



One final problem with large schools is that they cannot effectively operate as neighborhood schools to which most students can walk and in which the school becomes a center of community life.

problems at the other schools the report recommends replacing, but there is no need. The problems are all about the same. They are generally issues of maintenance that should not be used to justify replacement. If the community passes yet another bond, it will act as an enabler and the district will be back again asking for more money to replace even more schools it has failed to maintain.

To determine which buildings should be abandoned or demolished, the consultant established an arbitrary baseline using an arbitrary weighting of four criteria: building condition, educational suitability, site condition and technological readiness. If a building scored below 70 (whatever that really means) then that building should be replaced. But if that baseline were changed to 60, then only one building would need to be replaced and that would be Roosevelt. Who determined 70?

A more realistic metric is to determine if it is a good investment to fix a building rather than replace it. On most buildings owned by the U.S. government, for example, replacement is justified only if the repair costs exceed 70 percent of the replacement value. An even stricter measure has been used by the state of Washington, which has used 80 percent as the cutline for its schools. Using these metrics, 4J could not justify any replacement since the repair costs for any of the buildings does not exceed 70 percent of the replacement cost (see figure 2).

Myth: New and bigger buildings improve performance

Reality: The two new consolidated elementary schools proposed in the study are much bigger than the ones they may replace. These schools would each enroll about 600 students — more students than any elementary school in Eugene. However, research into small elementary schools, which are generally defined by the Education Commission of the States as enrolling no more than 300-400 students, clearly demonstrates the value of smaller schools over their newer and larger counterparts.

Many districts are now returning to the small school model given the enormity of evidence in support of such schools. In early 2012, for instance, New York City School Chancellor Dennis Walcott reported on a study of 105 small schools and concluded that these schools “changed thousands of lives in New York City, across every race, gender and ethnicity — not only helping them graduate, but graduate ready for college. When we see a strategy with this kind of success, we owe it to our families to continue pursuing it aggressively.”

Academic Performance

While socioeconomic factors play a primary role in academic performance, a study of 293 public schools by the National Center for Education Statistics found that school size was the second best predictor of student performance and graduation

rates. Educational researcher Kathleen Cotton analyzed 103 studies of school size and found that the data overwhelmingly supported small schools because they have higher attendance rates, higher student achievement and less violence. She found that “small schools are superior to larger schools on most measures and equal to them on the rest. This holds true for both elementary and secondary students of all ability levels and in all kinds of settings.”

Researchers in New Mexico found that small schools improve graduation rates and student achievement because they counteract alienation, isolation and disconnection in part because such schools have less violence, crime and classroom disruptions. They also found that small schools enable low-income students to succeed at the same levels as students from more privileged backgrounds, which helps to narrow the achievement gap.

Teaching Performance

An extensive study of school size by educational expert Stuart Grauer found that small schools offer better teaching conditions. In small schools, teachers use a broader range of teaching styles, have greater connection with parents, have more opportunities to collaborate, and they have “higher job satisfaction and sense of responsibility for ongoing student learning.” Creating positive environments for 4J teachers should be a top priority.

Student Participation

Educational researcher Susan Black found that small schools create more opportunities for participation per capita — more students participate in more kinds of activities. And another study found that because small schools need a large percentage of students to fill each activity, they “engage a broader cross-section of students, helping reduce social and racial isolation.” In addition, researchers from Ohio University and Marshall University found that students who participate in activities and feel connected at school have higher achievement, are less likely to drop out, have higher self-esteem, attend school more regularly and have fewer behavior problems.

Parental Involvement

Numerous studies have found that small school parents are closer and have higher levels of parental involvement, which is a critical factor in student success. William Bogart of Case Western Reserve University concludes that one effect of consolidation may be that, by making it harder for parents to get involved, it harms the quality of schools: “It makes it more difficult for students to participate in after-school activities relative to the case where they can walk to and from the school.” Bogart also found that closures of neighborhood schools results in a property value decrease of 9.9 percent. This is a significant finding: The 4J proposals may reduce property values and much-needed property tax revenues.

accessible by wheelchairs. To fix all of these problems, the consultant estimated a \$21.9 million cost. A replacement school would cost \$32 million.

Camas Ridge Elementary

Built in 1949, Camas Ridge is admittedly no architectural gem, but that has not stopped teachers and parents from creating a very positive learning community. The depth of the consultant’s analysis is almost laughable when used to justify demolition. The 417-student school’s roof may have a leak over the gym, the single pane windows need to be replaced, some carpeting and paint are worn, the main electrical service, water lines and floor tiles are at the end of their service life, the boilers are old and energy inefficient, there is no air conditioning, many light fixtures are old with yellow lenses, and “a lot of walls with wood paneling” are a problem. To fix the problems with Camas Ridge, the district would need to spend roughly \$5 million. Replacement would cost about \$12.3 million.

Edison Elementary

Like Camas Ridge, teachers and parents at Edison have created an excellent learning environment for the school’s 346 students despite the building’s supposed flaws. Built in 1926, Edison’s deferred maintenance has led to the following problems identified by the consultant: older windows are single pane, some doors need paint and have old hardware, some toilet partitions are at end of their service life, classroom cabinets are showing some wear, some drain lines are slow, the boiler is at the end of its service life, the stair lift is slow, many classroom doors have large areas of glass, and many areas are not directly accessible by wheelchair. The consultants also claim that the main building has unspecified seismic concerns, which is not surprising for an older building. Engineers and architects have the technology to make appropriate and fiscally responsible seismic upgrades. Edison has a replacement cost of about \$12.6 million and a repair cost of approximately \$5.7 million.

I could go on describing the various

