

Public Input Repurposing Columbus Elementary Discussion

AASD Board Meeting

Mon, Dec 9, 2024 6:00PM

Kay Eggert (Board President) 05:27

Next is an opportunity for public input. We do have a number of people have signed up to speak. This is one of the ways that the Board provides an opportunity to hear from community members, and so I, probably—since some of you may not have been here before to address the board, I'm going to just run through our summary of the guidelines that we asked you all to keep in mind when you're when you're speaking. Individuals may speak for up to three minutes, and we will have a timer that will be going so you can keep track of your time. I didn't check, but if there is an individual who is speaking on behalf of the group, then you can speak for five minutes. If you run out of time, any additional comments can be submitted in writing to the board, and all board members will get a copy of those comments.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 06:26

The board respectfully requests that speakers refrain from presenting comments that introduce complaints or concerns that are directed toward or identify individual staff members or individual students. Such personnel related and student related matters implicate a variety of rights that require careful attention, and the district has established alternative procedures for appropriately addressing such concerns. If a speaker does present a complaint about an individual staff member or inappropriate information about individual students, we will just ask that you conclude your remarks.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 07:09

And the Wisconsin Open Meetings law allows only brief discussion of topics that are not listed on the agenda; therefore, we may not be able to fully address comments that are shared tonight. So, with that, the first speaker, speaker who has signed up is **[Rebecca Z.]**. There should be a microphone at your spot, and just make sure the light is on green.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 07:34

Great. Thank you so much. I feel like that Bernie Sanders meme, once again, I am coming to you to talk about Columbus Elementary. In February of 2022 I spoke before the Board of Education on the proposal to close Columbus Elementary. At that time, 85% of Columbus students were economically disadvantaged. Despite that, they were performing 46% higher in math compared to similar students across the district. There are many benefits to small neighborhood school models. The Board of Education decided against closure at that point.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 08:16

In the last two and a half years, the Columbus PTO has worked to rebuild a new playground, establish a fund at the Appleton Education Foundation, and shredded the supply list twice to efficiently and equitably equip students with back-to-school supplies. Yet many of us continue to hear from AASD administration and staff that it was a matter of time before Columbus would be closed. This occurred in both private conversations and public neighborhood meetings.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 08:40

It's not a surprise that enrollment has dropped amid these conversations. Let me ask you, if you were looking for employment within AASD, would you choose to work at a school slated to be closed? If you had young learners,

would you want them to have to potentially start at a new school next year? Further, Columbus's attendance area is unusually tiny. You can literally see the Columbus building from another school's attendance area. If enrollment is a concern, what have we been doing to fix it? Why is closing a school easier than shifting an attendance area?

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 08:44

In 2024 I came before the Board of Education again after receiving a letter that cross categorical special education services would no longer be provided at Columbus, and it was recommended my family attend another school. This letter came after charter school and school choice enrollment closures, limiting my family and many other families' options. This proposal moved forward, and my children began enrollment in another neighborhood school.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 09:35

I'm still a current member of the Columbus PTO finishing out my term last Monday, we received a letter that the conversation about closing Columbus was starting again. The first listening session was three days later, and the topic will come before the board in a week. This is unacceptable and reads as if the fast-paced process is designed to minimize families' ability to give input. For the third time in as many years, drastic structural changes are being proposed with little time to organize neighbors. We know the changes to other enrollment areas have been discussed over periods of months and years. Why are these families deserving of the ability to process and respond to increased options within their neighborhoods, but not families facing school closure? I trust the board will carefully consider that question.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 10:20

Moving forward, I'm asking that you consider these points throughout the discussion: one, that the Columbus school site continue to serve children in our neighborhood in some way. Many neighbors find the current proposal to repurpose the school site as an alternative education space unacceptable as it won't benefit neighborhood children. That change would propagate a loss of identity and an important neighborhood asset. It's not about the physical building but a space where community members can gather that kids feel ownership over and systems that generate community connection. Please repurpose in a way that benefits the people who live around it. Walkability, community building, and localized culture is extremely important. The current proposal doesn't meet any of our neighborhood needs.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 11:03

Point two, be creative and generative. Neighbors are working on short notice to generate ideas that can enhance educational opportunity for our children. There are strong ideas emerging already. Make Columbus a school site for 4k-ers to take advantage of the small facilities and serve as a connection point to neighbors with young families. Another option is placing a charter school in the space. Many of our great charter schools are located on the edges of town where transportation barriers keep families from being able to enroll. But this would create opportunity.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 11:33

A third option, consider a single school, dual campus model, making Columbus in early childhood slash primary site and Edison and intermediate site. The Columbus building has great positioning to our newly remodeled library, as well as numerous art and education spaces in downtown that can further enhance its activation. In a time of disconnection from community in the wake of the pandemic, lean into a model that strengthens two organized neighborhoods.

Rebecca Z. (Resident) 11:59

When I was a student in AASD, it was at the start of the wave of charter schools. They brought innovation to our community as well as curious students who chose to open enroll here. We're at a new crossroads, even as the districts around us closed schools, limiting options for students as they fall into a scarcity mindset. But I don't believe that's in line with our values as a district. There's much we can explore here and ways to pivot away from a deficit focused decision-making process to something that is innovative with robust public support. Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 12:31

Thank you. Next, [Lanie F.]. Sorry.

Lanie F. (Resident) 12:44

Hi, everybody. Do I just push through? I don't even know. What's that? Okay.

Lanie F. (Resident) 12:52

Hi, I'm an Edison parent, and I don't have as beautifully prepared remarks, but I just wanted to come and say a few things about how things are going for our school and also to just sort of ask some questions of the board. I moved here from New Orleans a few years ago, and New Orleans is an all charter network of schools where we don't have any neighborhood schools, and we were pretty excited to come here. I went to Edison. My husband went to Columbus, and now our child goes to Edison.

Lanie F. (Resident) 13:20

One thing that we saw in New Orleans when there was school choice is that the choices were not always equal. And what ended up happening was the Southern Poverty Law Center came and had a giant lawsuit for the entire city of New Orleans and the state of Louisiana for not allowing the same type of choice for all types of students. And I'm kind of shocked to see that still happening, to see that kind of thing happening in Appleton. I know students who live in my neighborhood who are given all sorts of choices. Their parents have cars. They are able to research different things, and they've chosen—sorry—different charter schools, or they've chosen their neighborhood school. I also have a neighbor whose child has Down syndrome, and they had to fight to keep her at the neighborhood school where she could walk to. Students with special needs don't have the same choices as all other students, and I don't understand why that's acceptable in our city.

Lanie F. (Resident) 14:12

Edison received a bunch of students from Columbus this year who have a lot of special needs. A lot of those students had no choice. They were not—they didn't come to our school because they wanted to be at Edison. A lot of those students came there because their program was shut down at their school. I don't understand why this is an acceptable situation in our city. This is public school. Why did the charter schools have a different number of—they have very different demographics. Edison has—25% of our students have IEPs. That's not something you see at the charter schools. I don't understand why this is something that the city is celebrating, that we have school choice for some and not for others. Thank you very much.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 14:51

Thank you. Next. [Keara K.].

Keara K. (Resident) 14:57

I can just start? Hi [Keara K.], I live at [XXXXXX] so I am two doors down from Columbus. We moved here in 2020, and I was looking forward to sending the child that I now have to our neighborhood school. Transparently, she's not even three years old yet; we don't know what her educational needs will be. But the other thing that my family really values about having a school nearby is that we know that there is a place where the community can

come together. We know that our neighbors, who may not be as fortunate as we are, are able to have access to a great resource that's walkable. As you've heard in other comments tonight, that that can be a really important point. If parents don't have the flexibility to just be carting their kids all over town—right?—they have the ability to send their kids a safe distance to where they want to go and be educated.

Keara K. (Resident) 15:56

What I really like to do is understand from the board, you know, what is the value of us having this conversation year over year? We keep taking steps as a community and as a group of community volunteers to try to secure the future of this school, right? The most recent one being the significant investment we made in a new playground. And yet, once again, here we are needing to come and defend Columbus. So I think we're a little tired. I think we feel a little bit targeted and frustrated. It feels like you're saying my community isn't deserving of a local school. It feels like you're saying my neighbors aren't deserving of a local school. It feels like you're saying my family is not deserving of a local school. So, I really ask and echo that we try to find a solution here where Columbus is used as that community gathering point that can bring us together, because right now, it feels like we're being denied something, rather than celebrating and leveraging an asset that we have that's right here and accessible to my neighbors and to my family. Thank You.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 16:59

Thank you. Next. **[Sandy G.]**.

Sandy G. (Resident) 17:22

My name is Sandy Gibson. I live at **[XXXXXX]**. So, we're just right around the corner from Columbus, and I have a almost four-year-old and a baby on the way. We were looking forward to having a neighborhood school that we could send them to and walk to, and I think just get to know, like, other families more in the community, that just naturally happens when your kids go to a neighborhood school, because you see them at drop off or pickup, and it's just naturally easier to make friendships. So, we were looking forward to that. When we heard of all this, I guess I just wanted to come and share my support and hope that we can come figure out something, an alternative plan, so families in the neighborhood can send their kids to Columbus in some form or fashion. So, with that, I just want to thank everyone else that spoke, and thank you all for your time.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 18:25

Thank you. Next, **[Shannon F.]**.

Shannon F. (Resident) 18:46

Sorry. Thank you for receiving me, and thanks for everyone who spoke before and who's going to speak after me. I—do we have to mention where we live? Okay, well, I live in Appleton, and I'm in the Edison district, and I am a parent of a child who is in fifth grade there. Coincidentally, I did go to Columbus elementary when I was growing up and—in addition to Huntley and Lincoln at the time, as it was known at the time. But when I was at Columbus for fifth and sixth grade in the mid to late 80s, I was in Apex, which is now TAG, and the kids at Edison were being bused over to Columbus one day a week for our Apex classes because Columbus had recently completed a state of the art—at the time— addition to the school. And, you know, it's a sort of a—it was a milestone for, you know, a building that's iconic in another way, being that it's one of the oldest buildings— school buildings—in the city.

Shannon F. (Resident) 20:18

So anyway, fast forward to today—that was kind of a special feeling that we all had at Columbus, being in a in a place that had been, you know, invested in, in that way. So currently I'm volunteering—part of a consortium of parent volunteers. I come in every Monday morning to help teach math to fifth graders at Edison. And of course,

some of those kids are kids who have been moved over from Columbus, or are now formerly enrolled at Columbus, who are now enrolled at Edison. And I think in the in the, you know, the spirit of the community and the spirit of the neighborhood at Edison, we have embraced the incoming transplanted kids with open arms. But we do have concerns about the prospect of Columbus closing for similar reasons that have been already mentioned and that probably will be mentioned.

