



GREENFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

141 Davis Street, Greenfield, MA 01301

“Every Child’s Success is Our Mission”

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Jordana B. Harper, Superintendent of Schools

Grade Configuration Study, 2014-2015

Superintendent’s Executive Summary

Historical Background

Currently, Greenfield is comprised of an early childhood center, three K-3 elementary schools, a 4-7 Middle School, a 4-7 satellite campus of the Middle School at Green River School known as the Math & Science Academy, and Greenfield High School for grades 8-12, including the 8th Grade Academy. This configuration is a result of financial constraints that resulted in several schools being closed between in the years preceding 2008, including Four Corners and Green River School, which were subsequently opened as enrollment increased under the previous Superintendent. It is noted that the historical configuration of Greenfield was a constellation of neighborhood elementary schools extending through fifth grade, including North Parish School and Green River School, followed by a Middle and High School.

Emerging Themes

Beginning in July 2014, as part of the Superintendent’s Entry Process, meetings were held at each school throughout the district for educators, parents, and community members. At these early meetings, the question was quickly raised regarding the district’s grade configuration, specifically Grade 4 students (typically aged 9 at the end of Grade 4) entering the district’s Middle School, which houses students in Grades 4-7. These parents expressed the desire for a longer elementary experience in the district’s elementary schools, where it was noted that a strong community presence has been established, and excellent parent-teacher communication occurs, particularly in the form of regular all-school meetings and frequent events at the elementary buildings. Grades 4-7 at GMS, meanwhile, benefit from the Expanded Learning Time Grant and numerous arts and enrichment offerings. While many parents spoke to the positive experience their children had in Grades 4-7 at both MSA and GMS, many also indicated concerns about the developmental appropriateness of Grade 4 students being with Grade 7 students – particularly during unstructured times, such as while riding the school bus.

From July- December, these findings became a common theme and were identified as part of the Superintendent’s entry plan for further study. The findings were brought to the Policy & Curriculum Sub-Committee. In Winter of 2015, upon recommendation of the Policy Sub-Committee, the full Greenfield School Committee recommended creation of an Ad Hoc Committee to study the possibility of returning Grade 4 to the elementary schools as it had previously been, prior to the district’s financial setbacks and enrollment declines that forced schools to close. At the time of the Ad Hoc Committee, multiple scenarios and options existed in order to address the potential expansion of elementary schools, and a clear desired outcome was not apparent.

Guiding Priorities

The following priorities were established to guide the work:

1. Create a coherent, district-wide plan that prioritizes students' developmental and safety needs
2. Honor Parent/ student needs and engage community in a collaborative planning process
3. Build on successes of district in existing programs
4. Ensure high-quality instruction with minimal disruption to students
5. Maximize cost efficiency
6. Increase home-district enrollment, reduce Choice-Out
7. Maintain compliance with legal, DESE guidelines

Key Considerations

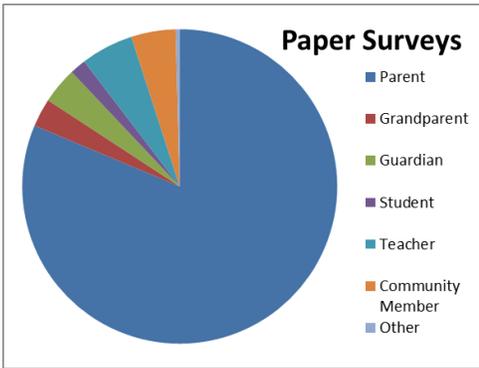
1. Move of Central Office to be completed Summer 2015 – Site TBD
2. Active School Construction / Repair Projects via MSBA/Capital Improvements:
 - a. Newton School – Summer 2015
 - b. North Parish School – Summer 2015
 - c. Green River School – Summer 2015
 - d. GHS – Anticipated Phase 4 Completion, September 2015
3. Pending Transportation Study – Est. completion late Spring 2015
4. Year 3 ELT Site Visits – Site Visit May 2015, Commendations & Recommendations est. May-June

Formation of Ad Hoc Committee

Building on the research completed to date, the Ad Hoc Committee was tasked with studying the question of Grade 4 reconfiguration and was comprised of School Committee Members Adrienne Nunez, Donna Gleason, and chaired by Margaret Betts. Following an initial planning meeting, the Ad Hoc Committee elected to hold an intensive series of meetings in January 2015, three public hearings designed respectively for educators, administrators and community members, and parents and caregivers.

