



MASTER PLAN REFERENDUM 2014

Managing Growth Today and Tomorrow

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As of 10/23/14

Would the new 9th grade center be physically connected to existing high school?

The new building would be located just to the west of the existing high school and connected by a covered, heated walkway with secure entrances into each school. Knights Place would no longer be a “thru street” for traffic. Custodial and supervisory staff would ensure the covered walkway would be kept clear and safe for all students, staff, and visitors.

Did the district investigate the possibility of an enclosed or elevated walkway between the schools?

Yes; however, these options were eliminated as being cost prohibitive. An enclosed walkway at ground level would become a physical barrier dividing the campus, restricting community access across the High School site, to Miller Park and the Community Center. An elevated walkway would require stairs and elevators to make the connection between the schools fully accessible for all students, staff, and community use.

The 9th grade center would provide students with all the core classes they currently take as freshmen as well as some of the elective courses freshmen typically take together. There would not be a steady stream of students moving between the two schools. Some students would go to the main high school building for a few electives or higher level courses. 9th graders would also have access to all the high school assemblies, programs, activities, athletics, and clubs.

When would the new schools open?

If the referendum questions are approved on November 4, architectural design will begin immediately on both the new elementary school and the new 9th grade center. The elementary school will be completed for the start of school in August 2016. The larger 9th grade center, which will be built on the location of the city’s civic buildings once they are demolished, will be completed for the start of school in August 2017.

What would the boundaries for the new elementary school be?

Once a referendum for a new school is approved, there will be a committee of parents and staff that will meet to review information, discuss options, and make a recommendation to the Board.

Will the district need to seek additional operating funds to support the new schools?

No. For the past several years we have been using funds in the general operating budget to help pay down the principal on the debt. The money that is currently being allocated toward extra debt payments would be used to help fund additional operating costs for the new buildings. The district's steadily increasing enrollment leads to increased revenue limits, which will offset additional costs associated with utilities and maintenance of the new space. Staffing is determined primarily by student enrollment and program needs, not by the number of facilities.

Just as when we built Deerfield Elementary and the new East Middle School, some additional support staff may be needed, but most of the staff will come from other schools, as will the students. After Deerfield was built and again after the new East Middle School was built, additional costs were absorbed within the operational budget. The percent of funds spent on personnel and the percent spent on building operations and maintenance (utilities, cleaning, building maintenance, etc.) have remained consistent over the past twelve years, even with the addition of the new buildings.

Is the district's overcrowding related to open enrollment students?

No. Only 5.9% of our student population this school year comes from open enrollment. Like all Wisconsin public school districts, Oak Creek-Franklin is required to participate in this program. 3.7% of our students are going to other school districts through open enrollment. Our space needs today are directly related to our total enrollment, which has grown by 1,746 students since 2000.

Did the district consider building a second High School?

Yes; however, this option was eliminated primarily because the cost estimates exceeded \$72 million. This option would also result in duplicating all functions of the existing building without any economy of use and would likely need to include the development of equal facilities for performing arts, athletics, etc. Building a second high school would also require the development of defined attendance boundaries for grades 9-12.

Why a 9th grade center?

In the book, *The Ninth Grade ~~Problem~~ Opportunity: Transforming Schools from the Bottom up*, the authors highlight the research that shows ninth graders generally have the worst attendance rate (higher number of absences) and the worst percentage of failures (higher number of failing grades) of all high school grade levels. They describe the ninth grade year as a "make it or break it" year for high school. As the authors of the book point out, the ninth grade year, for many students, is a time of confusion, awkwardness and apprehension.

Three years ago, to help ninth graders make a more successful transition, we implemented the Freshmen Mentor program at our high school. Upperclassmen volunteer to serve as mentors for the ninth graders. The mentors must meet established criteria and go through training to become mentors. As mentors, they serve as role models, help plan programs for the ninth graders, anticipate and answer questions of the ninth graders, and do what they can to help ninth graders successfully transition to high school.

In addition to the Freshmen Mentor program, last year OCHS teachers and administrators began looking at developing a program that would more specifically address the needs of ninth grade students. The staff read the book cited above as well as other research related to helping ninth graders be more successful. They also visited other high schools that had effective ninth grade transition programs. They wanted the ninth grade year to be a positive, productive year for freshmen, helping them establish habits and routines that will lead to greater success academically and socially. By the end of last school year, the START program was developed and ready to be implemented this school year.

START stands for Successful Transition and Academic Reinforcement Team. Teachers work as part of a team, similar to the middle school house concept, sharing the same group of freshmen in the core classes and sharing the same focus on overall academic support, organization, consistency, study skills, and time management. There are about 100 freshmen who are part of the pilot program this year, and the intent is to expand the program in the future.

An annex building next to the current high school will provide greater opportunity to implement the proven, effective strategies that will help our ninth graders have greater success their freshmen year. In addition, having 9th graders in the new building would limit traffic back and forth during the day. All 9th graders take English 9 or Accelerated English 9, Government 9, PE 9, Health 9, and Physical Science or Accelerated Biology. In addition, Band is separate now for 9th graders. Lunch is by grade level (all 9th graders eat together one period, all 10th graders eat together another period, etc.) For math, 9th graders take Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry or Accelerated Geometry, and all of those math classes could be offered at the new building. A number of electives would also be offered in the new building, but for some electives and for some higher level courses, 9th graders may go to the main building for one or more classes.

9th graders would be participating in all the events of the high school – pep assemblies, athletics (for instance, 9th graders could still make JV or Varsity teams), clubs (e.g. Forensics, Mock Trial, Multi-cultural, Math Club, Ski Club, etc.) and other all-school events. Some would also be attending a class or two at the high school, as well as using the main high school's outdoor facilities for physical education classes. Ninth graders would purposefully be provided with enough exposure to the high school and high school staff that it would not be as significant a transition to the high school as it is now for ninth graders.

The ninth grade center, as an expansion of the START program, would allow freshmen to develop as a more cohesive unit with a strong sense of community that will help them feel more confident and poised for success throughout their high school years.

Why is a 2-court Gym needed in the 9th Grade Center?

With our current enrollment of approximately 2100 students, we have 30 classes of physical education each day. We have 7 periods in the day, which means we have 4-6 classes going on at one time. These classes share space in our two gyms and weight room. With 30-35 students in each gym class, we can have as many as 100 students participating in physical education classes at one time in the main gym. As our enrollment continues to increase, we will need to add even more sections of physical education, which will be very difficult to do without added gym space. A gym in the new building will not only provide added space for physical education classes but will also help provide a safer environment for these classes.

When the gym is not being used by the school district, the community youth programs will be able to use the gym in the evening allowing 2 teams to practice at the same time.

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