Shannon F. (Resident) 21:34

I think—I'm an architect as well, so architects are very concerned about the urban fabric of the city from the standpoint of physical infrastructure, but it's that, how that infrastructure actually anchors the community that's very important. And I think from that—from my perspective, both as a parent, as a as a community member, as an architect, I feel that closing a school in the center of the city could have potentially disastrous consequences for the surrounding urban fabric of the neighborhood. Socioeconomically, the physical infrastructure, the real estate, the other infrastructural systems could suffer as a result of the school closure. So, I ask you to think very, very carefully before you implement whatever next moves you're planning to implement, because this could be a very short sighted and myopic thing that could detrimentally affect the city. Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 22:44

Thank you. Next, Oliver Zornow.

Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 22:49

I'm gonna keeping my time today. Hi. My name is Oliver Zornow. Today, I just want to—I'm speaking today as a father of children attending Edison Elementary and as an AASD taxpayer. My comments today are mine and don't necessarily reflect the views of organizations of which I'm affiliated with.

Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 23:10

After months of community conversations about the potential boundary reconfiguration on the north side, I was surprised last week to receive a letter that was sent to not only me, but to hundreds of families across the center of the city discussing—explaining changes that would be proposed tonight to all four boundaries of four elementary schools, including the elimination of one entirely. In the spirit of my previous comments, I welcome the engagement to address the seemingly illogical attendance boundaries that plague the central city. However, the process to this point seems to have generated solutions that exacerbate rather than address the key concerns that schools and families in the region have.

Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 23:49

Number one, parking and drop off. I think every school hears about it. I think we hear about it all the time. With increased numbers of students being separated by busy streets like Richmond Street in the current proposal and their neighborhood schools, more families will have to drive their students to crowded drop off lines and pick up lines, which are dangerous. This danger will increase to a general decrease in the amount of students walking to school as families fear the safety of their child, even if they live in close proximity to the school.

Oliver Zornow (Building For Kids) 24:16

Number three, the current proposal limits facility flexibility in the future. Demographics in neighborhoods change. It's the whole reason that we have built Sandy Slope and the conversations have gone on about the potential growth on the north side. So, we've built a school that will operate next year at about 50% capacity planning for future growth because demographics do change. That Sandy Slope attendance area is about 1/10th the density of our neighborhood. Our neighborhood is 8,000 people per square mile. It is the densest part of the county, and so if we look at the attendance pattern over just a few years, it seems like this decision is being made based on a few years of enrollment numbers—enrollment numbers that are complicated by many of the

things that speakers before hand have talked about. And really the current proposal doesn't seem to understand the need for square footage to accommodate those changes in demographics. There are over 300 preschool children living in our neighborhood right now, according to the latest census, and the current combination model relies on the fact that the current enrollment is down at both schools. And so, this is our chance, I think, to really transform education in the heart of our city. I'd like to ensure that we build a robust process that generates options that better meet the needs of our kids across this section of the district and really focuses on how do we add, how are we generating, and how are we, as Rebecca mentioned, how are we using this as a moment to think about how Appleton can be different, and how Appleton can differentiate itself and demonstrate investment and increased options for families living in the densest part of town? Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 25:54

Thank you. Next. **[Sarah R.]**.

Sarah R. (Resident) 26:07

Good evening. My name is Sarah Reimer, a parent with children attending Edison Elementary. I'm here to voice my concerns about the proposed repurposing of Columbus Elementary and the transition of its students to Edison Elementary. I fully support the request from Columbus families, and I urge you to carefully evaluate the impacts of the proposed changes, particularly on the most vulnerable and underserved students in our district.

Sarah R. (Resident) 26:33

As you are aware, the district shut down Special Education Support at Columbus, forcing students to move schools. My understanding is that around 20 of those students came to Edison at the beginning of this year. The transition has been challenging and continues to be difficult for everyone. The district failed to account for additional time and resources needed to manage such a significant change. As a result, Edison, its educators, and students are not set up for success, and urgent intervention is needed to ensure a successful conclusion to this year.

Sarah R. (Resident) 27:08

My children are facing daily challenges that make learning more difficult than ever before. My daughter, who would benefit from extra reading support, is struggling to get the help she needs due to overwhelm teachers and staff. The lack of resources has placed a tremendous burden on teachers who are left to manage classroom disruptions on their own while still providing quality instruction. While the educators at Edison are truly outstanding, it is unreasonable to continue asking them to go above and beyond year after year without the support they need from the district. Given these challenges, I believe it would be irresponsible to approve the proposed changes for next year without first providing additional resources that are lacking from the influx of students this year. Specifically, I request that Edison immediately receive the following: increase Special Education paraprofessionals beyond the district standard calculation. Currently 25% of Edison students require special education support, a much higher percentage than the rest of the district. A full-time counselor and a full-time social worker are also needed. Edison's current counselor works only 24 hours per week, and the social worker's available just 16 hours per week. Counseling services decreased from the year prior. Research and our experience show that students facing a school change often experience increased stress, anxiety, and grief, making the support critical for the mental health of our students.

Sarah R. (Resident) 28:40

Please listen to the concerns of the Columbus families about their schools closure and immediately provide the increased support Edison needs. I count on you to ensure the district is held accountable for the impact their decisions have made on students. Without a guarantee of these critical resources today, Edison cannot continue

this year or withstand another year of change without further harming the well-being of our students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 29:09

Thank you. Next, [Martin O.].

Martin O. (Resident) 29:28

Uh, [Martin O. at XXXXX]. I'm a Edison parents. My son is a kindergartner at Edison right now. Um, I want to first thank the—your time and I thank, and I want to thank all the teachers, the staff, and the administrators, for all the work that they do in and day out. I know they work really hard, both at Edison, but also at Columbus too.

Martin O. (Resident) 29:48

I come too for concerns about the closure of Columbus, but also for what may be to come beyond that, and that's where my concern comes for. I've been in education for almost 20 years, so I recognize the work that the board must do at times in order to kind of balance approaches for education that deal with social—efficiency, social mobilization, democratic ideals, and I also recognize the work that teachers and administrators must do to balance issues of equity, achievement gaps, and also efficiencies related to programs and services, to make sure that we're doing what's best for kids. Success for kids every day, right?

Martin O. (Resident) 30:24

And so, when I'm thinking about what I do to measure that success, I think about what we do to build relationships and also to measure results. How do we do relationships and results? And one of the concerns I have is about this process, because, like some of these other parents—again, I'm an Edison parent. I'm not a Columbus parent. I'm an Edison parent. I have concerns about the process because process like this I'm not sure if we're positively impacting relationships with families in a way that we could do better. I know that these families have been in limbo for too long, and I think that we need to create a process for which that we decide that we evaluate buildings and that we that do reallocate enrollment elsewhere. That process is really important. That's how we build relationships with families and community members.

Martin O. (Resident) 31:04

The other part is results. So, when making considerations about things like this, we need to think about what would be the impact for that for kids. Is repurposing a building and sending them somewhere else to make sure that we have kind of a one stop shop for something else, does that necessarily increase results for other kids? I did most of my graduate work down Milwaukee, in Milwaukee public schools. And work that I, that I know suggests that no, not necessarily, and while that there are some individual specific times, in most cases, not necessarily. And my concern is a caution for the board that I want to make sure we keep neighborhood schools please. I believe that neighborhood schools is a bedrock for democratic ideals, and there is no way that we can justify efficiency. There is no efficiency in democratic ideals when we teach those to our kids. And the best way that we can do that is through neighborhood schools and then make sure that we can all work together to solve common problems, rather than dividing out throughout the district.

Martin O. (Resident) 32:07

Democratic ideals is not efficiency, but it's what I believe is one of the best things we can do for kids. And when making decisions like this, I urge you to look at the results and see if the decisions that you're going to make impacts kids for success every day. Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 32:21

Thank you. Next, [Brianna C.]. Is your microphone on? Okay, do you want to try it again.

Brianne C. (Resident) 32:41

All right, hi. My name is [Brianne C.]. I live on State Street in the historic central neighborhood in Appleton. I actually brought you all something, so you can take one and pass it on. They are our most recent neighborhood newsletter, and you're welcome to attend to any of the things going on, so you can check that out. But most importantly, you'll see on the front, there's a little map, and that designates the boundaries of our neighborhood. So, we're part of the city's neighborhood neighborhoods program, and, yeah, as part of that program, we have to have boundaries. So just to show you that, because this is, you know, relevant to the division that is being proposed for boundaries for Columbus.

Brianne C. (Resident) 33:21

So first I just want to say, you know that ABS Appleton Bilingual School, which is at Zion across the street from Columbus, we already know, is going to Huntley next year. We have multiple families in historic central neighborhood that have children that attend there. My mine are some. And so that's already a pretty sad thing for our neighborhood. It's going to kind of tear a little bit of the fabric, a little bit out of the connection, a little bit of the energy out of our neighborhood. And so, it's, you know, having the idea that Columbus would lose all of our neighborhood kids, the other neighborhood kids that attend Columbus next year, would be hard. So, I would like you to maybe just think about that in your own neighborhood. You know, and maybe you don't live in a very dense neighborhood, but we do live in a dense neighborhood. So, you know, the houses are kind of close together. The streets are in a gridded fashion.

Brianne C. (Resident) 34:09

And so that neighborhood itself close to downtown already kind of doesn't allow for a lot of organic, like, neighborhood community building, because we have busy streets. We have—you think about Richmond, it's really sad to see, you see kids playing on at their houses on Richmond, and they have these tiny little yards because the street has had to be expanded over the years for people on the north side to travel in and out, and so they—and on the north side and south side, whatever, they might have bigger yards, backyards butting up to each other. We have a lot of fences in our backyards. My point is our neighborhood is just probably a little bit more challenging than a lot to create organic community building and connection between kids and between families.

Brianne C. (Resident) 34:54

And so, imagine in your mind, even if you don't live in a neighborhood like we do that two school—two schools, boom, all those neighborhood kids just aren't there anymore. Just in one year. That's a that's—that is a big deal for our neighborhood.

Brianne C. (Resident) 35:12

So, so I guess one point is maybe, you know—I think we all have a lot of a lot of respect for what you do, and we understand there are very hard decisions, and a lot of those come and a lot of those come down to finances. And we understand that. And you know, also know that, like we want to support public schools too. So, we want to be partners and support y'all, and so that exists too. But maybe this timeline isn't as strategic and planned out for the benefit of all of the components involved, especially the children that will be affected.