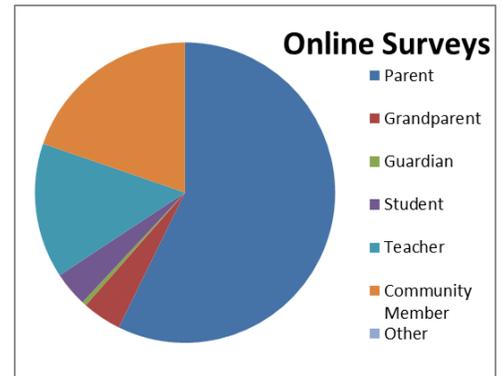
Meetings were well-attended, with approximately 150 attendees in all. In addition to in-person accounts, surveys were launched in both paper and online versions and received nearly 400 responses. Significant considerations were the physical space available in the schools as well as educational soundness of children at the elementary level. Also considered were parents' safety concerns; a review of pedagogical research; programmatic considerations and legal compliance; consideration of financial impact; impact of various models on ancillary concerns such as transportation; school choice; and access to educational opportunities. Two additional Ad Hoc meetings were then held to review and summarize the findings, with a recommendation to the full School Committee on March 25, 2015.

Key Survey Findings

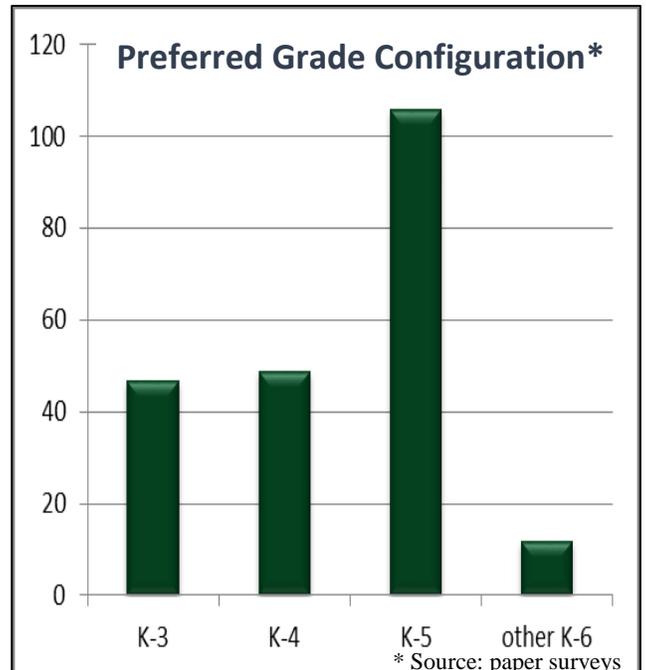
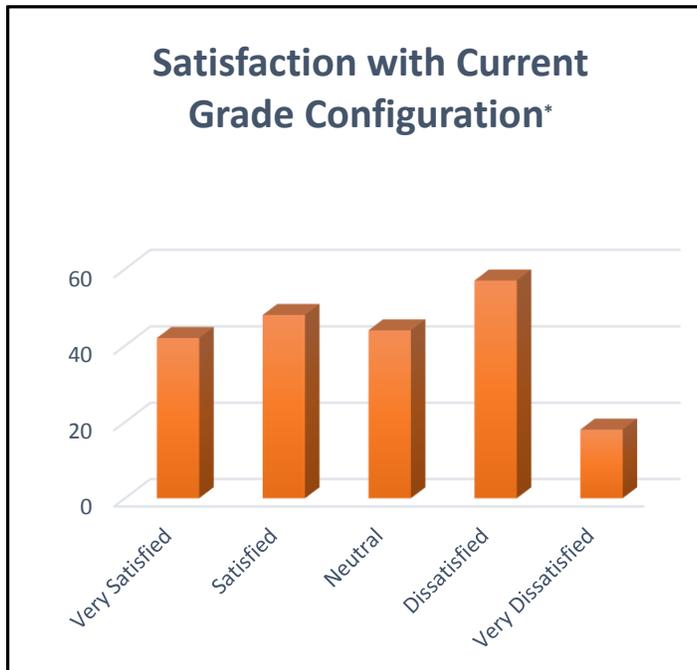


- 412 responses to the survey were received, including both paper and online versions.
- Surveys were compiled to account for all responses, including text responses.
- 85% of respondents of paper surveys, sent home in children’s back-packs, were Parents /Guardians.

- Of the paper surveys sent home with students, the greatest amount of individuals surveyed reported feeling “dissatisfied” with the current grade configuration.
- The online survey was made available to encourage community and teacher feedback as well, and was responded to by 57% parents, 4% grandparents, 2% guardians, 3% students, 14% teachers, 20% community members.



While the Ad Hoc Committee was formed to study Grade 4 Configuration, a surprising result came of the study: over 80% of parents indicated that their “preferred configuration for elementary school” was K-5. This fell outside the purview of the Ad Hoc Committee, and would involve further study. In order to fulfill the purpose of the Committee as formed, priorities were needed to focus and refine the recommendations.



