes that the district's current options are either fully inclusive services within a student's home school or placement in a district-operated alternative program. In reality, the report

identifies a different challenge: OSSD's increasing reliance on out-of-district placements for students whose needs cannot currently be met within existing district programming.

As discussed in the report, the concept being explored is not the creation of permanent alternative educational settings. Rather, it is the creation of in-district supports designed to help students remain connected to their home district, their peers, and general education opportunities while receiving the additional services they need. The intent would be to provide support in the least restrictive environment appropriate for the student, with the goal of increasing participation in general education settings whenever possible.

From that perspective, the educational and financial considerations identified in the report are not necessarily in conflict. The educational objective is to expand the district's capacity to serve students within OSSD and create pathways toward greater participation in general education settings. The potential financial benefit would come from reducing reliance on costly out-of-district placements when student needs can be appropriately met within the district.

The report also acknowledges that no specific program model has been developed. As a result, concerns regarding program design, student placement criteria, and safeguards against inappropriate placement would need to be addressed during any future planning process. Any program developed by the district would be required to comply with federal and state special education laws, including requirements related to the least restrictive environment and individualized decision-making by IEP teams.

Ultimately, the question before the Board is not whether to approve a specific alternative program model. The question is whether the district should continue exploring opportunities to expand its ability to serve students within OSSD, strengthen student supports, and reduce reliance on out-of-district placements while maintaining its commitment to inclusive educational practices.

6. Who makes placement decisions for the alternative programs, and are those decision-makers independent of the budget pressure to fill the programs and achieve the cost avoidance that justifies the proposal financially?

Placement decisions for students receiving special education services are made by a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team in accordance with federal and state special education law. The IEP Team includes the student's parent or guardian, educators, special education personnel, and other individuals with relevant knowledge or expertise regarding the student's needs.

By law, placement decisions must be based on the individual needs of the student and the requirement that services be provided in the least restrictive environment appropriate to those needs. Neither the district nor an individual administrator may unilaterally place a student into a program for financial reasons.

The concern raised in the question, that a district-operated program could create pressure to fill available seats in order to achieve anticipated cost savings, is understandable. However, the legal safeguards built into the special education process are specifically designed to prevent placement decisions from being driven by financial considerations. Placement recommendations are made through the IEP process and must be supported by the student's identified educational needs, evaluation data, and the services required for the student to receive a free and appropriate public education.

It is also important to remember that the concept described in the report is not predicated on filling a program to a predetermined capacity. Rather, it is based on creating additional in-district options so that when an IEP Team determines a student requires services beyond those currently available, the district may have the capacity to provide those services closer to home and, potentially, in a less restrictive setting than an out-of-district placement.

Ultimately, if the district were to develop such programs in the future, student participation would continue to be determined through the legally required IEP process, not through budget targets or enrollment goals. Success of the alternative programs would actually be judged by their ability to have students successfully return to the classroom.

7. Should the board require regular reporting on how many students are in each program, for how long, what their re-integration outcomes are, and whether out-of-district placements have actually decreased as a result?

The Board certainly has the authority to establish the outcomes and monitoring expectations it wishes to see through its Policy Governance framework.

Under Policy Governance, the Board's role is not to manage the day-to-day operation of district programs. Rather, the Board establishes the results it expects the district to achieve through its Ends Policies and monitors progress toward those outcomes. If the Board believes information regarding student participation, length of placement, reintegration outcomes, or changes in out-of-district placements is important to determining whether district programs are achieving their intended purpose, it could establish expectations for monitoring and reporting in those areas.

In fact, if the district were to develop additional in-district programming designed to reduce reliance on out-of-district placements, it would be reasonable for the Board to expect evidence regarding the effectiveness of those programs. Measures such as student outcomes, successful reintegration into less restrictive settings, changes in out-of-district placement rates, and overall program effectiveness could provide valuable information regarding whether the district is achieving the educational goals that justified the investment.

At the same time, the specific design of monitoring systems, data collection processes, and program operations would remain an administrative responsibility. The Board's role would be to determine what results it expects to see and to evaluate whether those results are being achieved.

8. What are the legal protections and due process rights for families whose children are being considered for placement but would not prefer the alternative program? Do families have access to an independent advocate?

Families whose children are being considered for special education programming, including any in-district alternative program, retain all rights and protections afforded under state and federal law, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Vermont special education regulations.

Placement decisions are made by the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team and are based on the student's individual educational needs and the requirement that services be provided in the least restrictive environment appropriate for the student. Families are full and active members of the IEP Team and participate in all decisions regarding eligibility, services, and placement.