Brianne C. (Resident) 35:49

So, what is presented tonight will be—I think, later to you, if you're not already familiar, we heard from Mr. Hartjes a couple days ago, is there's this like platter of an option for Columbus to kind of meld into Edison, for the kids to go there, Columbus become a site for alternative programs. Well, we have a few other platters that we want to present to you. So, um, so one of those platters would be maybe Edison and Columbus combined,

and we use the amazing, small gym facility, the cozy uh classrooms, the wide hallways, the new playground that has a lot of equipment for two-plus. A lot of elementary schools don't have equipment for two-plus. They have equipment for five, ages five-plus. And maybe Columbus becomes the 3k/4k kindergarten site, and Edison becomes the first through fifth grade site. Maybe it's a partnership school. How innovative would that be in the city of Appleton to really take this issue that so many districts are facing, but instead of kind of doing status quo and throwing them into a bigger school, maybe we create something innovative and have a dual school model.

Brianne C. (Resident) 36:53

Another platter to present to you is, yeah, we have these really cool charter schools, some of them, unfortunately, which are pretty unattainable for people to attend because of transportation. Montessori school, definitely one of those. Maybe Montessori moves in. Maybe Montessori expands and moves in. That would at least provide kids in our neighborhood still the opportunity to attend there. Okay? And then the other option, which—I know there's some funding issues with plumbing that might exist, but maybe we can come up with it—is it becomes the hub, the party central for little kids. So, we've got 3k. We've got 4k, just a big hub, and that also ensures that kids in our neighborhood get to attend school there. So, thank you for listening, and I appreciate all the work you guys have ahead of you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 37:39

Thank you. [Char S.].

Char T.S (Resident) 37:51

Hello. My name is [Char T.S.]. I'm—I live at [XXXXX], so kind of kitty corner from Columbus. I've lived there for about 25 years. Chose to live there because I wanted a neighborhood school for my children. All four of my kids have gone through, and I wouldn't change it for the world. I can't imagine the downtown that I live in without Columbus there. If we are having all of this influx of housing and development and wanting people to come downtown, wanting people to live there, and now we're removing a school from all of that influx of energy and excitement and families coming, it doesn't make sense to me. There's got to be a way in which we can utilize Columbus for our children, to make it safe for them to go to school there, to know that they're walking just a few blocks away, and maybe they can see their house from the playground, and how cool is that? And they know that they're safe and that's where they're going to be going to school.

Char T.S (Resident) 38:56

I know that there's a lot of ideas that were presented. I definitely am on board for combining some sort of resources with Columbus and Edison, but to close that school—close Columbus—I think would be a detriment to downtown when we're really trying to rebuild that and get folks to be to be coming into our into our town. So please consider very carefully what you're doing to our neighborhood. Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 39:29

Thank you. That's the end of the list of people who had signed up ahead of time to speak, but it's not too late. Is anyone else in the audience wanting to still speak with the board, to the board?

Allison U. (Resident) 39:48

My name—I'm good to go? My name is [Allison U.]. I live a block and a half away from Columbus. Our kids go to Appleton Bilingual School. School. And let me just walk you through what we were choosing when we were choosing schools for my son several years ago. We are lucky enough to live in a location with three schools within a four-block radius. So we have St Paul, where our kids went to daycare, and then Columbus, and ABS. And ABS was the one we agreed on. But to have three schools where our kids can walk to safely, is amazing. And that's one of the things I love about living in my neighborhood is the proximity to so many resources. And so, I

would ask you just consider very carefully what Columbus does for the neighborhood and the safety of our schools. So granted, our kids don't go to Columbus, but it's really nice to be able to send our kids out the door and know that they're safely going to make it to school a block and a half away. And there would definitely be some logistical changes. And we think about our neighbors down the street that also send their kids to Columbus and are able to send them walking. So just be careful when you make your decisions, knowing that it affects our neighborhood, and it's a neighborhood I care very deeply about. Thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 41:09

Thank you. Anyone else? Last chance.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 41:14

Okay, then, first of all, thank you to everyone who shared your thoughts and your concerns. It's very helpful, as you know, for us to hear directly from you. Later on in the meeting will be the first that the board is going to hear presentation from administration, the ideas about repurposing Columbus Elementary. But we appreciate hearing, hearing your thoughts and certainly raising questions that we will look forward to. Hopefully—well, I'm sure we will get answers at some point. I don't know if they'll all come tonight, but—so we do appreciate hearing from you. Thank you very much.

[Cut]

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:13:48

Okay, then we'll move to 10 D which is the repurposing of a Columbus Elementary School. Mr. Hartjes.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:14:00

Yeah. Thank you. So, I will be joined by Assistant Superintendent Nan Bunnow. So, Nan and I are co leading this work, because Nan oversees Columbus as one of the many schools that she oversees. And also, there is an area that impacts special education, so our executive director of special ed, Amy Steiner, is with us. And then also there are some staffing questions that may come up, and so Julie King is assisting in that area. So, the four of us are going to take you through a discussion tonight. This is the first time as board members that you've had an opportunity to discuss the repurposing of Columbus, and certainly Nan and I, Amy, Julie, none of us are happy to talk about this. This is not a topic that you wish to go through. Certainly, as seven board members, I'm sure none of you want to be in this position where we have to take some very strong consideration of a challenging situation with Columbus. But we have to, and so we'll take you through discussion tonight. Like I said, first time for you to hear much of this information, and I will get started. So, if Kayla can pull up the PowerPoint that we have.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:15:18

So, why are we considering we're repurposing Columbus? And it really comes down to enrollment. And the enrollment this year of Columbus is 79 students. And so when you look at some of the grades there, for example, in fourth and fifth grade, all of our other elementary schools are staffed at 27 to one. So, we are—that's how we staff. That's what we can financially afford to do. And so, when you look at having a school that has only 9 4th graders, it really causes challenges for us. And so, this enrollment is really the issue that we're talking about.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:15:57

But there are several factors that impact enrollment. And then there are several outcomes that come from having low enrollment. And so, in a situation like this, we have to figure out, do we run a combo class with

fourth and fifth grade together? Sometimes that doesn't work very well. So really, there are many challenges that come with having too few students at a grade level and in a school.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:16:25

And so, what we're talking about tonight many urban districts are facing similar challenges. So, you heard maybe last week Wausau looking to close four schools. Green Bay has closed schools, Neenah, Menasha, Oshkosh, Kenosha, Racine. Urban districts are all faced with this as we're all-seeing similar occurrences where we have lower birth rates. We have more families that are choosing from either home school or vouchers, and then we have just some families that move out to more of the newer areas, northern side of our district, certainly.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:17:07

And then enrollment declines in the central city also impact this. So, we're looking at Edison and Franklin, Dunlap to talk about tonight, because those are the three schools that are closest to Columbus, and they share borders, and so they also have similar challenges with enrollments as well. Dunlap not as much as Edison and Franklin.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:17:32

And then the Columbus building poses many challenges for us. And you know, simply, it's 130 years old, but I think we should really celebrate the fact that we've been able to educate kids well for 130 years in that building. And certainly, as we finish Sandy Slope this year, we hope that 130 years from now they're talking about whether they need to repurpose Sandy Slope or not. So, we should be very appreciative of the way that the district has kept Columbus functioning as a neighborhood elementary school.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:18:06

So, when we look at the declining enrollment across the central part of our city, and we go back to 2018-2019 so we just went back a handful of years here, and you can see that that year, Columbus had 161 students, and that alone, at that time, 161 students is a very small number of students in an elementary school or in any school. So even at that time, there were concerns about having a school with this size. But then it was 159 the next year. In 2020—the fall of 2020 was when we were virtual right at the height of the pandemic, and the enrollment dropped to 144. By the next year it dropped to 113.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:18:50

Now if you look at some of the other schools there, in terms of Edison and Dunlap and Franklin, you see that they were much larger (over 200 and over 300 for two of the schools), and they also saw some decline during the pandemic. But you'll see that Dunlap brought their enrollment back up. So that plays a role in why we're talking about Columbus. So that happened. Franklin did not necessarily see their enrollment go up much. Now they have over the last two years. So, they were at their lowest at 271 in '21-'22, and they went up a little bit, just a handful of students each of the last two years. And this year, their enrollment was steady had we not moved sixth graders out of our middle our elementary schools into our middle schools. But what you'll see here is, from a capacity standpoint, we have a lot of capacity across these four elementary schools.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:19:53

So, the decline in enrollment of Columbus has been, like I said, a district concern for several years. And so, when we got to '21-'22 in the fall of 2021 we were back in person for instruction. We were in masks. And that year we started to see our enrollments go back up. So, some of the families that chose maybe to do home school or virtual school, either in our district or outside of our district, they were coming back to our in-person schools that year. So, we were surprised in '21-'22 that that did not happen for Columbus. In fact, their enrollment went down another 31 students that year.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:20:35

So, in the spring of '22, the spring semester, in January and February, we were bringing together a committee to look at several different facility challenges we had, and we were talking with a large committee and then some focus groups around facilities, things like, should we be building a new elementary school? Should we build a new middle school? Should we build a new k-8 school? Should we look to move sixth graders out of our elementary schools to free up space around our 11 elementary schools that were overcrowded at that time? Should we move into sixth grade—sixth grade into middle level? We thought about, should we move Foster across the river and have foster students go to Wilson and West? Should we have Houdini students go to Wilson instead of Einstein? We looked at moving Magellan.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:21:34

We just looked at all these—and we talked about, should we be consolidating Columbus and Edison? Because what you'll see is that the ABS enrollment also had declined. And so, when we look at ABS having 177 students in 2018 and '19 and Columbus having 161, they functioned like one school from a staffing perspective—over 340 kids. We were able to staff that combination of two schools fairly successfully. But in '21-'22 the ABS enrollment had dropped to 119. So, with 119 students at ABS and 113 at Columbus, we opened the conversation around, should we be talking about bringing Edison and Columbus together? What we decided, though—and it was something that was discussed very briefly—is that let's wait to see where the enrollments go at our schools, especially Columbus, over the next few years after the pandemic is completely behind us. So rather than making a decision at that time, really even having much of a discussion, we just said, "Let's wait and let's see where Columbus's enrollment goes."

