

# MEMORANDUM



**To: Board of Directors**

**From: Rob Hess, Superintendent**

**Date: January 4, 2018**

**Re: Superintendent Recommendations for Over-Crowding at Seven Oak**

During the December 14<sup>th</sup> board meeting, concerns about over-crowding at Seven Oak were raised. The school's design capacity is 750 students. Current enrollment is 650 students. The district has been exploring a variety of options to address the growing concerns of over-crowding at the school. All of the options are listed below in no particular order. The inclusion of pros and cons are not exhaustive, but they do represent our best thinking to date and are based on the following facts and assumptions:

## FACTS:

- Our current bond does not expire until 2030.
- Over 15% of our current students district-wide are open enrolled at the school they are attending.
- During the spring of 2016 community, parent, and staff meetings and surveys were conducted throughout the district. Over 200 responses were collected in a variety of formats. There was mixed support for all configuration options, but the majority did favor Seven Oak becoming a 7-8 junior high school and the continuation of open enrollment.
- Since 1990, school district enrollment has been relatively flat with low and high years. We lost our largest group of students during the 2009 recession, but have recently grown to reach pre-2009 levels.
- The board approved boundary changes in the spring of 2016 to alleviate over-crowding at some schools, under enrollment at other schools, and community growth in some areas of the town. The boundary changes increased the boundary of Green Acres and Pioneer and decreased the boundary of Riverview and Cascades. Seven Oak, Hamilton Creek, and Lacombe boundaries were not affected.
- The board voted to make Pioneer a K-6 school in spring of 2016.
- Since the spring of 2016, the combined decisions of the boundary changes, Pioneer becoming a K-6 school, and shifting community demographics had the following enrollment impacts:
  - Green Acres increased in enrollment (formerly under-enrolled)
  - Cascades decreased enrollment (formerly over-enrolled)
  - Riverview maintained current size
  - Pioneer decreased in enrollment
  - Hamilton Creek increased in enrollment (formerly under-enrolled)
  - Lacombe increased in enrollment (now considered crowded)

- Seven Oak increased in enrollment (now considered crowded)
- 6<sup>TH</sup> grade students in our district (in general) have a history of higher achievement, growth, and positive social/emotional development in the elementary school setting

#### ASSUMPTIONS:

- District residents would not support the construction of a new school at this time based upon our tax rate and the fact that our current bond does not expire for another 12 years. The facilities planning process scheduled to begin in 2018 is key to any long term consideration for new facilities.
- Over-crowding at Seven Oak needs to be addressed this spring. Some of the options presented may necessitate that a decision be made at the February meeting.
- Engaging our middle school students at a high level across the district so that they are growing academically and have opportunities to pursue areas of interest is a priority. A high level of engagement is the key for increasing our graduation rate by ensuring our middle level students are prepared to be successful at the high school level and that engagement is achieved by a combination of both opportunities and academic rigor.
- There is not a significant advantage to, nor support for, adjusting the K-8 model for the two rural schools (Lacomb and Hamilton Creek).
- Open enrollment remains a priority for many families.

#### **Option A: Expand Cascades to become a K-6 school**

##### Pros:

- Academically Sound: Research and experience in Lebanon has shown that students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade benefit more academically in an elementary setting, and our students are currently behind the state average academically at this level. Another year in an elementary setting will benefit the majority of our students academically and socially.
- Cost effective: Cascades currently has three 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms but next year would need only two classes. The school has at least two open classrooms and could handle the extra 50 students. Current enrollment is 325 students. The school was up to 400 students prior to the 2016 boundary adjustment. This option would lower our enrollment projections at Seven Oak by 50 students.
- Create a 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing at Seven Oak: This option would allow us to create a 6<sup>th</sup> wing at Seven Oak so those students could have their own self-contained schedule at the school. There are currently three 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms at Riverview and two at Green Acres. There are a total of five classrooms available to be a part of the proposed 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing. Having a 6<sup>th</sup> grade team of five teachers on their own schedule would reduce the overcrowding that is occurring based on the current schedule of having all three grades share the same passing times throughout the day.
- Expand 6th Grade Band district wide: We currently have a band teacher on leave who would be willing to come back next year to teach band at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level in all schools that do not have a 6<sup>th</sup> grade band option. Having two 6<sup>th</sup> grades in

town makes this possibility a viable option for students. This would bring us another step closer to our 2020 Vision of music and band expansion across the district.