Under these protections, families have procedural safeguards that include, among other rights, the right to:

- Receive prior written notice of proposed changes in identification, evaluation, or placement
- Provide consent or refuse consent where applicable
- Request mediation
- Request a due process hearing if there is disagreement with a proposed decision
- Access independent educational evaluations under certain conditions

In addition, families have access to independent advocacy and support resources. In Vermont, this includes state-level parent and family support organizations that provide guidance, training, and assistance in understanding special education rights and navigating the IEP process.

These protections apply regardless of the specific program model being considered and ensure that no placement decision is made unilaterally by the district without full procedural safeguards and family participation.

- 9. What triggers a formal board review if the programs consistently run near capacity or if out-of-district placements do not decrease as projected? Who decides whether outcomes reflect the programs working as intended?*

As described earlier, under the principles of Policy Governance the Board delegates operational authority to the Superintendent. The Board does not manage or evaluate individual programs. Rather, the Board establishes the outcomes it expects the district to achieve through its Ends Policies and monitors the Superintendent's compliance with those Ends and the Executive Limitations.

As a result, there would not necessarily be a specific programmatic trigger that automatically results in a formal Board review of an individual alternative program. Questions such as program design, staffing, capacity, student participation, and operational adjustments fall within the Superintendent's area of responsibility.

However, if the Board believes that measures such as out-of-district placement rates, student reintegration outcomes, or the effectiveness of specialized student supports are important indicators of district success, it has the ability to incorporate those expectations into its Ends Policies or monitoring framework. The Board would then receive evidence demonstrating whether the district is achieving those desired outcomes.

Under Policy Governance, the Superintendent is responsible for determining how programs are structured and adjusted to achieve the Board's goals. The Board's role is not to decide whether a particular program is operating correctly, but rather to determine whether the district as a whole is achieving the results the Board has established.

If monitoring data demonstrated that desired outcomes were not being achieved, the Board could hold the Superintendent accountable for those results through its established monitoring process. The Board would not typically direct changes to a specific program; rather, it would expect the Superintendent to make whatever operational adjustments are necessary to achieve the outcomes established by the Board.

Ultimately, the Board governs through the outcomes it expects to see, while the Superintendent is responsible for the programs, practices, and operational decisions necessary to achieve those outcomes.

10. We mentioned at the April meeting that the Bethel district is piloting a similar model (59:18). Anne suggested inviting someone from Bethel to speak to the board. Is that scheduled?

At the April meeting, one of the action items was for Superintendent Clark to contact Superintendent Kinnarney regarding lessons learned from the implementation of Bethel's alternative programming, including any unintended consequences or challenges that emerged during implementation.

Superintendent Clark completed that action item and reported back to the Board at its May meeting regarding those conversations and the information that was gathered.

At this time, a presentation to the Board by representatives from Bethel has not been scheduled. Should the Board determine that it would be helpful to hear directly from educators or administrators involved in the development and operation of similar programs, the Board could request that such a presentation be arranged as part of its ongoing consideration of these issues.

11. This proposal sends all district PreK and Kindergarten students from Randolph, Brookfield, and Braintree to Braintree. What is the actual, realistic bus ride time for a Kindergartner traveling from Randolph to Braintree? From Brookfield to Braintree? A parent at the April meeting confirmed that the current bus pickup in parts of Brookfield is already 6:30 am and that almost nobody takes it because it is too early (1:11:10). If routes are extended to reach Braintree, what does that pickup time become?

The district currently operates its own transportation system and has the ability to design school start times, end times, and bus routing configurations. Those factors do provide meaningful flexibility in how transportation services are structured under any reconfiguration scenario.

At the same time, the specific questions raised—particularly regarding actual ride times for PreK and Kindergarten students traveling from Randolph or Brookfield to Braintree, as well as the resulting pickup and drop-off times—are valid and important. Those details cannot be accurately determined at this stage because no transportation modeling has been completed for a reconfigured system.

Transportation routing is a highly complex process that depends on multiple variables, including student distribution, stop density, road networks, fleet capacity, start and end times for each school, and allowable ride time thresholds for young students. Any accurate estimate of ride times or pickup schedules would require detailed route simulation and operational planning.

The concern raised regarding early pickup times is also noted. As was shared during the April meeting, some current routes in portions of the district already involve early pickup times, and participation in

those routes has been limited as a result. Any reconfiguration would need to carefully consider the impact of longer routes on student participation, family schedules, and age-appropriate transportation practices, particularly for younger learners.

Should the Board choose to explore reconfiguration further, transportation planning would be a required component of that work. That analysis would need to include route modeling, start and end time scenarios, fleet utilization, and consideration of age-appropriate travel times for PreK and Kindergarten students.

Ultimately, while the district has the operational flexibility to design transportation systems, the specific impacts on ride times and schedules cannot be responsibly estimated until a detailed transportation study is completed as part of any formal proposal development process.