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:22:56

Well, you can see in '22-'23 it went down again by 15 students to 98. It was 103 last year. And this year 79. We impacted, because we moved some students to Edison where we felt they we could better meet their needs. Now there was not a sixth-grade movement out of Columbus. We had already stopped having sixth grade at Columbus many years ago because of the struggle with having too few students. So, we had many classes in a row where we had 15 or 12. I think we had eight one year. And so, we decided not to have sixth grade at Columbus many years ago.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:23:37

There are 20 out of the 79 students at Columbus this year that are open enrolled into Columbus, and so they live in a different attendance area within or outside of our district. So anyway, we did have these conversations very briefly in '21-'22 when we were talking about other facility topics, and then we paused. And so now, for the last three years, we've waited to see where Columbus has gone.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:24:10

So, there are challenges when we deal with low student enrollment at a school. And this isn't just Columbus, this is overall as we see the smaller schools—the challenges that come of that. First of all, particularly at Columbus, where they have, you know, one teacher per grade level, it gets really difficult to create effective learning groups. When you have more than one section of a grade level, you're able to spend a lot of—you have a lot more flexibility in creating that class list, looking at academics, looking at support services like special ed, EL, TAG, and then you also can look at the social/emotional of students that maybe would do better if they're not in the same class. And so, when you get to a situation like at Columbus where there's only one section per grade level, it really is a challenge to create effective learning groups.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:25:15

How they've done that this year at Columbus is to create combination classrooms. So, looking at the numbers, you wouldn't think that they would need to, but as a staff, they looked at the need to have effective learning groups. So, one of the results of that is the choice to create combination classrooms, which has challenges among itself, because you're looking at not having a first-grade teacher to second grade teacher, but they're teaching first and second grade together. And so, with our curriculums, as they're coming in, it's getting harder and harder to do combination classrooms effectively. We've got a lot of creative things that our buildings are doing in the cases when they do have a combination classroom, but as the enrollment goes down, it's very frequent where you don't have the right numbers to have straight classes, and you end up creating these combination classrooms.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:26:15

A third challenge is based on FTE—FTE that we have that's based on enrollment. So, in particular, the two areas that you end up having limited and fractured staff is in your Student Services department, so your school counselors, your school social workers, school psychologists, because those are based on enrollment and also weighted enrollment. But when you have fewer students, you have less of that commodity. And then also with specialist staff, art music, PE, STEM. Those are all based on the number of sections you have. So, where you may end up having art teacher there a half a day or a day a week, other schools have the ability to have them there four to five days a week where you can have integration of the curriculums and have the art teacher working with the classroom teachers with arts integration. So that is another—that is a challenge.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:27:13

Another challenge that we found at Columbus, and you can see DPI has identified them as having inequitable distribution of teachers under Title One. We've seen quite a bit of turnover in the staff. Right now, they are—and it—and we understand that when you only have six teachers, it's really easy to get to that percentage of inequitable distribution. But because of the inability for them to have a grade level partner to plan with within the building, that has been looked upon as a negative, as well as when they have limited number of teachers there, most of the times, for new teachers, their mentors are outside of the building. So not that they're not doing a great job, but it's a lot easier to just pop over to the classroom next door to talk to a mentor, rather than calling on the phone or sending an email and scheduling time. So those have been some of the challenges that we face across all of our schools that when they have low student enrollment, but in particular, it has been very challenging at Columbus over the last few years.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:28:24

And just to give you an idea, Columbus has 19 traveling staff members. That means they come into the building for part of a day, or even just, as Nan was saying, maybe a half day a week, and it really makes for incohesive staff really. It makes for challenges.

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 1:28:47

As Greg mentioned in terms of special education, there was certainly challenges that were faced with the low enrollment at Columbus. And last year, we did make the decision to have 16 students that were attending Columbus have their services met at Edison. A couple of factors that came into play with that in terms of challenges was as a district, we moved to cross servicing across categorical model. That was really to better serve our students in the least restrictive environment. And as a whole, our approach was that we were going to be able to support students in their neighborhood school without having them to be placed outside of a neighborhood school.

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 1:29:26

In order to do that, you needed to have comprehensive teams of staff members to be able to provide that continuum of services. At that point in time, Columbus, over the years, has fluctuated in special education staff based on the needs of the students, but because the enrollment was so low—it was anywhere between one 1.5 to 2 FTE of staff, which made it very challenging when we had students with significant needs, which we which we did, to have their needs met at Columbus. And as such, historically, Columbus, then for those students, um, they were placed outside of Columbus already. So, Edison, historically has had students from that were within the Columbus attendance area where their needs could not be met go to Edison.

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 1:30:11

With that, the small class sizes, obviously, as Nan had mentioned when we're talking about our regular education setting having small numbers, that does play an impact on special education. It makes it more challenging if we do need to separate students to ensure SEL needs. We also had situations where our special education students [...], and so when we looked at those pieces and talked about how do we best meet student needs, have that team approach, ensure that our students are attending neighborhood schools, the decision was that we needed to shift those students over to Edison.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:30:56

So just some other challenges. And this first bullet point here really is the genesis of all the struggles at Columbus, and that is, it has a capacity for 135 students. That's it. It limits what you can do in the building. And so, you know, we look at, not only does it limit the what you can do in the building, but also the facilities themselves—we've done a good job of making it a functional building, but it's still 130-year-old, year old building in many parts of it. And so, we have just some facilities that are not nearly as functional as the other 15 elementary schools in our district.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:31:38

And it's just the nature of having a building that is that old. When you think about just how stairwells are designed, there's a lot of stairwells. You walk in the front door, and you go up, or you go down, and then you have several different floors of stairwells. There aren't what we're used to in terms of hallways with classrooms on hallways. It poses some challenges with supervising the building. It just it—when we talk about functionality, it doesn't function well for a charter school. There's not a charter school that wants to move into the Columbus building. Part of the reason is the capacity, again. Many of our charter schools want to be larger, and so to bring up to them that—we did look at, that. We talked about would it make sense for ABS to move across the street? Well, ABS has 139 students this year, and wants to grow. They'd like to get back to 177 students where they were prior to the pandemic. So that number, that limiting number of 135, really is a struggle. And then with ABS moving to Huntley, you know, an AASD building, instead of renting, we lose that ability to share some staff.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:32:51

Now, even with the two small staffs now—er small numbers, we haven't had full time staff. We used to be able to maybe have a full time phy-ed teacher between the two schools and a full time maybe school counselor across the two schools. That hasn't worked, and it's going to be more of a problem with ABS. ABS has some very positive outcomes that we're going to see with them moving to Huntley in terms of a much more functional school for them. And so, we knew that when we weigh the pros and cons for ABS moving, one of the cons was going to be it's going to force us to make a decision about Columbus, but we felt that the positives of moving ABS to a very functional school and saving the rent—\$100,000 is what we have been paying Zion, roughly. And we've been doing all the maintenance of the space, even though we're leasing, because Zion hasn't had an engineer any longer. So really it was a space that mutually we needed to part from. And so that's been an issue

as well as now that we're going to have ABS away from Columbus, it's going to be really hard for us to justify any staffing expenses there.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:34:06

A question that has come up is how many students would need to be enrolled at Columbus for it to be more viable as a neighborhood elementary school, and Assistant Superintendent Bunnow talked about wanting at least two sections. You really want to have two classes at each grade level, and if you add that up, you're talking about maybe 240 students, roughly at a minimum. When you start to get lower than that, which is where Edison has been going—and that's why Edison, we've had concerns about adding Edison getting too small, that they were going to start to get close to 200 students, run into the same challenges that we're having at Columbus. And so, you want to have two or three sections at each grade level.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:34:50

Green Bay, Neenah, and Oshkosh have recently closed or repurposed schools with between 150 and 250 students. Last week when Wausau came out and said, they're closing four schools, one of them had 222 students. Another one was 195. Another one was 185. And so, when looking at the 20 largest districts in the state—not Milwaukee, the next 20 largest—Columbus is the only neighborhood elementary school with less than 150 students. They are very much an outlier in our state. There are some rural schools and some charter schools, obviously that are smaller, but to have a neighborhood elementary school of less than 150 students is really unheard of. It just simply it doesn't work for all the reasons that Nan and Amy were describing.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:35:40

So, a question that has come up as well is, why not increase the attendance boundaries for Columbus to increase enrollment? And the reason, again, goes back to the capacity at 135. We could increase the boundaries, but then we hit that ceiling of 135 for capacity, so it really doesn't help us. And where would we take the boundaries from? Well, they'd be Edison, Franklin and Dunlap, and all three of those schools have capacity. So, we wouldn't want to take students from Edison. We want to take students from Franklin. Dunlap could be okay, as they're at over 300, but really, Edison and Franklin are getting to a point where they're on the small side where we start to worry about that. So, it wouldn't make sense to take from those two schools, certainly, and give to Columbus.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:36:28

So, what school would Columbus students attend? Nothing here has been set at all. We just have been having some discussions—really, Assistant Superintendent Bunnow and I, you know, Executive Director of Facilities and Operations Ray Przekurat is here. And so, we've been having discussions about how many kids live in each of these areas.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:36:52

And so, if you look at the T that is formed by the Columbus boundaries, we've thought about that left side T. Would we want that to go over to Dunlap? When we think about our seven criteria, proximity—right? How close you are to a school is one of them, and would we want that group to go over to Dunlap? You can tell this is an old map, because it still says Lincoln on it, but that's Dunlap. And so there is an area that is on the east side of Richmond that does go over Richmond and attend Dunlap at this time. It has since 1995 when the boundaries were drawn for North High School. And so that area that is in green there goes to Dunlap and Wilson and West. And then you can see Jefferson does cross over Richmond as well as those students go to Jefferson and to Wilson and West. And clearly that was all based on proximity, right? For those students to go all the way to North High School and even Kaleidoscope is quite a distance when Wilson is so close. That's why they are there.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:38:04

Now there are 22 students that live in that area. We know that. We know where they attend school at this time. Wouldn't have to be that area. Could go over to Edison as well. We're looking at the other three sections of Columbus, though, for sure, to go to Edison.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:38:21

Then you see an area in pink, which is Franklin attendance area. This is something we just for years have looked at as those students have crossed Wisconsin Avenue to go to Franklin. At one point, Edison and Columbus clearly were at capacity and didn't have room, and Franklin had room. So those students were assigned to Franklin. You'll see, for the most part, we try not to cross Wisconsin Avenue. We try not to cross Northland. We try not to cross Richmond, but sometimes we have to. But for now, there are 10 students in that pink area that attend Franklin. We think it might be reasonable to move those students (they wouldn't have to. They can remain at Franklin) but that attendance area into Edison as well. That just kind of cleans up that entire area.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:39:16

Now we have been asked about you heard tonight the concern about taking away a neighborhood elementary school. So, these are our 16 elementary school boundaries. We consider them all to be neighborhood elementary schools. You can see that their neighborhoods are not all the same size. Columbus is the smallest by far. When you look at Columbus and compare that neighborhood to any of the other neighborhoods, it's considerably smaller. Edison is our fourth smallest neighborhood. If we were to combine Columbus and Edison and that little part of Franklin, it would still be the sixth smallest neighborhood in our district out of our 16 elementary schools, even when we have a 17th, when we have Sandy Slope. So, it still would remain a neighborhood school. It still would be one of our smaller neighborhood elementary schools both from an attendant boundary area and from enrollment.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:40:16

