

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

indicators of indoor air quality concerns. Sample analyses indicated one area of the facility with an elevated spore count, which the company recommended be addressed with a general cleaning of the space with an anti-bacterial detergent.

SOIL TESTING

Soil samples were collected in November from four areas at the perimeter of the Byrd Learning Center campus. These samples were analyzed for seven metals, nitrates and 49 volatile organic compounds. Laboratory analysis for nitrates showed no detection (ND) and analysis of all 49 volatile organic compounds showed no detection (ND). Laboratory analysis of metals found in the so

Q: If voted in, when would the sixth grade school start? I have heard next school year 2018 and I also heard 2020?

A: The board will review recommendations following Town Hall meetings. If the board supports the recommendation for a sixth grade intermediate school for all Area 1 students on the current campus of Aiken Middle, the school would open in fall of 2019.

Q: Where can I find research to support a sixth grade middle school concept?

A: We've shared some information about the success of sixth grade schools, namely Crossroads Intermediate School, throughout Town Hall Meetings. The benefits detailed include:

- Community-oriented philosophy for transition year between elementary and middle school.
- Intellectual growth: transition from concrete to abstract thinking.
- Focus on building student confidence and teamwork.
- Social-emotional development and support.
- Age- and developmentally appropriate activities, including those specifically designed activities for sixth graders who are not eligible to participate in middle school athletics.
- Elimination of social influence of older students

For information on how these schools are performing throughout the nation and about sixth grade students generally, the below articles have been published on this subject:

School for all Area 1 sixth-grade students helps to create opportunities for academic growth and to level the demographic imbalance while providing students with a more accurate representation in their school of the greater community.

Q: Are the Aiken Middle School parents going to feel good about our kids coming there or about their kids being bussed to Schofield and Kennedy?

A: We certainly don't want to speak for those parents, but, should that recommendation be supported by the board, we plan to provide opportunities for all parents to help plan the new sixth grade intermediate school together.

Q: So why aren't we providing additional resources to benefit lower performing schools without sacrificing my special needs child or the financial well-being of my family?

A: Additional federal and local resources have been made available to lower performing schools, including additional summer training for all professional staff. While gains have been made in Aiken's traditionally underperforming schools, the demographic composition of students attending those schools present numerous obstacles to sustained success.

Special needs students will in no way be sacrificed at the expense of these recommendations.

Q: How can you provide for the transportation concerns of parents who have multiple kids and now have a 6th grade option at the farthest school from the South side?

A: Transportation will be provided to students at their zoned school. School start and end times may need to be adjusted, as needed to accommodate parents transporting students to multiple schools. The campus of Aiken Middle School (the proposed location of a new Intermediate School Campus for all sixth grade students) is only 5.8 miles from Kennedy Middle and 3.1 miles from Schofield Middle.

Q: How would transportation for a sixth grade school work?

A: Preliminary transportation plans for transporting Area 1 students to a sixth grade only intermediate school have been developed and were shared with the community at the Town Hall Meeting at Aiken high School. All elementary school buses would pick up sixth grade intermediate school students, along with students in grades PK-5th. Seventh and eighth grade students would ride with high school students. Elementary school students would be dropped off first, then those buses would travel to the Intermediate School.

Q: I don't believe that we should be expected to give up any of our (Area 3) students, not one. Why are you rezoning Trolley Run to Area 1 schools?

A: Byrd Elementary School and Midland Valley High School are over 100% capacity and there is space for students in Area 1 schools. In addition, due to the close proximity of the Trolley Run neighborhood to Area 1 schools, a large number of students have been approved for transfer and already attend schools in Area 1. Student transfers for the Trolley Run neighborhood include 14 high school students (12 at Aiken High), three middle school students (all at Schofield) and 20 elementary school students (seven at Aiken Elementary and an additional seven at other Area 1 schools).

Q: Have parents/homeowners in Trolley Run been surveyed to better understand their support or opposition to rezoning?

A: Parents and homeowners throughout the entire county have been invited to provide feedback on recommendations. Families in the Trolley Run neighborhood haven't been specifically targeted for their feedback, but have been invited to participate in ongoing conversations and requests for input as have all citizens.

Q: What does Grandfathering mean?