12. At what point does the length of a bus ride become developmentally inappropriate for a five year old? Should we consult early childhood development specialists on that specific question?

Research in early childhood development and transportation practice does consider the impact of extended bus ride times on young children, particularly five-year-old students in Kindergarten. Factors such as total time on the bus, time of day, length of the school day, and overall daily routine can all influence student readiness, behavior, and engagement in learning.

At this stage, the proposal does not include a transportation model, so no determination has been made regarding what specific ride times would look like or how they would compare to generally accepted developmental guidance. As a result, it is not yet possible to evaluate whether any potential transportation plan would meet those standards.

If the Board chooses to continue exploring reconfiguration, it would be appropriate for transportation planning to include consultation with individuals who have expertise in early childhood development, student wellness, and school transportation design. That input would be important in establishing parameters for what constitutes developmentally appropriate transportation for the district's youngest learners.

It is also important to distinguish between governance and implementation. The Board would not be responsible for setting specific bus ride time limits or designing transportation routes. However, the Board could reasonably expect that any plan brought forward for consideration would adhere to developmentally appropriate standards and reflect best practices for young children.

Ultimately, the question of what is developmentally appropriate is one that should be informed by research, professional expertise, and practical operational constraints, and it would need to be fully addressed as part of any formal planning process before implementation decisions were made.

13. The superintendent suggested at the April meeting that the board could set an executive limitation on maximum bus ride time and model routes around that (45:39). That conversation should happen before any vote. What is the maximum ride time the board believes is appropriate for a five year old, and can the district demonstrate that Braintree is reachable within that limit from all points in the district?

This question is appropriately directed to the Board, as it relates to whether the Board wishes to establish an Executive Limitation regarding maximum allowable bus ride times for students.

At the April meeting, the Superintendent noted that the Board has the authority under its Policy Governance model to establish parameters through Executive Limitations, including potential expectations related to student transportation. The intent of that discussion was to highlight that if the Board believes maximum ride times for five-year-old students are an important consideration, it could define that expectation in policy terms and require that any proposed configuration be designed within those constraints.

At this time, however, the Board has not established a maximum bus ride time for Kindergarten students. As a result, there is no existing standard against which any proposed routing scenario can be evaluated.

If the Board were to consider establishing such a limitation, that decision would need to be made prior to, or as part of, any formal evaluation of reconfiguration scenarios. Once defined, district administration would be responsible for modeling transportation routes and determining whether and how schools, including Braintree, could be accessed within those parameters.

It is also important to recognize that determining feasibility would require detailed transportation analysis, including route modeling across all geographic areas of the district, fleet capacity review, start and end time scenarios, and consideration of age-appropriate transportation standards.

In summary, the question of what maximum ride time is appropriate is a policy question for the Board. The question of whether any configuration can meet that standard is an operational and analytical question for district administration that would be addressed only after such parameters are established.

14. A family with a Kindergartner going to Braintree and a second grader going to RES will have children on two different buses running two different routes to two different schools. Do those buses arrive home at the same time, or is a parent waiting for two separate arrivals at potentially very different times?

At this stage, there is no finalized transportation model, so it is not possible to state whether buses serving different schools would arrive home at the same time or at different times. The answer to that question would depend on how routes are ultimately designed, the sequencing of school start and end times, fleet capacity, geographic distribution of students, and the need to efficiently serve multiple campuses.

In practice, when districts operate multiple schools with separate grade configurations, there is variability in arrival times across routes. In some cases, staggered arrivals may occur due to routing efficiency and school schedules. In other cases, transportation systems can be designed to reduce or minimize those differences where operationally feasible. Both outcomes are possible, but neither can be assumed without detailed route planning.

If the Board were to move forward with further exploration of reconfiguration, transportation design would need to explicitly consider family logistics, particularly for households with children attending different schools. That analysis would include evaluating route alignment, start and end time coordination across buildings, and the feasibility of minimizing disparate arrival times where possible.

Ultimately, this is not a question that can be answered in the abstract. It is a design question that would need to be addressed through detailed transportation modeling as part of any formal implementation planning process.

15. If PreK students cannot be bused, what is the realistic enrollment in the three PreK classrooms proposed for Braintree? We cannot assume the same people who plan to use Brookfield or Randolph preK will be willing to travel to Braintree. Does that campus reach the scale needed for its educational rationale, including professional density, collaborative expertise, and a world class early childhood campus, to actually function? Put simply, do we actually anticipate Brookfield and Randolph PreK families driving to Braintree every day or is the projected kindergarten population alone enough to justify the consolidation?

Vermont does have a documented shortage of high-quality PreK opportunities, and within that context, a centralized PreK model has the potential to strengthen program quality, expand access to specialized early childhood expertise, and offer more consistent services for families across the district.