So just to remind you of our decision-making criteria that we used, and we developed these early in the fall, led into helping us make decisions around Sandy Slope and Huntley and Ferber a little bit. So geographic proximity to the school, enrollment capacity, and current enrollments, feeder patterns. There are some feeder patterns that would be changed if we do anything with that little rectangle that we talked about that's on the east side of Richmond, because right now those students are assigned to Kaleidoscope and to North High School. So that's the only impact on feeder patterns.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:40:54

Transportation and accessibility. Transportation is—there is no bussing in these areas. So, there's a lot of open enrollment, because parents are choosing between which school they want to drive their kids to, which school their kids can safely walk or bike to, and so transportation really isn't a piece here. Accessibility is. Obviously, we are very concerned about adding more students to cross Richmond. We have looked at the possibility would we try to do some type of walking school busses with para pros. We do a walking school bus or two now with deans of students. It's not really part of their job description. They just do that. We would possibly, you know, with intent, look at having walking school busses, if need be.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:41:43

Neighborhood integrity, certainly, growth and future development. There's not a lot of growth or future development, if any, in any of these four areas. And then demographics. So, these are areas that we will still take into consideration.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:00

Again, here's the T that makes up Columbus, and you can see that there are 59 students that live within the T. That's what we talked about. There's 20 students that live outside of the T. If we look at that top left-hand part of the T, there are 22 AA elementary—AASD elementary students, 10 of which go to Columbus, one goes to Dunlap, and 11 go somewhere else in our district, either charter schools or other elementary schools in our district. But—yeah, go ahead.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:42:39

You don't have a—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:40

I do.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:42:41

And so that—oh, perfect. Okay. So that is where there are 22 students.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:42:46

You could repeat that.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:46

Right.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:48

Yep.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:42:49

One—go ahead.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:49

22 students in that rectangle that borders Richmond—

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:42:53

Okay.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:42:54

—and Wisconsin Avenue to the north. Not sure on the bottom if that is maybe Atlantic. But anyway, it's that rectangle.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:43:03

Okay.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:43:03

So, there's 10 Columbus students, one Dunlap, and 11 that go across our district. So, the other three parts of that T—make up the T—have the other 49 Columbus students. And again, if you have any questions about this, you know Ray Przekurat can look at any areas. He can look at where students live, where they attend school, in district and out of district.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:43:40

Okay, since we're on that map, what is—do we know—because we were talking about Richmond, you know the concern with crossing Richmond. So east of Richmond, the Dunlap—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:43:51

Correct.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:43:51

—section there was, there's no thought about and no reason to move those students to Dunlap simply because of Richmond street?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:01

So—

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:44:02

You understand my question?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:04

—the area that is below the T?

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:44:09

There's—right, that—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:10

That area already goes to Dunlap.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:44:12

But no—I'm sorry, but no—I was meaning if we would shift everyone to Edison. I'm sorry. Yeah, thank you.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:22

So, if we would shift that area to Edison?

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:44:25

Well, we try to not cross Rich—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:30

Right.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:44:30

The busy streets.

Unknown 1:44:31

It's similar logic to kind of what you were describing for the section for Franklin.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:34

Absolutely. You know—

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:44:35

Did pull those numbers—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:37

Okay.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:44:37

—because we're curious about what is there, and right now they're—in that lower part of the that goes east of Richmond that attends Dunlap—there are 18 students in that area, and eight go to Dunlap.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:44:58

So, in talking to the principal at Dunlap about—oh, sorry, go ahead.

James Bacon (Board Member) 1:45:04

I was just gonna ask, since you had that pulled up, Nan, do we know if any of those kids from that section go to Edison already?

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:45:15

I am seeing two—

James Bacon (Board Member) 1:45:16

Just two? thanks

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:45:17

Two go to Edison.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:45:22

There is certainly, I think a positive reason to assign that area to Edison, which is to not have those families cross Richmond. In talking to Principal McClone, his belief is that all of those students are driven to school. There is a median with—at Winnebago and Richmond. It's—it was put in within the last couple of years, supposed to slow down traffic. I don't know that it's successful. I certainly think if we were going to have more students cross Richmond, we would want to look at some type of walking school bus, some type of support, perhaps working with the city for a crossing guard. But also, because Edison does have room for 140 students, if we wanted that area below the left hand T there, which is now assigned to Dunlap and has been Dunlap for 25 years, there would be room at Edison to have them go over to Edison.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:46:35

And you know, one of the things we heard last week when we met—Assistant Superintendent Bunnow and I met with the PTO from Columbus, is we have to think more than just about the school day. When students are developing friendships with kids who go to their school, who attend their school, if those students are assigned to Dunlap, they probably have the majority of their friends that live on the other side of Richmond. There's not help for them getting across Richmond in the evening or on weekends. And so that's kind of, you know—in that discussion, we did talk about more going to Edison to keep kids from having to cross Richmond at all.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:47:18

And again, keep in mind, we have open enrollment, and many parents are already transporting their kids to and from school, and so there's a lot of options, and that's why when Assistant Superintendent Bunnow shares the

numbers, you hear 18 students, only eight go to the school that they're assigned to. The other 10 go to another school of their choice.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 1:47:43

Do you also have the distance from the corner? It would be Wisconsin to Richmond to Edison.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:47:57

It is—we certainly can get the distance. It's much farther than that distance to Dunlap, but we can get that answer for you certainly. So, yes, it is farther from that northwest corner of the current Columbus to Edison than it is to Dunlap, but you don't have to cross Richmond. And so those are kind of our pros and cons there.

Unknown 1:48:27

We had discussed earlier on in the sandy slope boundary discussion, some waiting around some of these parameters. I think this is a situation where something like that would be useful, right, where you're weighing proximity against accessibility, and one of those, you would think we care more about than the other, potentially. So, is it more important that somebody is close to their school or that their school is accessible?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:48:53

Absolutely.

Ed Ruffolo (Board Member) 1:48:57

Guess as long as we're opening up the attendance discussion, what about that little chunk that is south of Wisconsin that currently goes to Franklin and having to have to cross Wisconsin, which we all recognize is not ideal. Is that—would you consider shifting that to Edison as well?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:49:18

Yeah, absolutely.

Ed Ruffolo (Board Member) 1:49:21

Edison becomes more—I'm sorry—Edison becomes a little bit more of a self-contained area with Wisconsin as the northern border and Richmond, potentially as the western border then.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 1:49:37

I'm just going to say that the idea of shifting that piece of Franklin to Edison has been communicated to people at Franklin.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:49:50

That has been a request from Franklin principals for years, as they have seen attendance struggles with some families that live in that area. And so, as you can imagine, if a student didn't have transportation, they're crossing Wisconsin Avenue on their way to Franklin. And so that was, you know—I don't know if that was a concern when Assistant Superintendent Bunnow was there, but certainly previous principals have brought that up as an area of concern. And, you know, we just, we just kind of wanted to see where we were going here over the last couple of years, to see when would be the right time to have this discussion. We felt like now is the right time to have the discussion about that area.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 1:50:41

I guess I'm just wondering, you know, I don't know what the historical perspective was on that, but in setting that up, it seems like when we were talking about Sandy Slope that, you know, the busy streets, that would be a

reason to bus kids. So, I guess I was wondering why we haven't provided transportation when they're crossing like a Richmond or a Wisconsin Avenue. I don't know if anyone knows that here.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:51:11

I'm just assuming that crossing guards were available. I know that, you know, the number of crossing guards has decreased over the years. It's less and less students are using them. And then the other reason is they—if an area is designated as unusually hazardous by the County Sheriff's Department, then we do bus, and so if it's not designated as unusually hazardous, we don't. And so, we have areas that are, you know, within the City of Appleton, within two miles even, and they get bused because it's been deemed unusually hazardous. So that's been, you know, kind of, I guess, an unbiased opinion on what is hazardous. It's always the sheriff's department that decides that.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 1:52:12

And then do we know if there are crossing guards at those sites now? Cross either for Dunlap or for Franklin?

Someone speaks off microphone 1:52:22

I'm not aware [...]

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:52:24

Yeah, there is not a crossing guard anywhere to cross Richmond, because I know that's why the Jefferson has the walking school bus. The dean goes across Richmond street to get—

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 1:52:36

A few years ago, they did an audit to see how many students were using the crossing guard locations, and some were pulled because they weren't being used, and that was one of them on Jefferson crossing Memorial.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:52:53

All right, let's talk about staff. So, I'll turn it over to Julie King.

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 1:52:58

So as far as staff and how staff would be impacted, we did have a staff meeting at Columbus as well, a great conversation. First and foremost, all staff that are at Columbus would have continued employment. So, I wanted to put some minds at ease if, if this is a decision that moves forward. Then the questions were around, well, what is, what does that mean? Many of the staff at Columbus are newer, so they're not familiar with overall processes and posting and without assignment status and things of that nature. So many of the staff would be provided with Without Assignment Status, and that—what that means is they would not have a specific position, but they post for positions of interest and through the application process be awarded a position.

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 1:53:50

There's also the potential, depending on what the decision is, there may be additional positions at Dunlap or Edison, depending on enrollment, or they could be reassigned based on reconfiguration. So, some of our groups, like student services, they reconfigure because they might be shared between buildings. Or if there's a program move, they would move with the program, example being like Title One or the DEI program that are currently housed at Columbus. Those could be potential moves.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:54:31

So, what will we do with the Columbus building? We've looked at, you know, the feasibility of 4k. In 4k rooms you need to have bathrooms. That's not an easy building to put bathrooms in every room, if we were to use it

for 4k. I talked about charter schools already. Charter schools really aren't that excited about going into Columbus as it's got a lot of limiting factors in terms of functionality.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:55:02

We are using it currently for two special education district wide programs, and then also our Title One preschool is there, and so we've looked at these as possible three additions to the space. One is that we have students that are placed outside of our district. When Amy Steiner talks about that continuing—continuum of service, and we can't meet a student's needs anywhere within our district, they would then sometimes, if there's a space available, be placed outside of the district. Now, those placements often cost \$100,000 or more per student. And so, the thought is, could we do some of that if we had the right space? Certainly, it takes the right staff members. I mean, that's really the key. And kind of, as you look at the next one here, we have what we're calling RISE Program, and that's students who are not finding success at the elementary level in one of our neighborhood elementary schools. Not even in a pull-out setting are they having success. We've been using the RISE program, something that Amy and her staff put together. It's just got just outstanding people in in working with kids in very small numbers. But those small numbers need large spaces, and so it's worked to have them at Columbus.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:56:26

And then also, you know, we had a situation last year were we had some behaviors that were at the elementary level that warranted expulsion. We don't expel, obviously, but we also don't return a student back to that school environment where they've caused significant disruption or maybe some type of safety risk, and last year we had them here in our district office in a conference room being educated until the end of the year. We'd like to have some type of program like that somewhere else. It didn't work very well for them to be here. And so those are just, just some options that we thought about. And certainly open to many other discussions.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:57:09