Cons:

- Change is hard: Any kind of change can be hard on people. There would be a change at Cascades with the addition of a grade level. There would also be change involved to create a self-contained 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing at Seven Oak including potential teacher transfers and moving classrooms.
- Cost: There would be a cost of .5 FTE music teacher to implement this option.
- Close Open Enrollment to Seven Oak at 6<sup>th</sup> grade: Option A would require us to close 6<sup>th</sup> grade open enrollment at Seven Oak. We currently have several students from Hamilton Creek and Pioneer open enrolled at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. Since next year we could only accommodate the five classrooms from Green Acres and Riverview, we would not be able to permit 6<sup>th</sup> grade open enrollment. Since our district has a long history of supporting open enrollment whenever possible, some parents would not be supportive of this decision. However, any student currently open enrolled to a proposed 6<sup>th</sup> grade feeder school (Riverview and Green Acres) would continue to be articulated with their peers to Seven Oak.

#### **Option B: Expand Cascades and Green Acres to become K-6 schools**

Pros:

- Academically Sound: Research and experience in Lebanon has shown that students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade benefit more academically in an elementary setting, and our students are currently behind the state average academically. Another year in an elementary setting will benefit the majority of our students academically, and we would be able to increase this benefit to another 50 students at Green Acres.
- Create a 6<sup>th</sup> grade wing at Seven Oak and support Open Enrollment: Option B would also allow us to create a 6<sup>th</sup> wing at Seven Oak so those students could have their own self-contained schedule at the school. There are currently three 5<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms at Riverview, but we would create space in the wing for a team of four 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. It is more efficient to build a four-teacher schedule as opposed to five, and we could also support open enrollment from Hamilton Creek, Pioneer, Cascades, and Green Acres since we would have 25 open enrollment seats. This option would reduce our projections at Seven Oak by 75 students.
- Expand 6th Grade Band district wide: We would still be able to support 6<sup>th</sup> grade band with a .5 FTE music teacher.
- Flexibility: Due to the advantage of open enrollment, this option provides the most flexibility to meet student needs.

Cons:

- Change is hard: Option B impacts more schools and families than Option A, so the impact and stress of the change would be increased.
- Cost: Option B is more expensive. In addition to cost of a .5 FTE music teacher, we would need to purchase/lease a two classroom modular building to place at Green Acres. Due to the need for special education and district services

at the school, there are not enough regular education classrooms to expand the school to 6<sup>th</sup> grade without the addition of two modular classrooms.

**Option C: Fully implement the K-6 Model for all in town elementary schools**

Pros:

- Academically Sound: Research and experience in Lebanon has shown that students in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade benefit more academically in an elementary setting, and our students are currently behind the state average academically. Another year in an elementary setting will benefit the majority of our students academically, and we would be able to increase this benefit to all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in the district.
- Seven Oak becomes a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade junior high school: Under this plan Seven Oak could operate as a true junior high school. Students would enter the school more academically prepared, and the school could focus on student career interest and plans. This would allow for more CTE options and electives at the school. The school size would be under 500 students which would reduce the need for administrative and office support. Managing student behavior would also be easier.
- No Need for Open Enrollment: Though there would be some open enrollment requests from Hamilton Creek and Lacombe, this option would definitely reduce the number of open enrollment requests for Seven Oak since the school would only have two grade levels.
- Future growth in the community: Though predicting enrollment growth is not an exact science, this option does prepare our district for student enrollment growth for the next 5-10 years. It not only expands the capacity of our elementary schools through additional space, but also creates space for at least another 200 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at Seven Oak.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Band: Through an additional .5 FTE music teacher, we could still have 6<sup>th</sup> grade band at all of our elementary schools.