For that reason, district leadership anticipates that a centralized program in Braintree would likely remain attractive to many families, particularly given the potential for enhanced programming, improved staffing depth, and more robust early childhood offerings than may be possible in a more distributed model.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that enrollment patterns would ultimately depend on multiple factors, including transportation logistics, commute times, family schedules, and individual preferences.

As a result, while it is reasonable to expect that a well-designed centralized PreK program could maintain strong enrollment, and potentially strengthen participation in some areas, actual enrollment levels would need to be confirmed through implementation planning, transportation analysis, and family engagement.

The intent of the proposal is to create a PreK structure that is not only more efficient in terms of staffing and programming, but also more consistent and robust in its educational delivery. Whether that translates into equal or increased enrollment compared to the current distributed model is an important assumption that would need to be tested as part of any formal planning process.

16. How many families in this district have children in multiple grade bands who would face split school situations under this proposal? Is this worth taking some kind of census or counting? What is the realistic daily experience for those families, particularly those with a PreK child who cannot be bused and an older child who can?

At this time, the district does not have a precise count of how many households would have children split across multiple schools under the proposed scenarios. That information could be developed through a detailed student-level analysis of current enrollment patterns and household groupings. If the Board determines that this level of specificity is important to its decision-making, a targeted data analysis or family impact review could certainly be undertaken as part of a more formal planning process.

It is also important to note that the actual number of affected families would depend on how any reconfiguration is ultimately operationalized, including grade configurations, building assignment.

For families who would have children in different buildings, the daily experience would be shaped primarily by transportation logistics and school schedules. In some cases, families could experience staggered drop-off and pick-up times across different schools. In other cases, coordinated start and end times and route planning could reduce overlap. The specific impact on families cannot be fully described without a finalized transportation and scheduling model.

What can be said at this stage is that the question of family impact is an important consideration in any reconfiguration discussion. If the Board chooses to move forward with further exploration, understanding how many families would be affected and what their daily experience would look like would be an appropriate and necessary component of implementation planning.

Ultimately, this is one of several areas where the proposal is currently conceptual, and where the real-world implications would need to be carefully modeled before any final decisions are made.

17. The superintendent stated at the April meeting that the district increased out-of-district education costs by \$800,000 in the budget we just passed, representing the cost of placements for students not on one of our campuses (51:35). The proposal's financial case appears to rest on the argument that in-district alternative programs could avoid that cost by keeping students in district. Is that a correct understanding of the financial argument, and is that the primary financial justification for this proposal?

The increase in out-of-district placement costs, including the approximately \$800,000 referenced during the April meeting, is one of several significant financial pressures facing the district. These costs reflect the fact that a number of students currently require specialized educational placements that cannot be met within existing in-district programming capacity.

The report does identify the expansion of in-district supports and alternative programming as one potential strategy that could reduce reliance on out-of-district placements over time. In that sense, there is a connection between strengthening internal capacity and the potential to avoid or reduce future external placement costs. However, it would not be accurate to characterize this as the sole or primary financial justification for the proposal.

The financial concept outlined in the report is broader and includes the potential to improve overall resource alignment across staffing, facilities, and programming by reducing duplication across multiple campuses and increasing professional density. Out-of-district placement costs are one important component of the district's overall expenditure profile, but they are not the only factor driving consideration of reconfiguration.

It is also important to note that any reduction in out-of-district placements would depend on individual student needs, IEP team determinations, and the successful development of appropriate in-district programming. As such, any financial impact in this area would be gradual, variable, and dependent on multiple educational factors rather than a fixed or guaranteed cost avoidance amount.

18. If so, are we sure that in-district alternative programs of this design actually reduce out-of-district placements rather than running alongside them? Is there a scenario where a student's needs exceed what the in-house alternative program can provide and an out-of-district

placement is still required? We acknowledged at the April meeting that alternative programs have a documented tendency to fill up without releasing students (2:29:07). If the programs fill with students who would not otherwise have gone out of district, or if out-of-district placements continue alongside the new programs, there is no financial benefit at all. What prevents that outcome, and what happens to the financial case if it occurs?

It is accurate to say that there is no automatic or guaranteed reduction in out-of-district placements simply as a result of creating in-district alternative programming. Individual student placement decisions are made by IEP Teams based on student needs, and there will always be students whose needs may exceed what can appropriately be provided within any district-operated program. In those cases, out-of-district placements would continue to be required.

It is also possible that, if not carefully designed and governed, in-district programs could serve students who would not otherwise have required out-of-district placement, thereby increasing overall system capacity without proportionally reducing external placements. In that scenario, the anticipated cost avoidance would be reduced or eliminated.

The concern raised at the April meeting regarding programs tending to “fill up without releasing students” reflects a known implementation risk in special education program design. This is precisely why program structure, entry and exit criteria, and ongoing oversight are critical components of any future development work.

