



## **Enrollment Balancing Project Report to the School Board**

**To:** School Board Winnetka Public School District 36  
Trisha Kocanda, *Superintendent*

**From:** Enrollment Balancing Board Advisory Committee

**Re:** Enrollment Balancing Project Recommendation

January 24, 2017

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### **Section 1: Executive Summary**

#### Introduction

The Enrollment Balancing Project is an effort to address the enrollment imbalance currently being experienced at the elementary school level. Over the past ten years, the enrollment at Crow Island has remained above 350 students while Hubbard Woods and Greeley Schools have dipped below 250. Currently, Crow Island serves 45% of the total K-4 population. With the District's commitment to consistent programming, instructional minutes, and class size guidelines, the enrollment at Crow Island has placed a strain on the educational environment.

The School Board approved the Enrollment Balancing Project in June 2016. To assist with the development and evaluation of potential solutions to the enrollment imbalance, the Board commissioned a Community and Staff Advisory Committee to study the issue and develop a recommendation to address balancing the enrollment at the elementary level.

#### Advisory Committee Charge

The School Board's charge (August 16, 2016) to the Committee was threefold:

1. Determine the best way to address space and program relief at Crow Island (for fall 2017)

2. Determine the best way to offer Extended Day Kindergarten in the short term, with an eye toward the long term
3. Identify viable options and prioritize these options to address the long-term enrollment forecast and facility use (this provided context to the short term recommendation)

This report addresses all three charges, but does not prioritize the partial list of potential long-term options. Prioritization of the long term solutions is thought to be more appropriate for the long-term study process.

### Review Process Overview

The Advisory Committee was formed in August, 2016, and committed to meeting seven times for the purpose of studying the issues and coming to consensus on a recommendation by the January 24, 2017, Board meeting. An additional December meeting was added to the schedule by the Committee. All meetings were open to the public with two public comment opportunities offered at each meeting.

In addition, an Enrollment Balancing Project webpage was established where all relevant documents were posted including a link through which members of the public could provide comment and feedback to Committee members.

### Advisory Committee Recommendation

As the result of its careful and prolonged study, the Committee recommends the following be implemented for the opening of the 2017-18 school year:

**All Crow Island kindergarten students attend Greeley and Hubbard Woods for their kindergarten year.**

This recommendation may be in effect for a period greater than one year depending upon further work regarding the implementation of a long term solution to balance enrollment.

## **Section 2: Enrollment Profile**

### History of Enrollment

The District's current level of enrollment (1,688 students January, 2017) is similar to the enrollment level of 20 years ago. Within the 20 year period, enrollment rose to a level of just over 2,100 students in 2006 followed by overall declining enrollment. Only Crow Island continued to register sufficient numbers of students to maintain and sometimes increase its enrollment. As these smaller cohorts moved through the system into later grades, total District enrollment trended down and the proportion of elementary aged students increased at Crow Island.

To update the projected enrollment, in Summer 2016, the District contracted with Dr. Jerrold McKibben (McKibben Demographics) to provide a Demographic Study (August 2016; revised October 2016). The Demographic Study was informed by a number of sources allowing for a

projection of continuing decline in enrollment by 114 students or -6.7% between 2016-17 and 2021-22.

During summer 2016, the District also began working with Matthew Cropper of Cropper GIS who was commissioned to complete a Building Capacity and Utilization Study to calculate the total number of students that each individual school can hold, both in terms of optimal and maximum capacity. At Board direction, Cropper and the Committee worked with optimal capacity data calculated on the low range of class size guidelines (grades k-4 @ 17 students; 5-8 @ 18 students, special education @ 10 students). Cropper also provided a set of several draft Planning Models for Committee consideration which were later divided into long and short term options for consideration. After deliberation, the Committee narrowed the options to four short term models to bring before the community and staff for their comment and consideration.