A:

Q: Why not grandfather younger siblings not in school yet?

A: That was the sticking point because that is the biggest and most direct inconvenience we're asking of parents located within that swath of land. Proximity wise, every way you cut it besides this one took Chukker Creek as a school even further away from the district average for poverty numbers. Please let us hear your feedback and we will absolutely look at alternative means to achieve greater balance and attendance numbers for the school.

Q: How can we justify moving students from a highly ranked elementary school to a lower one?

A: Our goal is to guarantee a high quality educational experience for ALL students. With a more proportional distribution of students from families with financial security and those less fortunate, we anticipate greater academic success for all students.

There are a multitude of articles written regarding the benefits to all students of more diverse schools. The below is a small sampling of published articles on this subject:

A: Researchers have documented that students' exposure to other students who are different from themselves is socially, emotionally and academically beneficial. We believe diversity, simply defined as comprehensive inclusion and tolerance, is also beneficial. The federal definition of poverty is established by the percentage of students who receive subsidized school lunch. That is the primary reference to school lunches. This is not a race issue; the issues are related to overcrowding and a lack of socio-economic balance. Unfortunately, people tend to couple poverty with race. In Aiken County, we have many families of all races who meet the federal definition described above. We receive federal funding based on the number of students throughout the county. The recommendations will not provide additional funding but would require that we split the finite funding for elementary schools by 20 instead of 19, if adopted.

Q: Should my kids go to a different school so we can balance something for everyone else? Or are we in the right schools because we are a minority? In my mind, why does it even matter? I'm a person with a family, living my life, making ends meet. Who cares what color or gender or religion my kids are? All lives matter. ALL. So what makes it important to you where my kids go to school?

A: The main concern we are trying to address is utilization, simply stated – overcrowding of schools. In addition to utilization, we are striving for a greater level of demographic balance between schools of the same grade span. You are correct, color, gender, or religion have no bearing at all. Chukker Creek Elementary School is densely populated and new developments are underway in the current attendance zone. The recommendations are designed as options for consideration.

Q: How can the Board justify having students/parents go past elementary/middle schools/high schools to go to their zoned school? Is that safe?

A: We don't believe that there is a safety concern with parents driving by a school to attend the school to which their children are zoned. This is already commonly done in our school district. The recommendations actually create more contiguous zones, largely eliminating that practice in many areas.

Q: How much did the Aiken County School District pay Cropper GIS and McKibben Demographics for the realignment study and where did those funds come from?

A: Approximately \$60,000 from the general fund.

Q: Why aren't the needs created by additional students offset by additional tax revenues.

A: Schools are funded on a per pupil (per student) basis. South Carolina does not provide any funding for facilities improvements or new construction.

Q: You said no decisions have been made, how can I stop you (Dr. Alford)?

A: No decisions have been made. We are seeking community input on these recommendations. Any feedback will be shared with our school board members prior to their decision in late January. How can you stop it? Let us hear from you. Visit our website. Call your board member. Email me (Dr. Alford: salford@acpsd.net).

Q: What are you doing to ensure that Ridge Spring has strong educational programs like that of other high schools?

A: Ridge Spring has expanded college-course offerings available virtually through Aiken Tech to lower grades. In addition Ridge Spring has expanded the number of Advanced Placement classes from one to five. Through partnership with Wagener Salley, Ridge Spring students have access to additional CATE (Career & Technology Education) courses on their campus.

Q: There seems like a lot of focus and attention on North Augusta? What is going to be done to support our area (Area 5; Silver Bluff)?

A: The need is in North Augusta right now as the schools are overcrowded. We are addressing those needs. When there is a need here (Silver Bluff), the need will be addressed.

Q: Are the decisions of board members weighted?

A: No. there are nine members; everyone gets a vote.

Q: Have you had any study or input on the impact to the county in terms of traffic and local economy?

A: While a traffic and economics study has not been commissioned on behalf of the school district as it relates to the recommendation for attendance line shifts, recommendations have been shared with local officials and their input and feedback requested.

Q: Will minutes and our questions be posted? What about people that can't make the meetings?

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capacity). Adding onto it usually not the best use of public funds.