If the Board were to pursue further exploration of reconfiguration, the extent to which in-district programming actually reduces out-of-district placements would depend on several factors, including:

- Clear criteria for program entry and exit established through the IEP process
- Ongoing review of student placement appropriateness
- Availability of less restrictive in-district options for students to transition into general education settings
- Monitoring of placement trends over time, rather than enrollment in isolation

Without these structures, it is possible that in-district programs would operate alongside existing out-of-district placements rather than replacing them, limiting or eliminating any anticipated financial impact.

For that reason, the budget section of the report does not assume guaranteed savings, but rather identifies potential cost avoidance as contingent on program design, implementation fidelity, and student-specific educational decisions made through the IEP process.

Ultimately, the financial case is not based on certainty of placement reduction, but on the possibility that strengthening in-district capacity could change placement patterns over time in a way that better aligns educational need with more cost-effective service delivery. Whether that outcome is realized would depend on design choices that have not yet been made.

19. Has this financial analysis been reviewed by an independent party, or does it come entirely from district administration? Would an independent review give the community greater confidence in the numbers before any vote is taken?

At this stage, the financial analysis and conceptual modeling presented in the report have been developed by district administration. No independent third-party review or external validation has been conducted on the reconfiguration concept or its associated financial assumptions.

This is consistent with the current status of the work, which remains in the idea and exploration phase rather than a fully developed proposal with finalized cost modeling.

Whether such a review is necessary or appropriate at this stage is a determination for the Board, based on how it wishes to proceed with further exploration of the concept and the level of external validation it considers appropriate before moving from an idea to a formal proposal.

The district's role at this point has been to provide the best available internal analysis based on current enrollment, staffing, facilities, and financial data to support initial discussion and identify key areas that would require deeper study if the Board chooses to move forward.

20. *Has any modeling been done of the property value effect of closing Brookfield and what it means for Brookfield's contribution to the grand list and district tax revenue over time? Is there a scenario in which property value decline and reduced tax revenue offset a meaningful portion of the projected cost avoidance?*

To date, there is no comprehensive modeling specific to Orange Southwest that projects the impact of a potential Brookfield school closure on property values or long-term grand list contributions. That type of analysis would be complex and would depend on a wide range of factors, many of which are difficult to isolate or predict with confidence.

Based on experience in other Vermont districts that have undergone school closures, there has not been a consistent or demonstrable decline in property values attributable to the closure of a school facility. In several cases, property values in affected communities have remained stable or increased following closure, although it is important to note that many variables influence housing markets and it is not possible to attribute those changes directly to school configuration decisions.

It is also important to distinguish between local property values and the structure of Vermont's education funding system. Vermont operates under a statewide education funding formula in which local grand list values do not directly determine local education tax rates in isolation. While assessed property values are one component of the broader funding formula, changes in a single municipality's valuation do not translate directly into proportional changes in local tax rates in the way that is sometimes assumed.

As a result, while property value trends are an important community consideration, there is not a direct one-to-one relationship between a school closure and a reduction in district-wide education tax rates or revenue capacity. Any variance between assessed values and actual market conditions would continue to be addressed through the statewide equalization and funding mechanisms rather than through local school configuration alone.

At this time, there is no evidence within the district's analysis to suggest that potential changes in property values would offset or materially negate the projected financial considerations associated with

reconfiguration. However, a more formal economic impact analysis would be required to fully model long-term effects if the Board wished to explore this question in greater depth.

21. *The superintendent indicated at the April meeting that if out-of-district placement costs remain at current levels, he will face cutting another \$550,000 and finding 28 more students in next year's budget (52:33). Can the board be presented with a clear picture of what the district looks like financially if this proposal does not move forward? What specific cuts are anticipated, and what is the realistic budget trajectory? The community deserves to understand the consequences of inaction as well as the case for the proposal.*

It is important to first acknowledge that long-range budget projections, particularly those extending 12 to 24 months or more into the future, carry a significant degree of uncertainty. Changes in enrollment, state funding formulas, special education needs, staffing availability, inflation, and policy decisions at the state level all have a substantial impact on the final budget outcome. For that reason, any projection for the 2027-2028 fiscal year should be understood as directional rather than precise.

That said, recent budget cycles provide a reasonable basis for understanding the general trajectory if the current organizational structure remains unchanged.

As outlined in the budget section of this report, the district has already addressed a substantial portion of its most accessible reductions over the past two budget cycles, including administrative restructuring, staffing adjustments, and operational efficiencies. The 2025-2026 budget required significant reductions to bring a projected double-digit increase down to a level ultimately approved by the Board. The 2026-2027 budget included additional administrative reductions and operational changes, resulting in a more modest expenditure increase.