### Projection Data

Regarding enrollment projections, the Committee noted certain points of learning. Although they are aware that the Board has been informed of the details regarding anticipated enrollments, they highlighted the following:

- in proportion to the other elementary schools, Crow Island currently serves the largest percentage of elementary students at 45% of the elementary enrollment (note: currently GR serves 26% and HW serves 29%; this is the largest discrepancy in the past 35 years)
- redistribution of Crow Island boundaries resulting in additional students crossing Green Bay Road presents a challenge that merits further study
- the redistricting of some Crow Island students to the Hubbard Woods or Greeley areas would require the shift of a substantial number of households to effectively and consistently benefit from a classroom reduction at any grade level
- the effect of additional students at either Hubbard Woods or Greeley would need to be considered to avoid a problem being solved at Crow Island, but transported to Hubbard Woods or Greeley
- construction of larger homes in the community may be yielding unintended consequences resulting in fewer primary aged students, narrowing the pool of interested/able home buyers, and/or decreasing the number of residential parcels in the community
- confirmation of the demographer's perceived limited effect of the One Winnetka development on Greeley's future enrollment should be pursued
- the enrollment projection data is as good as we can get at this point in time, but to be useful, it will require monitoring and updating on a regular basis
- information that was provided regarding the demographic profile of Winnetka residents and potential buyers was instructive (the Committee learned from the population pyramids reflecting fertility bands, median age of population, and empty nesters; aging populace; baby boomers staying in their homes due to the 2008 recession shrinking market values; fewer urban buyers; mortgage rates and approvals; and the rate, magnitude, and price of existing home sales as the dominant factors affecting enrollment)

### **Section 3: Advisory Committee**

The Advisory Committee's purpose and charge was to recommend a method to relieve the current overcrowding conditions at Crow Island for the start of the 2017-18 school year. This coincided with the implementation of the Extended Day Kindergarten program and required consideration of where and how the program could best be accommodated.

#### Advisory Committee Membership

The Committee membership was developed in concert with Cropper GIS who brought extensive experience to the project as the result of working with community and staff committees in their prior demographic and capacity study work. Community and staff members were invited to apply for Committee membership. Applications were reviewed for distribution across the community, personal and professional background, those with and without children currently in the system, prior knowledge of the District, length of District residency, personal statements of interest, and availability of time to dedicate to the effort. Community members were joined on the Committee by board members, staff, building administrators, and central office administrators. The resulting 17 committee members initially met on September 26, 2016.

#### Advisory Committee Guiding Principles

The Committee used two important documents that helped guide their work and decision making. The first was a set of Guiding Norms for Committee interactions developed at the September meeting. The second was a set of Guiding Principles that were used throughout the decision process to help narrow the options under consideration. The Guiding Principles resulted from a staff and community survey that was developed and completed in September 2016 resulting in five high value priorities that were taken into account when making decisions.

#### Advisory Committee Review Process

In addition to factoring in the Guiding Principles, staff and community input, and impact on students and the educational program, throughout the process, the Committee and District placed a high priority on providing opportunities for the community and staff to be fully informed by providing access to the information being used for decision making. As with School Board meetings, agendas were posted in advance, all meetings were open to the public, and all meetings included two opportunities for the Committee to hear from the public. The enrollment balancing webpage was regularly updated with materials that were provided to the Committee. Verbatim copies of the EBP emails were provided to the Committee for their review. Staffs were informed at the building level by regular visits by the Superintendent. A summary of the previous night's meeting outcomes was posted the day after the meetings, and meeting minutes were posted to the Board page after approval at the Board's regular meetings.

In addition, as the options were narrowed to four potential models, eight staff and community input sessions were scheduled to allow for the wider distribution of information about the models. During

the input sessions, an introductory video was shown, a gallery walk hosted by Committee members was available, and an online survey was used to gather feedback.

This information and feedback from the community and staff was integral to the determination of the final recommendation.

At the November 29, 2016, Committee meeting, the Committee reviewed the benefits and opportunities of the remaining models and narrowed to four the models to be brought before the community and staff for consideration:

1. Crow Island offers no kindergarten classes.
2. Crow Island offers some kindergarten classes.
3. Crow Island offers no 4th grade classes.
4. Crow Island retains all kindergarten and 4th grade classes. Two additional temporary classrooms are added.