We have long stated that we will not have ~~and~~ have not schools and we are committed to that. The differences now between our three largest high schools (North Augusta, Aiken and South Aiken) in terms of facilities will present a challenge to that commitment.

While South Aiken is not among the ~~list~~ of schools recommended to be included as part of the recommendation for the \$90 million bond referendum to fund current needs, renovations and improvements to that campus, and others, ~~will~~ likely become part of our cyclic maintenance and facility improvements plans.

Mr. and Mrs. Dalbec

We appreciated your comments Tuesday evening and thank you for taking the time to address our school board with your concerns.

Unlike the format of our Tow9suour

The demography study did include projected growth for the next 10 years for all of Aiken County. Tangible, concrete data on our community's growth, I believe, was necessary to demonstrate the impact of housing growth to our schools. Over the holiday break, our district staff attained all permits pulled for the year 2017 and color coded the document by current area lines and proposed new area lines in order to provide further clarity on the recommendations.

We previously noted that our district did not commission its own traffic and economic study, though many of the recommendations from the professional demographer we did commission are

Mr. Ben Harm,

We appreciated your comments Tuesday evening and thank you for taking the time to address our school board with your and Wells' ideas and concerns.

improvements to that campus, and others, will very likely become part of our cyclical maintenance and facility improvement plans in order to ensure as equitable as possible facilities for all learners.

In closing, I hope that you and Wells find that the information included here provides greater clarity on the issues at hand and the rationale behind the proposed solutions. Should you have additional questions or concerns, please know that I am open to discussing any matter of importance to your family and school community.

We sincerely appreciate your involvement in these difficult realignment discussions and remain hopeful that through open dialogue we are able to meet the needs of all families who entrust our district to educate their children.

Mr. Burt Carey,

Thank you for taking the time to address our school board on behalf of South Meadows residents Tuesday evening with your collective concerns regarding realignment of your neighborhood.

Unlike the format of our Town Hall Meetings where we engage in open discussion and public questions and answers with the community, public input at school board meetings typically do not lend us the opportunity to respond immediately to citizens.

The misunderstanding you voiced that recommendations were rooted in an effort to secure additional federal funding was a circumstance where immediate clarification was necessary. K-12 educational funding is complex, however I believe that our Federal Programs Director explained Title 1 funding well.

To reiterate and further detail how Title 1 funding works:

The state department allocates Title 1 funds to districts based on poverty information. The total sum of funding is based on the number of students in K-12th students in Aiken County Public Schools who are on free and reduced lunch. The total sum of money for last year was roughly \$7.5 million for our district.

The money our District allocates to schools is based on which free and reduced lunch students are at those schools.

The law provides that districts provide more Title I funding to schools in greater need. In Aiken, we give a higher per-pupil amount to higher poverty schools.

Title 1 Funds are utilized by our schools in accordance with their greatest needs and in a variety of ways. Some use the funding for additional teachers to reduce class sizes, for intervention programs to support struggling students, activities to increase parent involvement, or instructional materials and supplies. Others use the additional funds to supplement educational programs, technology, and strategic tutoring efforts (after school, Saturday Sessions, and certified tutors during the day to provide intervention). While some Title 1 funds are allocated at

the school level for professional learning and teacher training, we have a district-wide focus on systemic growth and most schools find those district provided trainings fitting for their educators' professional growth.

We believe that the parent involvement at Chukker Creek is outstanding. However, it is certainly not the only school with highly engaged and involved volunteers. East Aiken School of the Arts, for example, has 40-50 community members who volunteer their time each year as part of their Rotary Reader Program. These volunteers on average give 400 hours of their time to work with students during the course of a year. In addition, 115 parents at East Aiken are trained parent volunteers.

We are certainly proud of our teacher-generated guaranteed and viable curriculum in Aiken County Public Schools. A relevant and consistently utilized curriculum, as you have noted, is not the only key to student success. However, it is an excellent indicator of systemic efforts to ensure equity and access across all elementary, middle and high schools. November 2014 was the last state department generated report card rating for schools and district. Beginning in the 2016-17 school year, state and federal report cards were combined and another overall rating for schools and districts will not be available until Fall of 2018.