Taken together, these trends suggest that future budget development under the current structure is likely to present fewer “non-student-impacting” reduction opportunities. As a result, any further pressure from increases in out-of-district placements, special education needs, staffing costs, or inflationary factors is more likely to be addressed through reductions that increasingly affect direct student-facing services.

In that context, the scenario described by the Superintendent at the April meeting should be understood as illustrative of the type of pressure the district may continue to face rather than a precise forecast. If out-of-district placement costs remain elevated, the district would likely need to identify additional reductions or revenue increases of a similar magnitude, though the specific combination of actions would depend on conditions at that time.

At this stage, it is possible to describe the general direction of the budget trajectory with reasonable confidence, even if precise dollar amounts and staffing implications cannot be definitively identified. That direction suggests increasing constraint in future budget cycles under the current structure, with fewer available options for absorbing cost increases without impacting core educational programming.

For that reason, the budget section of the report frames reconfiguration as one potential strategy to change the underlying cost structure of the district, rather than relying solely on incremental annual adjustments within an increasingly constrained system.

22. *Has any financial modeling been done of the full costs of this proposal, including renovation at Braintree, increased transportation, administrative restructuring, and transition costs, set against the projected cost avoidance from reduced out-of-district placements? What is the realistic timeline to any net benefit, and what assumptions does that model rest on? In short, how much money will we actually save, and when?*

This is a central and appropriate question, and it is addressed in conceptual form within the budget section of the report.

At this stage, however, a full financial model that quantifies total implementation costs, ongoing operational changes, and projected cost avoidance over time has not yet been developed. The proposal remains in the idea and exploration phase, and a complete cost-benefit model would only be possible if the Board were to direct that the concept move into a formal design and feasibility study phase.

The budget section identifies the major categories of both potential costs and potential financial impacts that would need to be included in any comprehensive model. These include, but are not limited to, facility modifications (including potential renovations at Braintree and reconfiguration of existing spaces), transportation redesign and potential increases in routing complexity, administrative restructuring, staffing realignment, transition and implementation costs, and changes in program delivery models.

On the offset side, the report identifies potential areas of cost avoidance, most notably reductions in out-of-district placements, improved staffing efficiency through increased professional density, and potential reductions in duplicated services across multiple campuses. However, these are explicitly contingent outcomes rather than guaranteed savings, as they depend on student needs, IEP determinations, program design, and implementation fidelity.

Because neither the cost side nor the savings side has been fully modeled, it is not possible at this time to provide a reliable figure for net savings or a definitive timeline for when any financial benefit might be realized. Any attempt to assign a specific dollar amount or payback period at this stage would require assumptions that have not yet been tested through detailed operational analysis.

What can be said with confidence is that the report does not assume immediate or guaranteed savings. Instead, it identifies a set of potential financial impacts that would need to be rigorously modeled as part of any next phase of work, should the Board choose to advance the concept beyond its current exploratory stage.

In short, the answer to “how much will we save and when” is that it cannot yet be determined, because the variables that would determine both cost and savings have not been fully defined. The budget section outlines the structure of what would need to be modeled, not a finalized financial forecast.

23. *Have we made any outreach to the Brookfield selectboard and planning commission to discuss what closure of the school might mean for the town? The Brookfield building's future is not purely an educational question. It has implications for town planning, community resources, property values, and municipal finances that those bodies have a legitimate interest in. If that conversation has not yet happened, the board should commit to initiating it so that Brookfield's*

elected and appointed community leaders have a genuine seat at this table. Should this also happen with Braintree since the building's use is fundamentally changing?

At this time, there has not been formal outreach or structured engagement with the Brookfield Selectboard or Planning Commission regarding the potential implications of school closure.

This is consistent with the current status of the work, which remains in the idea and exploration phase. At this stage, the district has been focused on identifying potential educational, operational, facilities, and financial considerations at a conceptual level rather than initiating formal municipal-level planning discussions.

However, the question correctly identifies an important next-step consideration. If the Board were to decide to move forward with further exploration of reconfiguration, engagement with municipal governance bodies would be a necessary and appropriate component of that process. That would include Brookfield's Selectboard and Planning Commission, as well as other local stakeholders whose responsibilities intersect with land use, municipal planning, and community development.

At this stage, no commitments have been made regarding timing or structure of those conversations because no decision has been made by the Board to advance the concept beyond exploration. Should the Board choose to do so, initiating formal dialogue with affected municipalities would be an expected and important step in moving from conceptual discussion to structured planning.

24. The proposal states that the Brookfield building would be turned over to the community. A parent at the April meeting made the point that this simply shifts the cost of the building from the school budget to the town budget (1:01:26). What does that transfer mean legally and financially? Has the town of Brookfield been formally consulted about whether it wants or can afford to take on that responsibility?