Narrowed Recommendations

While the Ad Hoc Committee and Superintendent had originally considered nearly a dozen scenarios, a narrower set of recommendations was needed to present to the full Committee. Guided by the priorities and constrained by the key considerations, two recommendations were put forward by the Superintendent in response to the data presented throughout the process:

Scenario 1: MAINTAIN CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND STUDY POSSIBLE CONFIGURATIONS FOR 16-17



PreSchool

- North Parish



Elementary (Gr K-3)

- Four Corners
- Federal Street
- Newton



Middle (Gr 4-7)

- MSA
- GMS



High School (Gr 8-12)

- 8th Gr Academy
- GHS

Scenario 2: GRADE 4 ADJUSTMENT in 15-16 with FURTHER STUDY for 16-17



PreSchool

- North Parish



Elementary (Gr K-4)

- Four Corners
- Federal Street
- Newton -- K-3 ONLY due to Roof Repairs



Middle (Gr 4-7)

- MSA
- GMS - offer sections of Gr 4 that would have been housed at Newton



High School (Gr 8-12)

- 8th Gr Academy
- GHS

Ad-Hoc Recommendations to the Full School Committee

Upon vote of the Ad Hoc Committee, Scenario 2 was recommended to the School Committee on March 25, 2015. There, a friendly amendment was made to the motion, to indicate that Newton's 4th grade students would only be housed at Greenfield Middle School if classroom space was not available at Newton due to the modular classrooms and roof repairs in Summer of 2015. The motion indicated that 4th grade at the other elementary schools would be offered, and that 4th grade at Math Science Academy would remain as an offering as well for the following year.

Ten-Year Plan

It is the Superintendent's vision for the Greenfield Public Schools to engage all stakeholders in a long-range planning process and thereby create a long-range, viable option for all Greenfield students. The efforts of the Ad Hoc Committee in reviewing the Grade configuration are a significant undertaking that responded directly to the parent and community needs. However, further study is required to support the foundation of the schools for many years to come. Specifically, parents strongly indicated a preference for a K-5 system over a K-4 system, which had mixed results, with many feeling that the benefits of a longer elementary system would only be realized with a K-5 configuration, and others expressing the benefits of services and enrichment offerings currently consolidated at Greenfield Middle School. Decentralizing these requires cost analysis, and is dependent on the number of students enrolled at a particular elementary school as part of the cost-benefit analysis. Further, a K-5 configuration is not possible within our current elementary configuration of three elementary buildings, and would require additional physical space. This significantly broadens the scope of the study, but also the options for addressing a broad range of educational, social-emotional and operational needs. Therefore, the Superintendent's Recommendations both included further study of the appropriate elementary configuration model for the Greenfield Public Schools, with clear timeframes to engage the community while providing time and clarity for parents and students regarding the process. The goal of such a process is to thoroughly evaluate, and put in place the conditions for supporting, an elementary configuration that meets the needs of our students, families, and community for the decade to come.



Further Study – Suggested Timelines

The timelines suggested during the Ad Hoc Committee were as follows:

- March, 2015 – School Committee Vote for '15-'16 Configuration
- April – May 2015 – formation of Strategic Task Force for Long-Range Planning (S.T.A.R.: Strategic Taskforce for Alignment & Reorganization)

- April – June, 2015 – ongoing data collection and planning for K-12 Curriculum Alignment
- May – September, 2015 – Study & Analysis of Long-Range Planning options, including
 - Children’s Developmental Needs & Social-Emotional Readiness
 - Physical Space Assessment for Long-term needs
 - Comprehensive Cost Projections & Analysis
 - Transportation Study (Pending – anticipated May 2015)
 - PreK, Elementary, Middle School, and High School enrollment projections
 - Vertical alignment and Teachers’ Professional Development opportunities
 - School Choice & Neighboring district configuration
 - Delivery of services including Remediation & Enrichment offerings
 - Integrated Arts programming
 - Socio-economic impact
 - Other factors, as identified by STAR Task Force
- September-October, 2015- Review of completed studies, identification of Potential Scenarios for Greenfield’s long-term grade configuration based on analysis completed.
- November, 2015 – With stakeholder input, narrow options to two options.
- December, 2015 – Vote of School Committee between final options for Long-term plan for Greenfield Public Schools’ comprehensive grade configuration.
- January, 2016 – Public communication to parents and broader community regarding options for Fall 2016.
- Winter & Spring, 2016 – Administration planning, organization and implementation for Fall 2016.

Summary

It is my wish to extend my thanks to the dedicated educators, supportive community, and caring parents who have participated in a transparent process grounded in the community’s needs to reach this point, as well as to the School Committee for their support of this informed process. I now call upon those same committed individuals to continue the work begun this year as part of the strategic planning process for the long-term success of the Greenfield Public Schools. Together, we can make Greenfield Public Schools our families’ first choice, and their best choice.

Together in Education,

Jordana B. Harper
Superintendent