Really, how we utilize Columbus, if we were to repurpose it, is separate from the discussion around, should we be moving those 59 students, or 79 if the other 20 come with, to Edison or Dunlap. So really, they're kind of two separate decisions. They don't go together. We don't have to make a decision about, one, repurposing Columbus, and then here's what we're going to do with it.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:57:34

The Morgan building, we are constantly moving programs around in and out of the Morgan building as they go there. We have some success. They out grow the space. Sometimes we find someplace else for them. We kind of look at, could we use Columbus like that, where we're just constantly looking at, what additional programs can we use to help kids be more successful? And we move 4k programs, special ed programs and EL programs every year, we're moving to different sites where we think kids can be more successful, or sometimes where more students live. Like, we've been talking about having EL newcomers—that program—at West High School, just because we know that there's a lot of our newcomer families that live closer to West than they live to North where our program is. So those are the type of decisions we make often if we think it's going to be better for student success.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:58:30

So anyway, Columbus, really, it's wide open what we would use it for. We just make—we want to make sure everybody understands that we will use the building. We're not intending to shutter the building, to sell it. We put a lot of money into some spaces. The gym is relatively new. The offices are new. The rooms that RISE is using are new. So, we plan to use the building, and we have a lot of different folks within the district that would like to be there. We're going to make sure that it's the best options for kids.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:59:00

So, what is the timeline for a decision? It all backs up from that bottom bullet point of staffing, right? We need at some point in February and March we're staffing, right? We're hiring staff for next year making decisions around staffing. So, then you have to back that up. Before we can have staffing go in, we need to have enrollment projections. And so that takes us maybe a week to do something, maybe two weeks to look at enrollment projections. That backs us up to a board decision.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 1:59:32

And so let me start now at the first bullet point. So, we met with Columbus staff and Columbus PTO last week. We're meeting with Columbus families tomorrow night. And that's Assistant Superintendent Bunnow and I, with those families tomorrow night. Then on Wednesday we have a meeting with Edison staff after school, and then in the evening on Wednesday with Dunlap, Edison, and Franklin families. So those are the meetings that we have. And so, as we finish, we come out of that. We all—you have a board work session next week, Wednesday, where we'll share what came out of our listening sessions for next week, and then it is our hope that we can make a decision in January.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:00:18

So, if we need two meetings, we have a meeting on the 13th. Is it the 13th and the 28th? Or the 27th Thank you. 13th and 27th are the two meetings in January. So, we'll kind of like we did with Sandy Slope, we'll bring it all together for you on that first meeting in January. And then if it takes one more meeting after that to make a decision—if it takes more, it just pushes our timeline as you know that enrollment projections gets tighter and the staffing gets a little bit tighter. Just a lot of pieces that go into play. With having 19 traveling staff that go over to Columbus is just a lot of other buildings that get impacted just by a little bit. You know, they share staff members with Columbus. So anyway, that's a little bit about the timeline.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:01:16

So, with our listening sessions, this handout that we're providing to you right now is a overview of the rationale of why we're looking at this but also with some frequently asked questions that have already come forward. But we're also letting folks know that if there's additional questions that come up, we have the link with the QR code, and Kylie Harwell is monitoring that survey to collect the questions so that we can continue to add to this frequently asked questions document. It is up on the website, and so it'll be updated even after the point of the listening sessions being completed. We will still collect the questions, and certainly took notes tonight from some of the speakers so that we can make sure that we can get all of the questions answered as we move forward in this process. Also, in addition to that attachment that you have, is just an overview of the notes that were taken at the Columbus listening sessions that were held last week, including the staff listening session and then the PTO.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:02:32

So that is all the information we have for you. We certainly can get more information if there's something that's missing, something that will help you make a decision going forward, but we will again pause here and see what questions you have.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:02:48

Just off the bat, I'd like to—one clarification I'd like to make. So, number one on here, and I think number one on the presentation slide deck really talks about that this declining student enrollment, and from what you were describing, it sounds to me like even if that weren't the case, we still have a lot of these same problems. So even if suddenly enrollment were to rebound, the capacity of the building is really the driving force there. Yes, the

lower enrollment is kind of driving that decision, but it sounds to me, correct me if I'm wrong, like the administration is saying that the capacity of that building basically makes it unsuitable for use as a neighborhood elementary school. Is that an accurate statement?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:03:32

It is accurate.

Ed Ruffolo (Board Member) 2:03:36

So, Greg, as I—we always talk about student success being our north star number one priority. And as I look at the state report cards that just came out, I know you have to take those—you have to be use care when comparing schools. But if you look at Edison and you look at Dunlap, we look at Columbus, which really serve a very similar population and demographics, Columbus is performing very poorly, and it seems to me that we're just not meeting our commitment to the community to educate these students, nor are the staff able to be very effective. And it seems what you're saying is, we think it's because of the physical space and the low enrollment, and by moving these students to whether it be Edison or Dunlop or some combination, recognizing that there's challenges to that that want to deal with, but in the long run, we believe that's going to simply provide better educational opportunities for these. Is that really our motivation? Because some people have asked me, "Well, is it financial or is it just the building's too old?" And I'm getting a sense that it's none of that. It's really our students just aren't successful in this current setting.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:04:57

That's where it all starts—right?—looking at student success. And so, as Amy talked about, with such a low enrollment in special education, students weren't being successful. We couldn't deliver the support that we can deliver in other schools that have 300 students because we have more of a team of staff that can meet student needs. So absolutely, it's there. We look at just the struggles with having—you know, with every staff you want, just a real strong contingent of full-time people in that building who love the building, who love the school, love the neighborhoods and the families. And there's just not enough of that at Columbus because they're so fractured by having just point three of this—or I think they have just point one—is it their social worker is just point one. Whereas a school with a large enrollment is going to have a full-time counselor, for sure, probably a half time social worker. It just is really hard. So, you can imagine a principal who's trying to lead a school that's got all of these people who just come and go through the building throughout the week, and it's really only the six full time staff—teachers, right? Is there six full time—yeah—educators, which you know, when you think about that and compare it to a school that has 500 students like Highlands. You know, they've got a staff of probably 40 to 50 full time people that are just fully committed to everything at Highlands elementary school, and Columbus staff is. There's just too few of them to make a significant difference for students,

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:06:41

I would say, just to add on to that, with professional learning communities, with our PLCs, that has been critical as we've moved forward with the ELA adoption, and Principal Cannon has done everything he can to create the PLC but it's a vertical PLC. It's kindergarten through fifth and so that's challenges where you could have at least two or three or four first grade teachers sitting around the table and working on the next ELA module. At this point, they're singleton, and so that's where low enrollment gets very challenging. We're looking at building capacity and support for our staff.

Ed Ruffolo (Board Member) 2:07:21

Yeah, thank you for that, Nan. I have no doubt everybody's trying their very, very best. It just is starting to appear that the obstacles are just insurmountable for us. So, I'm open to other ideas people in the community may have, but I just know something has to change, because we're not successful at Columbus.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:07:40

Um, please correct me if I'm wrong, but like the state report cards for Dunlap, Edison, Franklin, they're not the best, but is—I guess, what admin is saying is that if the enrollment at these schools grows, then staffing would make it so that there's better staffing that could help improve those challenges. Is that correct?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:08:12

Yeah, absolutely. And, I mean, you know, Franklin has had two really outstanding years in a row. Their data is really strong. They've had really good success, and so we definitely feel that those 59 students will be more successful in a larger school environment, because the teachers are going to be more successful.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:08:37

When you think about a first-year teacher at Columbus this year or last year, well, let's say this year, with new curriculum and new instructional practices and having no colleague in that same grade level to be working with. So that's a challenge. Now they have an instructional coach, but that instructional coach isn't working side by side with that teacher every day throughout the school year, and that's a struggle that you have when you have one single teacher at each grade level. Whereas if you go to a Highlands where they have three or four at each grade level, that's a team working together every day. Not saying that it can't be done, because there are some successful teachers at Columbus who have stayed there and have worked really hard, but it really is very challenging to be just on your own, essentially, in a classroom with no support from colleagues.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:09:38

And then—so you know something we've heard not just tonight from public participation but in letters and emails, is like the lack of resources at Edison specifically. So, my hope is that as we move forward, we're able to respond to those concerns directly, and I trust that—like we're having this discussion right now, so I trust that that would happen.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:10:06

Another thing, another question, like nuts-and-bolts question is, like—this is still sounding like two decisions to me, like, one, to close Columbus and then—well, the second one is also a multiple—like, there's could potentially be many other decisions in that which is redefining boundaries. So just like, logistically, how does that work for us? Like, are we voting on one and then the other? Is it going to be one item altogether?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:10:38

So, we can—we haven't gone that far yet in our thinking, but because there are so few students we're talking about, we're talking about, you know, 10 students from here or eight students from here. We're not overly concerned about the boundaries. We want to get those right, but it certainly would be helpful if we knew that we're going to repurpose Columbus. So, if we were to make that decision at one meeting, and we have to come back at another meeting and figure out what we want for boundaries, we could do that. That gets us as administration like halfway to where we can start looking at staffing.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:11:20

But I do want to go back to your the question you had just before that, because in some of the emails you received, that information was not accurate about staffing. So, I'll have Assistant Superintendent Bunnow respond to that, and then also Amy Steiner.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:11:35

So, what we looked at was—first of all, I'll start with the enrollment at Edison, because in 2023 it was third Friday count in September was 245 students, and then this year for third Friday is 231. So, the impact of sixth grade was—but just also declining enrollment overall. So, they went from 245 students to 231 students. But with the addition of the with the special ed program, the students coming over to Edison, we did look at additional supports, and you want to first start with the special ed?