Under the Articles of Agreement and applicable Vermont law, if the Board were to close the Brookfield Elementary School for educational purposes, the district would be required to offer the property to the Town of Brookfield for \$1. This is a statutory process that governs the disposition of school property following closure.

If the Town chose to accept the property, it would assume ownership and, with it, the ongoing responsibilities associated with the building. Those responsibilities would typically include operations, maintenance, insurance, capital upkeep, and any future use or redevelopment costs. In that sense, the transfer does not eliminate costs; rather, it shifts responsibility for those costs from the school district to the municipality or another designated entity.

If the Town declined to accept the property, the responsibility for determining the next steps would remain with the school district, consistent with legal requirements for disposition of public assets.

At this time, there has been no formal consultation with the Town of Brookfield regarding its interest in or capacity to assume ownership of the building under such a scenario. This is consistent with the current stage of the work, which remains in the conceptual exploration phase rather than a formal implementation process.

If the Board were to move forward with further consideration of reconfiguration, engagement with the Town of Brookfield would be an expected and necessary step. That discussion would appropriately include not only the legal mechanics of property transfer, but also the financial and operational implications for the municipality, including long-term maintenance obligations and potential reuse considerations.

It is also important to note that the proposal does not assume or require that the Town accept the building. The potential disposition of the property is one of several downstream considerations that would need to be addressed only if the Board were to determine that school closure is warranted.

25. If the building's structural condition is serious enough to at least influence the decision to close it as a school, is it actually in good enough condition to serve meaningful community purposes? Or are we telling Brookfield residents their building will become a lasting community asset when the same structural concerns that make it unsuitable as a school may make it unsuitable for other uses as well?

The facilities analysis presented in the report does not characterize the Brookfield building as unsafe or unusable. Rather, it identifies a distinction between the building's current condition, its long-term suitability as a modern educational facility, and the specific requirements of 21st-century instructional programming and code compliance expectations.

In that context, the question of whether a building is appropriate for continued use as a school is not always identical to the question of whether it can serve other community purposes. School facilities are subject to specific regulatory, programmatic, and safety requirements, including instructional design needs, accessibility standards, fire suppression considerations, and evolving educational specifications that may not apply in the same way to other types of community use.

That said, it is also important to be clear that any future community use of the building would require careful evaluation. Structural condition, life-cycle of major systems, compliance requirements, and the level of investment required for repurposing would all need to be assessed before any assumption could be made about suitability for alternative uses. It would not be appropriate to assume that a building deemed no longer optimal for its current educational purpose is automatically ready for other uses without modification or investment.

The report's reference to potential community use is therefore not a conclusion that the building is already well-suited for a specific reuse, but rather an acknowledgment that disposition options may exist beyond continued operation as a school. Determining what is feasible would require separate analysis involving engineering review, municipal planning input, and evaluation of intended future use.

Ultimately, the question of whether the building can serve as a meaningful long-term community asset is not yet answered and would depend on the nature of the intended use, the condition of the facility at the time of transfer, and the level of investment any future owner or operator is willing and able to make.

26. *Do we yet know what Act 72 might ultimately require of this district, specifically around supervisory union structures, funding formulas, and consolidation requirements? Is there a realistic possibility that structural investments made under this proposal could be superseded by state-mandated changes within a few years, resulting in two rounds of significant disruption in a short time frame?*

In short, given the unresolved nature of Act 72, is now the right moment to commit to this level of structural change? What is the case for moving forward before the state's intentions are clear?

This question raises an important timing and policy uncertainty consideration that is appropriately part of the Board's deliberation.

With respect to Act 73, the district does not yet have final clarity on the specific requirements that may ultimately be adopted regarding supervisory union structures, funding formulas, or consolidation expectations. As with many state-level education policy initiatives in Vermont, the details of implementation, timelines, and final statutory requirements remain subject to legislative and administrative development.

What is known at this time is that under Act 955, OSSD is required in good faith to engage in exploratory conversations regarding potential voluntary merger or restructuring options, as outlined in the Superintendent's June report. That obligation is procedural in nature and does not itself determine the outcome of any future structural arrangement.

The question of whether state policy may evolve in a way that would later require additional structural change is a legitimate consideration. It is possible that future legislative action could introduce requirements that overlap with or alter assumptions underlying any locally initiated reconfiguration effort. In that scenario, there is a risk that a district could experience multiple periods of structural transition within a relatively short timeframe.

At the same time, there is currently no definitive indication of the final form or timing of any such changes under Act 73. As a result, the district is operating in an environment of policy uncertainty, where decisions must balance current operational and educational needs with potential future mandates that are not yet fully defined.