While we too are certainly proud of the academic achievements of Chukker Creek Elementary. Please note, however, that it is not Aiken's lone National School of Excellence. On the elementary level, Chukker Creek joins in that honor with Aiken Elementary and Hammond Hill Elementary schools. It is our goal that these schools and others with high achievement serve as model programs, rather than pockets of excellence, as we pursue excellence district-wide.

We sincerely appreciate your involvement in these difficult realignment discussions and remain hopeful that through open dialogue we are able to meet the needs of all families who entrust our district to educate their children.

Q: You say demographic balancing is a recommendation from a consultant. I still have not reviewed your consultant's recommendation. Where is the study with the free and reduced lunch data? Where are you getting your numbers? The demographic study does not include any statistics on free and reduced lunch. How can you trust the numbers are not being skewed? How can we as a community provide options and input when we are not properly informed?

A: The study containing both the recommendations from the consultant as well as the free and reduced lunch data is available on our website, acpsd.net, under the Town Hall channel/tab, Demography Study, Restructuring Options for Consideration, <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://www.acpsd.net//cms/lib/SC/02209457/Centricity/Domain/6392/Aiken+SC+Options+Analysis+with+Maps+171103.pdf>.

The free and reduced lunch numbers for students enrolled in Aiken County Public Schools are readily available to us as those families apply yearly and are qualified for free/reduced cost

meals. The free and reduced lunch data appears on page four of that document. A screenshot of the free and reduced lunch numbers is included below.

Q: How can you vote to rezone at this time when almost 1200 new homes with permits were not included in your maps? This only includes the first phase. That means more phases will follow which are also not considered.

A:

A: We are not able to determine the demographic impact of a community that has yet to be occupied by students or families. The recommendation for a new elementary and a new middle school between Graniteville and North Augusta was made with the intention to relieve overcrowding and account for new growth in those areas. The feasibility of that school hinges upon identifying and securing a funding source for the project. Several funding mechanisms have been shared as possibilities; most require a taxpayer vote.

Q: Since overcrowding is not an issue, why is the school district refusing to produce an

A: Our board sought the professional expertise of demographers in drafting recommendations for community feedback. While our district did not commission its own study, many of the recommendations from the professional demographer we did commission are likely to have a positive impact on Whiskey Road traffic.

Q: With the sixth grade intermediate school concept, will you have 11 year olds riding on the bus with 18 year old adults for longer periods of time on unreliable buses with no supervision? Not to mention it will be earlier and darker while stopping at two schools. This is a major safety concern that has not been addressed.

A: As part of our current operations, students from multiple grade spans share bus routes. Preliminary transportation plans for the recommended new Intermediate School for sixth grade students has sixth graders sharing the route with elementary school students. Should the board vote in favor of that recommendation, transportation, planning and other logistics would begin immediately and be finalized over a 19-month period in collaboration with the community.

Q: How does the sixth grade academy impact my children? How does it benefit them academically and socially. How do we avoid pitfalls of other sixth grade academies?

A: Dr. DeeDee Washington, our Chief Officer of Instruction, joined Mr. Jess Hutchinson, Principal of Crossroads Intermediate School, during our Board Workshop January 6. Some of the information discussed in that open-to-the-public study session included:

Academic benefits such as the ability to increase course offerings were part of the discussion. Additionally, with a single grade configuration, our qualified educators can provide additional supports to help students transition from concrete to abstract thinking.

Social benefits discussed included the ability for students to participate on an equal level in more age and developmentally appropriate activities, the elimination of the social influence of older

A: Renovating Chukker Creek and South Aiken High School are both options. However, allocating funding for that purpose at this time may not be the best possible use of public funds as we have nearby schools that were built prior to the construction of both Chukker Creek and South Aiken. Chukker Creek and South Aiken are also not yet at capacity.

For the last several years, Dr. Sean Alford, Superintendent, has insisted that we will not have have and have not schools. Our District remains committed to that. The differences now between our three largest high schools (North Augusta, Aiken and South Aiken) in terms of facilities will present a challenge to that commitment.

While South Aiken is not among the list of schools that are part of the recommendation for the \$90 million bond referendum to fund current needs, renovations and improvements to that campus, and others, it will very likely become part of our cyclic maintenance and facility improvement plans in order to ensure as equitable as possible facilities for all learners.