Medford Public Schools

Dr. Suzanne B. Galusi, Superintendent

Space Utilization Task Force Update & Request for Scope Approval

After a comprehensive analysis of building facilities, space utilization, and historical enrollment trends, the Space Utilization/Grade Level Configuration Task Force determined that Andrews Middle School cannot accommodate two full grade spans (such as a combined 7th and 8th-grade model). Projected enrollment for the combined grades would result in a total enrollment of substantially over 600 students at the Andrews Middle School, exceeding the building's physical capacity and requiring extensive space renovations.

Further analysis of the educational and operational impacts of switching to a 5-6/7-8 model did not yield compelling evidence that the potential benefits of the model, though plentiful, would outweigh its challenges. However, the Task Force nonetheless wishes to emphasize the urgency of addressing underlying concerns about the current model, particularly in regards to meaningful disparities that currently exist between McGlynn and Andrews Middle School.

Community survey results and Task Force deliberations have affirmed that equity between middle schools, including balanced demographics and equal access to specialized programming, remains a top priority for caregivers, educators, and the broader community. To achieve meaningful equity while addressing space constraints, the Task Force requests School Committee approval to expand its focus to a comprehensive review of middle school teaching and educational models across both McGlynn and Andrews Middle Schools.

<u>Key Findings & Challenges</u>

1. Facility & Enrollment Constraints at Andrews Middle School

- Historical data and cohort progression indicate consistent districtwide grade sizes of approximately300 plus students, with a min of 280 students and a max of 415 students in each of the two grades over the past 26 years. Concentrating two full grade cohorts at Andrews yields a projected student population of 660 students in 7th & 8th grade in SY 28/29 if you follow the cohorts. Additionally, the projections completed as part of the MSBA Enrollments studies for the High School Project indicate that starting in 2031, the total for 7th and 8th grade will remain significantly above 700 students for the foreseeable future.
- Looking at the as-built drawings for the Andrews School, the room layouts and occupant loads were designed for a total capacity of 600 students. There are 26 general education classrooms, and this number can increase slightly depending on the number of students in a room, for example, under the CBA classes can be up to 25 (plus 2) students, which means that, if necessary, 700 students would need to fit in the existing classrooms.
- Architectural data from HMFH and internal district walkthroughs revealed that housing 600+ students at Andrews would require repurposing nine non-classroom spaces (including Specialist

spaces- like Tech and Art, teacher planning spaces, and specialized offices) and physically constructing two additional classrooms within the footprint.
- Concentrating this population in Andrews would create severe operational pressures on cafeteria capacity/lunch scheduling, Specials scheduling, bussing, and space for specialized Special Education and English Learner (EL) programming.

2. Impact of Current and Proposed Educational Models on Students
   - Research findings are mixed about the positive and negative impacts of different educational models on middle school students. The strongest consensus is around the value of strong Tier 1 core instruction at all levels, and the instability of student outcomes associated with transition years. The former is model-independent; the latter would be exacerbated under a 5-6/7-8 model.
   - Task Force members spoke with school and district administrators in Attleboro, Braintree, Chelsea, Falmouth, Pittsfield, Shrewsbury, Stoneham, Tewksbury, and Westfield to understand the advantages and challenges of a 5-6 / 7-8 middle school model, as well as strategies for maximizing opportunities and mitigating risk.
     - Benefits of the proposed model could include: reduction of population-based inequities; shared resources; ability to restructure team teaching and social-emotional instruction to fit developmental needs; increased coherence within individual grades; increased focus on grade-specific skills and behaviors; increased access to clubs, enrichment, and content-specific learning for younger students; opportunities for elementary licensed teachers to deepen/focus their teaching in particular subjects; elimination of the middle school lottery
     - Challenges of the proposed model could include: more frequent transitions; lack of consistency and continuity across grade levels, limited opportunities for long-term culture- and relationship-building within the school; behavioral challenges and lack of mentorship/leadership opportunities for older students; isolation of younger students from role model peers; tension between elementary and middle school curricula and approaches for teaching and learning
   - Ultimately, the Task Force concluded that potential benefits of the proposed model did not sufficiently outweigh the combination of operational and educational concerns, but that the current fifth grade and middle school models could be modified to incorporate some of the educational advantages of the proposed model.

3. Community Focus on Educational Equity
   - Community feedback and survey responses consistently emphasized that any structural changes must prioritize equity across all district middle school students.
   - The Task Force fully vetted these responses, recognizing that long-term community trust depends on eliminating programmatic disparities between McGlynn and Andrews, providing equitable access to electives, academic supports, specialized programming, and reviewing entry lottery assignment processes.
   - Although admittedly out of scope, the Task Force also considered the impact of a 5-6/7-8 model on projected elementary populations across the district. The analysis of enrollment trends, special education needs, and elementary school building designs indicated that such a shift, particularly, would mitigate the short-term overcrowding issues at the Roberts and the Brooks,

but without additional redistricting would likely widen disparities district-wide, including underenrollment or an increased concentration of high-needs populations at the Missituk and McGlynn Elementary.

Recommended Path Forward & Next Steps

To address these findings effectively, the Task Force recommends pivoting from a purely facility-driven grade-reconfiguration approach to a broader, instructionally centered review:

1. Review of Middle School Teaching & Educational Models:
    - Conduct a full review of current educational models at both McGlynn and Andrews to determine what instructional frameworks best serve middle-grade learners.
    - Examine alternative teaching structures (e.g., team-teaching, content specialization, interdisciplinary block scheduling, Tier 1 core instructional supports, and specialized program integration) used in other Massachusetts districts.
    - The Task Force will synthesize findings and present a final recommended path forward to the School Committee in April 2027.
2. Review of Redistricting:
    - The Task Force understands that redistricting is the purview of the School Committee, and while redistricting elementary school lines may balance student numbers between buildings, redistricting alone does not solve core instructional and transition needs. Relying solely on redistricting could potentially exacerbate equity issues across the four elementary schools.
3. Feasibility of a Single Comprehensive Middle School Model
    - Conduct a feasibility study to identify the associated costs and implications of moving to a single comprehensive middle school at the McGlynn Complex and moving McGlynn Elementary School to Andrews as part of the redistricting process. This study should include stakeholder feedback in the scope.

Request for School Committee Approval

The Task Force formally requests that the School Committee approve an expanded review of middle school educational and teaching models at both McGlynn Middle School and Andrews Middle School.