Ultimately, the question of whether to proceed with exploration of local reconfiguration prior to full clarity on state-level restructuring is not one that can be answered with certainty based on technical factors alone. It is a matter of Board judgment regarding timing, risk tolerance, and the extent to which local action may either anticipate, align with, or be affected by future state-level decisions.

27. *The possibility of a regional high school combining RUHS with neighboring districts was raised at the April meeting (48:52). Should the board be making structural decisions about elementary education before the high school question is resolved? Does it make sense to address one before the other?*

This question raises an important sequencing and structural alignment issue that is appropriately within the Board's purview to consider.

The potential for regionalization of the high school through a structure involving RUHS and neighboring districts, as referenced in the April meeting, represents a separate but potentially related layer of organizational design. At this time, however, no formal proposal for such a regional high school structure has been developed or brought forward for Board action.

Because of that, decisions regarding elementary and middle-level configuration are not technically dependent on the existence of a regional high school model. The district currently operates as a standalone governance structure, and any decisions regarding grade configuration, facility use, or program delivery must be made within that existing framework unless and until a different governance structure is formally established.

It is also accurate to note that if a future merger or regionalization were to occur, governance authority would shift to a newly constituted board, and that new governing body would retain authority over subsequent structural decisions within that new organizational context. In that scenario, certain decisions made today could be revisited or modified by a future regional board, depending on the terms of any merger agreement and state requirements.

However, given that no such structure currently exists, the district is operating under the governance responsibilities and obligations of the existing OSSD Board. From that perspective, the Board is responsible for ensuring that the current organizational structure is educationally sound and financially sustainable under present conditions, while also remaining aware of potential future changes in the broader governance landscape.

Ultimately, whether to proceed with elementary and middle-level reconfiguration prior to resolution of broader regional high school discussions is a matter of sequencing judgment. It involves balancing the need to address current operational and educational pressures with the recognition that future governance changes could alter the long-term structural context in which those decisions sit.

28. The long-term success of any restructuring depends on community trust and buy-in. If Brookfield and Braintree come to feel that this district has eliminated or fundamentally transformed their schools while continuing to ask for their tax dollars, what is the board's assessment of the effect on budget approval in those towns? A restructuring that avoids costs on paper but produces repeated failed budgets and prolonged community conflict does not actually improve the district's financial position. Has the full political risk been considered.

As Superintendent, I can speak to operational, educational, and financial implications to the extent that they can be reasonably projected. However, I cannot reliably forecast how any specific reconfiguration would influence future budget votes or long-term community support in individual towns. Those outcomes are shaped by a wide range of factors, many of which are outside the scope of administrative modeling.

What can be stated is that major organizational change can influence community perceptions of the district, and those perceptions may, in turn, affect future budget dynamics. That is a real consideration in

any restructuring discussion, but it is not one that can be quantified with precision or reduced to a single predictive outcome.

The role of the administration is to provide the Board with as clear a picture as possible of potential educational impacts, operational changes, and financial scenarios associated with the proposal. The role of the Board is to weigh those considerations alongside its responsibility for representing the communities of the district and determining what level of change and associated risk is acceptable in pursuit of its educational and financial goals.

For that reason, while this report identifies community trust and long-term stability as relevant factors, the assessment of how those factors should influence the decision ultimately rests with the Board.

29. What happens to staff currently employed at Brookfield and Braintree under this proposal? Which positions are eliminated, which are reassigned, and what commitments is the district prepared to make to those employees?

At this stage, no staffing plan has been developed because the proposal remains in the idea and exploration phase. As a result, it is not currently possible to identify specific positions that would be eliminated, reassigned, or newly created under a reconfiguration scenario.

What can be stated is that any staffing impacts would be governed by applicable collective bargaining agreements, licensure requirements, and district hiring and assignment practices. In any scenario of this type, the district would first seek to minimize disruption to staff through natural attrition, retirement, reassignment within the district, and placement into comparable vacancies where appropriate and feasible.

It is also reasonable to anticipate that a reconfiguration of facilities and grade structures would result in a redistribution of roles across buildings, rather than an immediate one-to-one elimination of positions. Some positions may change location or responsibility, some may be consolidated, and some new roles could emerge depending on how programs and services are ultimately structured. However, those determinations cannot be made until a detailed implementation plan is developed.

With respect to commitments to employees, the district's approach in any transition would be to comply with all contractual obligations and to prioritize continuity of employment to the extent possible while still aligning staffing with the educational model adopted by the Board. Support for affected staff would also typically include reassignment processes, internal posting opportunities, and transition planning consistent with past district practice.

In short, while it is not yet possible to specify which positions would be eliminated or reassigned, the intent in any implementation scenario would be to manage staffing impacts through a combination of reassignment, attrition, and internal placement opportunities, with direct layoffs minimized where feasible.