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TPS Unveils Three Project Schoolhouse Proposals for Public Discussion

TULSA, Okla. – After months of study and creative problem-solving, Tulsa Public Schools has made three Project Schoolhouse proposals available for public discussion. The proposals, called Plans A, B and C, offer three very different scenarios for how TPS might best optimize its resources for improved academic results in light of declining state funding for education and under-enrolled schools. All three proposals were posted at http://www8.tulsaschools.org/4_About_District/project_sh_proposals.asp on the TPS website this morning at 6 a.m.

“Like other urban school districts across our nation, we have gone through a long, slow period of decline that has left many of our schools greatly under capacity,” said TPS Superintendent Dr. Keith Ballard. “We have more than 10,000 empty seats. This has resulted in vast disparities at our schools, impacting our ability to deliver a full slate of quality learning opportunities to *all* of our students. If we can reduce the capacity by more than 7,000 seats, we can make the district more efficient and restore equity. We can take the savings generated and invest them back into the classroom, greatly expanding our curriculum and the services offered to all of our students. This is a process that is long overdue.”

Savings from the three plans are expected to range from \$6.1 million to \$9.5 million. Ballard said the savings would be used to fund what he is calling “Trade Ups.” Possible Trade Ups could include: new enrichment offerings and a greater breadth of curriculum; access to art, band, orchestra, drama, dance, speech and debate, athletics and more after-school extracurricular activities; and the development of new community schools. Some Trade Ups will be “automatic” and essentially cost nothing, like the elimination of “split” classrooms, where two grades are taught in a single classroom by the same teacher. (See the complete list of possible Trade Ups available in the Project Schoolhouse section of the TPS website at http://www8.tulsaschools.org/4_About_District/project_sh_proposals.asp.)

“A number of children at TPS have had to do without things that many schools take for granted,” said Ballard. “Project Schoolhouse is our chance to not only become more efficient, but to restore a sense of pride in our schools by offering students the best possible education we can give them. It’s time we got rid of the inequities in the system and improved the educational experience at TPS for all.”

Highlights of the three plans include:

Plan A: Based on a philosophy of “one size does not fit all,” this plan:

- Proposes the closure of 13 elementary schools (Addams, Barnard, Burroughs, Cherokee, Chouteau, Emerson, Greeley, Houston, Mayo, Park, Phillips, Sandburg and Whitman). The proposal also recommends the closure of three middle schools (Thoreau Middle School, Wilson and Cleveland). These students would be reassigned
- With the closure of the Mayo and Thoreau buildings, both programs and the current student body at each school would be moved. Grimes Elementary and Nimitz Middle School would no longer serve as neighborhood schools, but with their greater capacity, would serve as new homes to the Mayo and Thoreau programs. (The Mayo program would move to the Grimes property, and Thoreau to Nimitz). The capacity at Grimes and Nimitz are greater, which would allow more students to participate in both of these popular programs
- No high school closures proposed
- Various school configurations and changes depending on the high school feeder pattern
 - Central, McLain and Webster: Elementary (grades PK-4) → Upper Elementary Schools (grades 5-6) → High school (grades 7-12)
 - East Central, Edison, Hale and Memorial: Elementary (grades PK-5) → Middle School (grades 6-8) → High school (grades 9-12)
- Bryant, Celia Clinton, Hamilton, Jackson, McKinley, Owen and Springdale elementary schools would leave the Rogers High School feeder pattern and join the McLain feeder pattern
- Alcott and Porter elementary schools changed to Pre-K/early childhood centers
- Monroe Middle School reopens as a Thoreau-model school, grades 5-6
- Alternative education programs would be centralized at Bell Innovation Campus. (See handouts available at http://www8.tulsaschools.org/4_About_District/project_sh_proposals.asp)
- Rogers High School Lottery Magnet created, giving students in grades 9-12 the opportunity to earn a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree from Tulsa Community College.
 - Rogers Lottery Magnet feeder pattern: Elementary (grades PK-6) → Rogers Lottery Magnet (grades 7-12)
 - Rogers 2011-12 students currently in grades 10-12 reassigned to other high schools.
 - Kendall Whittier and Sequoyah elementary schools students (grades PK-6) eligible to attend Rogers, as well as all students in the district through a lottery selection process
 - Remaining seats filled by 6th grade magnet applicants from across the TPS system
 - In 8th grade, Rogers students have the opportunity to commit to a program in grades 9-12 that provides concurrent courses for college credit from TCC
 - Graduates of the program would earn both a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree
- District boundaries change
- Number of seats closed: 6,819 seats
- Plan A savings: Approximately \$6.3 million

Plan B: This proposal is based on research that supports the belief that a student’s achievement can be improved by having fewer transition points in their educational experience. This plan:

- Proposes the closure of 10 elementary schools (Addams, Barnard, Bryant, Burroughs, Cherokee, Houston, Marshall, Phillips, Sandburg and Whitman). It also recommends the closure of four middle schools (Cleveland, Madison, Nimitz and Wilson); these students would be reassigned
- No high school closures proposed
- Various school configurations and changes depending on the high school feeder pattern
 - East Central, Edison, Hale, Memorial and Webster: Elementary (grades PK-5) → Middle School (grades 6-8) → High school (grades 9-12)
 - Central: Elementary (grades PK-6) → High school (grades 7-12)
 - McLain: Various school configurations to include:

- Grades PK-5: Alcott and Hawthorne
- Grades PK-6: Anderson, Bryant, Celia Clinton, Greeley, Jackson, McKinley, Owen, Penn and Springdale
- Grades 6-8: Gilcrease Middle School
- Grades 7-12: McLain High School
- Rogers High School Lottery Magnet established (identical to “Plan A” above)
- Porter Elementary would become Pre-K – Kindergarten
- Bell Elementary School (formerly in the Rogers feeder pattern) would move into the Hale High School feeder pattern
- Alternative education programs: the opportunity to pursue a structure similar to “Plan A” above
- Number of seats closed: 5,911 seats
- Plan B savings: Approximately \$6.1 million

Plan C: Based on several studies regarding grade configuration that have reported middle schools to be less effective in terms of test scores than K-8 schools in the same district. This plan:

- Proposes the closure of 15 elementary schools (Addams, Barnard, Burroughs, Cherokee, Chouteau, Greeley, Jones, Marshall, Owen, Park, Peary, Phillips, Sandburg, Springdale and Whitman); the closure of Nimitz Middle School; and the closure of Central High School; these students would be reassigned
- Establishes 15 early childhood centers (Pre-K through Kindergarten); Alcott, Bryant, Celia Clinton, Emerson, Patrick Henry, Houston, Kerr, Lindbergh, McArthur, Penn, Porter, Reed, Robertson, Salk and Sequoyah elementary schools would all be transitioned to this model
- Middle schools changed to a configuration of grades 1-8; and high schools grades 9-12
- Number of seats closed: 7,914 seats
- Plan C savings: \$9.5 million

Dr. Ballard said the Project Schoolhouse proposals offer three very different solutions for how TPS might become more efficient. “There is no doubt that you will find some things you like in these plans, and other elements you do not. We recognize that it can be a deeply emotional issue when we propose the closing of even a single school. I would caution parents, students, teachers and other TPS employees against considering any of these plans ‘a done deal.’ None of these plans are final, and until a final recommendation is made to the school board and passed, they are just that – proposals.”

Ballard said the savings exceed the cost of the Trade Ups, resulting in a net savings to Tulsa Public Schools. As many of the options described in the above plans would likely be phased in, savings would not likely occur until June 1, 2012. “We have to make plans to become more efficient now, as we are all aware of the potential for additional state budget cuts to education. “We are going to do the responsible thing and position TPS for success no matter what lies ahead.”

At this time, there is no plan to make changes to magnet school programs or to the district’s current transfer program. “It is my goal that by improving educational opportunities at all schools, parents will ultimately decide they don’t need to transfer their kids to ‘better schools,’” said Ballard. “That better school will be located in their own neighborhood.”

The three plans are the combined efforts of several Project Schoolhouse committees. The Blue Sky Group, composed of education reformers, made initial recommendations and drafted the three plans. The Advisory Council, a 15-member group appointed by the TPS school board, studied data relating to the district and offered further recommendations. The Project Team, a group made up of TPS executive staff

and other key employees, “vetted” the recommendations to determine the feasibility based on staffing and other resources. Changes were made along the way, culminating in Plans A, B and C.

Project Schoolhouse now enters a new phase of public discussion. Last week, a survey was distributed to the parents of all 41,000 students in the district, available in both English and Spanish. The survey is also available online at the TPS website. The deadline for completing the survey is today, Tues., Mar. 29 at 5 p.m.

Additional public forums will be hosted as follows:

Tues., April 5	6 p.m.	Thoreau Demonstration Academy, 7370 E. 71 st St.
Thurs., April 7	6 p.m.	Foster Middle School, 12121 E. 21 st Pl.
Mon., April 11	6 p.m.	Eugene Field Elementary, 2249 S. Phoenix Ave.
Thurs., April 14	6 p.m.	Hawthorne Elementary School, 1105 E. 33 rd St. N.

All forums will take place in the school libraries at the above schools. All TPS parents and patrons are invited to attend.

“I have always said we would be transparent with this effort, and that public discussion is critical if Project Schoolhouse is to be successful,” said Ballard. “I really want to hear what parents and the community has to say before we make a final recommendation to the Board. One thing is clear since we’ve been going through this process: There is no one perfect solution. That’s why I think it’s even more critical that we make these proposals available to the public for discussion.”

Please visit the TPS website at <http://www8.tulsaschools.org/> for additional information.

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