#### **Section 4: Rationale and Recommendation**

The final Phase 1 recommendation was decided by vote at the January 17, 2017, Committee Meeting. For the 2017-18 school year, the prevailing vote was to recommend:

**Crow Island offers no kindergarten classes. All Crow Island kindergarten students attend Greeley and Hubbard Woods for their kindergarten year.**

(Note: This recommendation may be in effect for a period greater than one year depending upon the implementation of a long term solution to balance enrollment.)

The Committee's rationale for the recommendation includes the following as the Committee believes this option:

- provides immediate relief by opening two classrooms and reducing enrollment by approximately 75 students (-20%) in the building (provides the most relief for space, staff, students with fewer hours of specials and staff to schedule)
- reflects feedback from the input sessions and emails and is in concert with a substantial portion of the community and staff opinion regarding those models they could support (in the process, the Committee eliminated those models that were not as tightly tied to the Guiding Principles and/or what was learned from reading and listening to community, staff, and administrative input)
- diminishes the potential impact on students already attending Crow Island (particularly at 3rd grade) and respects the social emotional learning needs of currently enrolled students
- provides a fiscally responsible choice
- allows for enhancing the extended day kindergarten program at its implementation by increasing collaboration around a new program (EDK); (capitalizes on the opportunity to roll out EDK as a District level enhanced program)

- addresses the integration of the community by families and students having direct experience in another District school
- is in concert with the panel discussion held with Building Principals and the educational impact report authored by administrators with input from their staffs
- allows for creative ways to keep students connected to Crow Island
- helps balance enrollment if families choose not to go back to Crow Island (but if allowed the choice, may stay for 1st grade and beyond)
- unifies District 36 - reinforces one District program and consistent learning opportunities across the District
- capitalizes on prior experience with children coming into Winnetka schools at 1st grade from another Winnetka program
- avoids need for fragmenting community by identifying who would stay at CI and who would attend at a sister school
- provides relief for common areas such as the lunchroom, gym, play areas, specials

However, there was some dissention in the vote and cautions from the Committee regarding the recommended model. These cautions included:

- Avoid impacting any CI students twice (short term kindergarten move and long term move due to long term decision)
- Focus on smooth transitions (for both students and staff) which may require some resources and early school tours and visits
- Keep an eye on the transition process both into kindergarten and into 1st grade
- Recognize that all Crow Island kindergarten families are impacted by this model to a greater degree than if fewer families were involved, therefore anticipate and help with scheduling, multiple school issues for sibling families, etc.
- Help community understand that the CI overcrowding needs to be addressed regardless of offering EDK
- Provide clearer communication around EDK as the District's kindergarten program...lots of misunderstanding regarding the half day option for families to have students stay for a half day as opposed to an option for a half day only kindergarten class
- **minority opinion comments here or in a separate section labeled "minority opinion?"**

**It is important to note that there was discussion related to Model 2** (some kindergarten students to remain at Crow Island). There were ideas offered by Committee members and parents supporting two half-day kindergarten classes (an a.m. and a p.m. serving up to 40 students) or one extended day class (serving up to 20 students). This would open up one classroom at Crow Island School. It would also allow some kindergarteners to remain at Crow Island, which evoked concerns as to a fair method to determine which students would attend Crow Island and which would attend at Greeley or Hubbard Woods. In order to consider any half-day only option, the Board would need to review this change in light of its previous Extended Day Kindergarten program approval.

## Section 5: Notes to the Board

In the enrollment balancing process, the Phase 1 Committee developed a wealth of information and understanding about the current situation and the need to address enrollment balancing over the long term. In the process of wrapping up the current short term process and moving to considering the long term, the following thoughts were generated:

### Re: Short term Model Implementation

- as soon as possible develop the allocation plan for CI kindergarten students and staff at Hubbard Woods/Greeley
- by the February Board meeting, have the plan ready for distribution so families and staff are aware of assignments for the 2017-18 school year
- as soon as possible, communicate if CI kindergarten will be redistributed to GR and HW for one or two years
- be sensitive to arrival and departure times for families who will have drop off and arrival times at two buildings
- offer families some clarity regarding the opportunity for CI kindergarten children who begin at GR or HW to stay at the school through their elementary experience; (provide for parent choice, self-selection, and strive to allow families to stay)
- conduct a mid-year December/January 2018 survey of CI kindergarten families to determine how many families intend to request elementary placement at GR or HW through the remainder of the elementary years rather than returning to CI for 1st grade and beyond
- prepare an integration plan to acclimate Crow Island incoming kindergarten students into GR and HW in early spring
- investigate open enrollment at all grade levels as an option to attract families into buildings where there is available space