Cons:

- Cost: This is by far the most costly option as it would require modular buildings at both Green Acres and Riverview so they could keep their 6<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- Significant Change: This option would require transferring several teachers, and based upon certification, layoffs are a definite possibility if a decision is made to implement this model by the fall of 2018.

### **Option D: Implement the “Sister School” or Princeton Plan**

#### Pros:

- Restructure in-town schools into two P-2 and two 3-6 schools: Structuring schools according to the development needs of children was started in Princeton, New Jersey and has experienced growing success around the country. There are several schools organized this way in the LBL region and prior to consolidation in 1995, Waterloo and Crowfoot were designed after this model. The advantages of this model include having more teachers per grade level, less school shopping/swapping, ability to expand pre-school, focus Title dollars to two schools, and design professional development at each school according to student need. Our two newer schools (Pioneer and Riverview) would become the 3-6 schools, while the older ones (Green Acres and Cascades) would be P-2.
- Cost Efficient: Because the schools would be tailored to the developmental needs of the students they are serving, there would be significant efficiencies gained in terms of how space is used, programs offered, and function of the school. The P-2 schools would be designed to teach students to read (with no state testing occurring), while the 3-6 schools would be focused on reading to learn. Since we could use space more efficiently, we would be able to move to this model without adding any additional classrooms or modular buildings.
- Seven Oak becomes a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade junior high school: Under this plan Seven Oak could operate as a true junior high school. Students would enter the school more academically prepared, and the school could focus on student career interest and plans. This would allow for more CTE options and electives at the school. The school size would be under 500 students which would reduce the need for administrative and office support. Managing student behavior would also be easier. This is the best model to prepare for anticipated community growth during the next 5 to 10 years.

#### Cons:

- Significant Change and potential cost: This option would highly impact five schools. It would require transferring a significant number of teachers, and district programs. Based upon certification at the middle school level, layoffs would be a possibility. Implementing this type of change for the fall of 2018 would require a decision by February or March at the latest. A change of this nature would be a significant undertaking.
- Families can feel less connected to schools: Since no student would be at a school for over 4 years, some families may feel disconnected to their local school. In this model, it would be possible for a large family to have children at four different schools for a period of time.

### **Option E: Pioneer reverts to a K-8 school**

#### Pros:

- Seven Oak enrollment is decreased by 50 students: Converting Pioneer back to a K-8 would mean that their current 6<sup>th</sup> graders would stay at the school next year as 7<sup>th</sup> graders and the following year as 8<sup>th</sup> graders. This would have an immediate benefit for Seven Oak in terms of numbers for the next two years.

#### Cons:

- Loss of Programs: The 2016 boundary changes increased the number of students attending Pioneer so creating space at Pioneer for an additional 50 students would require two current classroom programs to be displaced: the district behavior program for elementary students and the district pre-school partnership would have to be moved or eliminated. The following year two more classrooms would be needed to expand the school to be a K-8. This would require the additional cost of a modular building or adding classrooms to the building.
- Loss of Equity: Many Pioneer families have had a positive experience sending their junior high students to Seven Oak. They have appreciated the additional programming and opportunities provided to their children. These opportunities would no longer exist for these families and students. The school board approved the configuration change based on positive input from the school about the change. Going backwards on that decision at this point would most likely result in negative feedback to the board.
- Loss of the K-6 Model: Implementing the K-6 model at Pioneer has been extremely successful in terms of student achievement and growth. Eliminating the K-6 model would be considered a step backwards. Across the district, our students are consistently scoring significantly below the state average at the middle level. The K-6 model provides a proven effective, academic intervention that helps our students be academically prepared for 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond.

**Option F: Take no formal action**

Taking no action is always a choice. If the board takes no formal action this spring to address Seven Oak overcrowding, we will most likely have over 700 students at the school this fall, and the problems we are facing now would increase the need for additional staffing. There could be some relief in designing a different schedule for the school, but that won't change the perception of an "over-crowded" school.