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 2:12:12

Yep. So, with the 16 students that came over, we added 1.5 special education teachers and a 1.0 Special Education para.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:12:20

And I want to be crystal clear that there has been issues with staffing there, either with some of the para professional either on leave or an unfilled position, so it's not fully staffed right now, and we've been working with the principal there to look at all options, including short term substitutes and things to make sure that, you know, we're getting the coverage that has been allocated.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:12:45

In addition, they were scheduled by formula to only have three 4th and 5th grade teachers, so they would have most likely have a 4, 4/5, and a 5. We gave them an additional intermediate teacher to lower the class size with this change, so they have two 4th grades and two 5th grades this year. And also the youth advocate left the position to become a special ed teacher at Edison, and we converted that position, the youth advocate which is ASU, to a teacher position to a dean. So those are some things that we put into place this year with the change.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:13:24

And then looking ahead to what would happen right now, if looking at a 231 students, estimating about 305 so Edison would be about the—around 300. That would mean that they would go from potentially 13 to 18 classroom teachers. And with that increased enrollment, they would have an additional paraprofessional, regular paraprofessional, in the building. And then with that and with the Student Services staff—it is weighted, so we're not quite sure what it will be—but right now, as was mentioned before, Edison has a .6 social work—school counselor. Minimally, that would go to a .8, so an additional day a week. And then with the school social worker, right now, it's two days a week. Minimally, it would go up to .5. And then with specialist staff, you'd be increasing an extra day for art, an extra day for STEM, extra day for music, and extra day for PE. So that fracturing would be a little less, because with the enrollment that would increase.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:14:30

We're also considering looking at, when you talked about program moves from Columbus, they do house one of our DEI coordinators at Columbus. We're considering that being moved over to Edison. So, they'd be enough—another staff member at Edison next year, as well as looking at a potential addition of a community schools Resource Coordinator, making that—Edison a community school. So, we would have the potential of having that person there working on partnerships with the neighborhoods and helping with the transition. So, I hope that helps Nick to kind of lay out how things change this year, but then how they would look potentially next year.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:15:13

Yes, thank you. And like, a few of these things were like, potentially we want to—and I understand that, like, it's probably—because we have to decide this part first. But I guess my question is, like, you know, we want to, you know, move this DEI position here. We want to potentially turn this into a community school. Like, what is—what are the things that are needed before you can say, okay, yes, actually, we can do that.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:15:48

It kind of falls into that list of things, because we need to know who this—how many students are coming to attend there. So, once we have that decision, then we'll know how many students, which is our enrollment, and then from there, we can determine the staffing. So, it all kind of—it's dominoes.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:16:10

Understood. And I guess the last thing for me for now, is just, you know, Greg, you had mentioned needing, you know, this desire to have schools that have a consistent staff that stays there for a long time. But I also, you know, know that every year staff gets shifted between sites. So, like, I guess I'm just bringing that up because, like, how achievable is that? And is because of how the district operates already. Yeah.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:16:46

But I think the difference is, if you have—let's say you have 80% of your staff that is consistent year after year, and 20% that do move, you're going to be okay. Columbus has had situations where they probably lose 50% of their staff. So that turnover's significantly higher at Columbus than any of our other schools.

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:17:06

It averages 70% for the last six years.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:17:10

Thank you. Miss Bunnow. Can you talk about how their school counselor went down this year due to Esser ARPA funds?

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:17:21

Yes, and I know Laura Jackson is on as well, so please chime in, Laura. But due to—Katie was getting very creative. Katie [...] the principal with funding, and so she was using some of the Esser funds to add on to the FTE. So that between the loss of the population of the sixth graders, the weighted student needing to—loss of the Esser funded point as well, it kind of was a culminating factor.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:17:55

So, the Esser funds—we gave each school an allocation based on the number of students that they had in their school on a weighted formula, and then they could decide how best to use those dollars. And so, some principals took what was a .8 counselor and made them a 1.0 for the three years during the pandemic that we had Esser dollars. And so, as we knew, at some point we were going to pull those positions back, and that had to happen for this year. So, a lot of our buildings were impacted by losing a .2 or a .3 or .4, and a lot of those student services positions is where they added them. And thus, had to [...]

Unknown Female Staff Member 2:18:38

One other component is that we had not adjusted Student Services staffing for school social workers, school psych, and school psychologist across the whole district since prior to the pandemic, and we maintained that level of staffing. So, when you go back and review the presentation that Superintendent Hartjes and Assistant Superintendent Bunnow shared with you, you can see the overall student body decline during that period as well.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:19:17

Thank you for responding to my questions.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:19:19

Just one, one question or something that I would like to know more about, is that it was mentioned that Edison might possibly become a community school, that there would be a community school resource coordinator and possible program there. And I guess I'm curious about how that's decided, what the determining factors are, and then any board involvement in that process, and as well as funding for it, so that—I don't know if that can be added to...

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:19:53

Okay.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:19:54

I'll let Nan start, and then I—

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:19:55

Currently we have community schools at Jefferson and Dunlap, and working with Julie [Barkultz?] we have been looking at the potential expansion of community schools, which is funded through Fund 80. And there has been in the past—and we have to relook at that, but there in the past when Jefferson and Dunlap—well, I should say, when Dunlap was added, there was an application process, and at that time, Edison and Columbus had applied for interest becoming part of the program. But that is the typical process that we would follow.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:20:34

And I'll add on to that, we didn't think about that until last week when we met with the PTO from—and realized their neighborhood is so strong, and you heard that tonight, is what a great place for a community school based on how much their neighborhoods support the school currently. And that's really what a community school needs to be successful. And so, we are looking at it as again, just Miss Bunnow and I talking about is saying, you know what? This all really fits well around a community school coming together. Because there are three neigh—city neighborhoods that are, two are in the Edison area, and one is in the Columbus, and that kind of goes into

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:21:17

The central—

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:21:17

Yeah.

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:21:18

And that was really the discussion, because Dunlap is having great success because of their partnership with the historic neighborhood that they are in, and so it would really—and that's the purpose of these listening sessions is to hear and bring that information back to the table to say what are the possibilities.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:21:39

And it's taken us a little while to figure out community schools. You know, when we brought our first one in, then the pandemic hit, and so community schools are all about bringing community into your school and couldn't do that for two years. And so now we've come out of the pandemic, and we're just starting to see really good results from both Jefferson and Dunlap. But yeah, the key is trying to figure out, how do you get your neighborhood into your school? What draws them in? And you know, Columbus is already doing that. So, it does—it is a Board, because it goes through Fund 80, that you'd be involved in the decision. Which kind of

answers your question as well, a board member asked the question, who makes these decisions? You would about a fund 80 allocation.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:22:24

I just have one comment that I feel that I need to make because I am trying to put myself in the place of the families and the students who are going to be very much affected by it, any decision that we make, and I just think it is important for us to be sensitive to their needs and to the timeline. I think it's a very tight timeline. I know, Greg, you and I talked last week. You know, just receiving notice of the meetings last Monday, I think it was great that the PTO could come together on Wednesday, but it's also very busy time of the year, and, you know, expecting families to come together again this week.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:23:12

So I want to be sensitive to that and also to let the families know that we are—I appreciate all this information, all the statistics, but in some ways, when I'm listening to, well, it's 10 students will move here, 10 students will meet—move there, though, those are some of the same things that we tackled when we looked at Sandy Slope, and we talked about less than 20 students moving, and in the end, we decided that it was really important to look at their need, their current needs. So, I hope that we will do that as we're as we're making a decision, and I hope that we won't look at making a quick decision in order to adhere to a timeline of staffing. I know that's really important, but I do want—I do think it's important that the families feel that they're involved in this decision and that their input is really strongly considered.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:24:18

I have—I'll say that I echo what Kris is saying there. I have a question on just see if I heard this correctly. Is there currently no special education programming that's happening in Columbus or there is?

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 2:24:33

There is special education programming. There's speech and language only. So, we have a .8 SLP that's over there, but any student who require services beyond that, cross categorical and such, those students were over at Edison.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:24:48

So, it's quite limited.

Amy Steiner (Executive Director of Special Education) 2:24:50

Yes.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:24:51

Um, and then I wanted to know about staffing. The question around that staff would retain all rights to employment, are we talking about all staff or only some staff?

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:25:04

All staff at Columbus.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:25:06

From the top to the bottom.

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:25:07

Correct.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:25:07

Okay. And then I wanted to also—I was curious, to also understand, like any financial implications that would happen with any of the shifting that is happening or any of the potential discussions that might arise in repurposing Columbus for whatever reasons, in terms of the shifts in budgets or, like, in any direction, whether it is an increase or decrease.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:25:36

We're estimating a savings of \$500,000 to \$700,000 a year in staffing efficiencies.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:25:54

Well, first, I just wanted to say that I did go back and pull the report cards from Columbus over the last, like, 10 years, and even with not horribly dissimilar sizes, Columbus was meeting expectations every year until the last two and exceeding even just a few years ago. So, I think, in some ways, that also speaks to this—how much things can shift a little bit with a small population ebbs and flows a little bit as well, and maybe we should also look at all the factors that are contributing to that as part of the conversation. Since it was brought up, I just thought it'd be worth mentioning that.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:26:33

I wanted to clarify just a question, though that was asked a minute ago about the turnover. When you said 70% of the staff turnover for the last six years? Is that what you said?

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:26:48

All staff. So that's including transfers out, resignations, retirement—all, all encompassing.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:26:55

And are you saying 70% of the staff turns over every year for the last six years? Or just in the last six years, 70% of the staff has turned over. Do you know?

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:27:05

So, when I, when I looked at the data, on the low end it's 14 staff per year, up to 21. And granted, that's all in totality. So, if I look at, as an example, probably another indicator that is really a good indicator is when we look at our core teachers, the average experience is 2.12 years at Columbus, or all of our teaching staff 9 years. So that means all of the special student services, all of those folks.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:27:43

Got it. That makes sense. I just—with how unique Columbus's staffing model this was, just trying to make sure I understood what that stat was getting at. But that—what you just gave, actually, I think is also a helpful one to understand kind of the landscape. But it's there. Because you were including all staff, including the full-time teachers, the support staff, those that are partial FTEs—

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:28:06

Correct.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:28:07

—as well. And I'm assuming some of that turnover is also the nature of partial FTEs being reallocated and paired in a way that pulls staff away just because of the nature of it, because it was the smaller FTE that got paired somewhere else and maybe couldn't stay there or the same person. Okay.