### Long term Model Considerations

#### *Process*

- continue to have the long term recommendation reflect input from the staff and community as was done with the short term study
- consider the ways to combine some draft models; be flexible to combine the best of multiple models
- many in the community expressed an openness to consider redistricting; therefore, seek a procedure that offers redistricting with the ability to “course correct” as enrollment changes over time

- study appropriate grade cohorts that may enhance learning environments for children as the community expressed an openness to cohort changes (such as four K-5 schools with one 6-8 middle school or three K-3 schools with a 4-5 and 6-8 middle school configuration)
- investigate the number of classrooms and be realistic as to the number of students the school can really hold - go for the ideal
- be wary of moving the problem- ex. shifting a cohort that would then overtax another campus
- be mindful of the amount of time and notice the community and children need to prepare for change- the longer the better for prep time; a longer time also allows for more thoughtful implementation;
- strive for an equitable and sustainable Phase 2 solution so the staff, community, and children experience predictability for sustained periods
- look carefully at how to best use Washburne space in Phase 2-
- continue to use and update the Cropper data to inform Phase 2
- maintain feedback loops, panels of those most informed on issues, building tours- invaluable to hear so many points of view
- continue to build on potential models as other options can and should be explored in Phase 2
- educate all families and the community to the condition of and differences among the buildings
- any redistricting will be better received by the community provided adequate advance notice is given
- any redistricting will be better received by the community provided currently enrolled students and/or families have the option to be grandfathered

### *Community*

- keeping neighborhoods together is a strong theme expressed by the community; avoiding splitting streets down the middle
- work to educate the realtor community regarding any process and the effect of boundary decisions on area properties

### *Students*

- if students are currently enrolled in a school, especially if they have been moved as a kindergarten student in the short term model, avoid moving them a second time; keep an eye on the whole picture with transitions back to CI and effects of Phase 2 resolution
- review and communicate the Board policy that allows for the granting of requests to attend school outside of one's school boundary area
- in any redistricting or grade configuration change, be cognizant of safety issues for children such as crossing Green Bay Road

### *Staff*

- consider the staff in deliberations in terms of school assignments for traveling staff- time and cohesion of programs
- recognize the flexibility and creativity of the staff who are open-minded and ready to make every child's experience positive and successful regardless of their home address and school assignment

### *Facilities*

- the opportunity to tour the schools reinforced the need for facility upgrades and improvements regardless of enrollment needs
- conduct a parallel long term building study concurrent with Phase 2 rather than conduct Phase 2 and follow up with a facilities study
- some non-parents expressed they would support needed facility upgrades, but would find it difficult to support adding square footage to any building in light of available space in some buildings

## **Section 6: Next Steps**

At the January 24, 2017, Board work session, members of the Enrollment Balancing Committee will be present to communicate this recommendation and answer any questions the Board may have regarding this decision.

Following Board consideration of the Committee's recommendation and final action by the Board, a plan to communicate the Board's decision regarding Crow Island space relief and extended day kindergarten implementation will begin. The communication plan will include parents, community, staff, realtors, Winnetka pre-school providers, private schools, and other entities who will be affected by this decision.

Following the anticipated transition of Board members in April 2017, Phase 2 planning will be brought before the Board for discussion and approval. It is recommended that at least half of the current Advisory Committee be involved in the next phase of the study to benefit from their knowledge of the issues. Additional community and staff would be invited to participate to broaden the Committee's thinking and engage others in the long term deliberations.

## Section 7: Appendix

Demographic Background by McKibben Demographics (revised October 25, 2016)

Guiding Principles developed with community and staff input (October 18, 2016)

Cropper GIS Models (November 22, 2016)

Benefits and Challenges of Short Term Models (November 29, 2016)

Educational Impact Report from the Administrative Team (January 5, 2017)

Summary Report from December 2016/January 2017 Community and Staff Input Sessions  
(January 10, 2017)

Presentation to School Board