Julie King (Chief Human Resources Officer) 2:28:23

Yep.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:28:24

Thank you. Then, I guess another question I had was, you know, I guess, partially echoing some of the comments that have been made earlier, partially some from Nick, some from Kris paying route, just like timelines and like how we think about these types of decisions and the process we go through and how we get public input and how we share that information out with our community's constituents, it just feels like, you know, today we presented a lot of data that was multiple years in the making as part of the rationale for having this conversation, and then it feels like it was now happening really quickly with urgency and with limited time for people at the school and in the communities to participate. You know, especially given we've been talking about boundaries for Sandy Slope and some of the different decisions we were making there. So I'm just curious, like, do we have any—like, I know rather the policy that the superintendent administration cannot make boundary decisions without the board voting on them. But beyond that, given that there's a lot that goes into it beyond just that single vote of decision, you know, what policies or procedures, like, on the administration side do we have around the ways with which we do get input, who from, the timelines that we are seeking to do those things on? Because I feel like we've now had several boundary conversations, and even a short time, this could be a good time if we don't already have it, to start institutionalizing some of those procedures/policies, because I think it really matters that our community knows how we make these decisions, how to expect to engage in them, you know, when there's reasons to revisit them, whether we decide to revisit them every 10 years or on a timeline, or when something like this happens when we're at a certain percentage under capacity, so that maybe these conversations could start happening, you know, a little bit earlier in the process. So.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:30:40

Before you respond, can I just add on to that, which is, like, this whole meeting, I've been feeling like I want to ask, like, why aren't we having more global conversation about bond boundaries and, like, the metaphor, like missing the forest for the trees, or whatever, like we're and I'm sure you got you all are talking about these things at a more global level. Yeah, like, I feel like maybe we should, or we should know more on a global level, all of these things.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:31:20

So, I'm not sure exactly how to respond to that. We did talk about what comes first. So, we could have come last meeting with this information. Last meeting we were—it was pretty heavy with the Sandy Slope/Huntley which impacts hundreds of students and families. We wanted to get that one finished. This one has less students and families. But we also thought this time—because the last time we came to you with information, you said, "Go out and talk to people first." So, we went out last week, and we started with the PTO and the Columbus staff so we'd have something to bring to you to discuss tonight outside of what we already have. So, if we were in error in there, we can certainly look for the next time that we do this. Not sure where we'll go in—you know, we were a district that was going up by 100 students every year until 1819 and then that year we went down by 100 students. And then—

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:32:32

2019, not 1819.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:32:34

The '18-'19 school year, you mean.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:32:39
Sorry.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:32:40
Yes.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:32:40
I have a pretty good history—

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:32:42
to grow 200 years ago.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:32:43
—but not that good. The 2018/2019 square, and then we started to decline, and then we had the pandemic. And so really, I think every urban district is having that—well, we know they're having the same discussions. How are we moving forward? How are we going to continue to meet the needs of students based on the number of schools we have, boundaries we have, the finances we have? Yeah, that all plays a role in this, certainly. But, you know, we finished out this year and we'll we can certainly look to see, how would we do this going forward? We did—maybe we took too much time on the seven criteria, because we did spend two meetings on the criteria, thinking that we need these to help us make decisions going forward. So that was a step in that direction.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:33:34
Yeah, I appreciate that, and I appreciate that, obviously, in the last five years—not 200 but five years or so—you know, I mean, things have changed dramatically for a variety of reasons, both with the trends that, you know, just are happening in different ways in urban centers and education, and then the pandemic and all that brought with it. So, I certainly understand the challenges here. I just know that it sometimes can feel especially challenging, you know, well, even—it's obviously very challenging for the administrators and then the board to make these kinds of decisions. But I think when it feels pressured for time sake, it also then sometimes feels like in the community we aren't actually wanting to listen—like, we have to act fast at this point, so we have a lot of decisions made, or a lot of what, I think to people outside the district, feels like, well, you've already proposed boundaries, you must have already done all the things you want to do about this. Like it's just a matter of getting it done at this point, especially when it's quickly. And I think sometimes there's just not a lot of time to process. And for busy families with kids that you know struggle to find childcare on short notice and stuff like that, it also is just challenging to feel like there's really dialog and that listening is happening I suppose. So, anyway, I just think that if we think we're going to start facing these kinds of decisions more, I would love to see us do what we can to learn from these and start to codify them into our systems in a way that becomes, hopefully easier for everyone involved. Us those of us in the room, but also the people in the communities we're making decisions about, which are school community. So anyway, thank you.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:35:28
I wanted to add, I do believe that there has been, there's been an evolution of these shifts in, you know, the attendance areas. And I—so I don't think that the attendance declines in the central part of the city are all new. I'm sensing, though, that it almost reached a tipping point, like we got to a point that with the enrollment just declining to a point that it's really not best for students. That's what I'm sensing. And I don't know if, you know, to try to put that into a system of being able to predict that. I don't—I'm not sure how—I don't know how that could be done very, very intentionally, but I appreciate the comments. I am don't like to have to make decisions

quickly and don't have enough information. So, I think also to make sure that we have as much information as we can is certainly helpful.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:36:42

But I wanted to add that I don't think this has come out of the blue, but I do think that it's a it's—it's concerning that if we're—if we are in a situation that our students are not being served in the best way that they can be because of the physical situation and because of the low enrollment. So, I'm [...]

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:37:11

I also don't think the pandemic is behind us. And I bring that up because it sounds like this declining enrollment is being taken as, like, well, this is the new normal, but we haven't gotten to the new normal yet. I still think we're dealing with the impacts of COVID. And yeah, so yeah.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:37:47

One of the speakers tonight noted the number of preschoolers that live in the Columbus area, and I'm wondering if we have any information about that too, in any of the areas Columbus, Edison, Dunlap, if that factors into decisions. Because obviously the fifth graders will be moving out, and we'll have a new group of kindergarten students, but just wondering if that's information that the district has?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:38:21

I can start. So, you know, the information we have is what has been our trend in our schools, individual schools, individual grades across our district. We do know that for many years we'd have, on either side of 1100 kindergarteners come in, and so that would go all the way through. We pick up a few more at high school. So, we might be between 1100 and 1200. Our last two kindergarten groups were less than 1000. So, we know that. Whether 300 kids are going to enroll in the AASD in a few years, we don't, we don't have any idea about that. With vouchers and home school and private school options and open enrollment school of choice options, it's very, very hard for us to predict anything other than predictions based on what we have in our schools and what that tells us. So I don't know anything about that 300 number.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:39:22

Thank you.

Pheng Thao (Board Member) 2:39:31

Maybe—the question that I have is that it was shared right that 20 students open enrolled to Columbus. Do we know where they're coming from? I'm sure we do.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:39:42

We do. Yeah, so Ray has access to that, and if I remember right there are, maybe—yeah, they're coming from—a lot of times we see open enrollment or school of choice in our district where a family has moved within the district, but they want their kids to stay. So, they may have started at Columbus, then they moved into the Franklin attendance area, but decided we'll just—we drive our kids to school anyway, so let's just drive them to the same school. That's a lot of what we see for school of choice is just keeping kids at their school even though the family has moved. So that's our best guess on why that is the case that there's 20 kids that are open enrolled.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:40:26

Okay. Anything else? Any other questions on this topic? Any other additional information that—I think we some things have been shared?

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:40:51

Maybe going to get into this, but next steps then?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:40:54

Yeah, so next steps. So, we have the three listening sessions yet this week, and then we have no further information other than what you want us to bring if there's anything you have questions about, but next week, it is on the agenda for the work session. So, we do have four topics, but we're saving an hour for this topic to kind of update you and answer some of the questions that you had tonight.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:41:16

I guess information that I would be—any sort of new information would be like, there were some ideas brought up from folks in public participation about solutions, you know, if it's going to be repurposed. So, like, I would love to hear any further conversations on that, and, like, how the folks who are showing up to these meetings, you know, are responding to it. Because I understand that also like decoupling the decision to repurpose from what that repurpose is going to be, like, but knowing what Admin thinks about some of these community developed solutions would be helpful.

James Bacon (Board Member) 2:41:19

I feel like most of them were addressed. I'm assuming those were things that you added after the listening session with the PTO possibly. You spoke about the idea of using it as 4k not being viable because of the bathrooms. Spoke of the idea of a charter school not being viable because of the overall capacity. The one thing that was brought up that maybe wasn't addressed was this idea of, like, kind of a dual campus school. Is that's something that you can address.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:42:36

Yeah, we definitely—we don't know anything about that. We don't have a model like that in our district. We can certainly find and see if there's other districts that are doing that. We know that school districts do that in more of like four grade bands, or they might do fifth and sixth together, seventh and eighth together, and K through four. But yeah, we did—you know right away, when we started talking administratively about repurposing Columbus, we have lots of phone calls from administrators saying, "Have you thought about this?" So, yeah, 4k as an option, we definitely thought about and looked at. The feasibility is not great just because of the need for restrooms in every classroom. The charter school option's not great, but we haven't looked at this idea of Columbus/Edison being partner schools where we do a K-2, or whatever it would be. We can definitely look at that. Yeah.

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:43:31

But I think also to board member Ross' question, it almost sounds like there might be three decisions here. One is, are we going to repurpose Columbus? What will the boundaries be? And then what will we use Columbus for? So really, in my mind, that's kind of my takeaway here is there's really three questions to answer. And like I said, so the first question is the one that is most timely, obviously. The other two we can spend more time on. And certainly, the repurposing, we can wait until next year if we wanted to. We don't even have to make a decision about that. We know we have some programs that are there, although I know that Amy is probably thinking she'd like to, you know, start considering what might happen at—if it could be repurposed. But anyway, that's not a decision that we have to do anything immediately. It's really the first one that is has some urgency to it.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:44:27

Yes, and I appreciate that, and I—like, really, what I'm asking for is, like, I want more information about collaboration between admin and the communities impacted, whatever that looks like. Also, like I would—and this is something I will do on my own as a board member, and hopefully other board members will too by engaging with the community—but like, there seems to be a pushback against the Alt Ed idea so I'd like to know a little bit more about that, you know, just so that I as a vote—a board member voting on these things in this timeline, you know, know that—and it's not that I don't believe this will happen—but know that the that we are working with the community in a way that they appreciate and value, will help me make the decision—the other decisions that come ahead of time.

Nick Ross (Board Member) 2:44:27

Well, what we hear Columbus is very integral to the neighborhood and to the community, and I think that's why these can be feel like they're separate decisions, and yet it's hard to decouple them, because I think the neighborhood would want to know what is going to be there. They have a new playground, you know, it's very much—it's a center—it's a center of the community—you know, their neighborhood, it's very much. And so, yes, separate, but still really related. So whatever information that could be determined, you know what the purpose would be, I think would be helpful.

Ed Ruffolo (Board Member) 2:46:17

Greg, you had mentioned a couple of listening sessions. I'm aware of the one tomorrow, and are there additional ones?

Greg Hartjes (Superintendent) 2:46:24

Yes, there are two. On Wednesday after school is the staff at Edison, and then in the evening, at 6:30 at Edison—in which location, Nan, at Edison?

Nan Bunnow (Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) 2:46:39

Yes, it's in the multi-purpose room at Edison on Wednesday night, and it starts at 6:30, and we have sent invitations out to the Franklin, Dunlap, and Edison communities to come forward if they're interested to learn more. And then tomorrow night at 6:30 is at Columbus and in the gym at 6:30.

Kris Sauter (Board Member) 2:46:59

I would just like to echo Nick's comment about hoping that we can have community input and look at some of the thoughts that they brought forward and have it be a decision that they feel that they're a part of as well.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:47:30

Okay, any last thoughts or comments? Okay, then obviously we will have more to come on that.

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:47:49

This takes us to the end of our business for tonight. It's been mentioned that next week we've board work session, and then that'll be until the holiday break, so I'll ask for a motion to adjourn tonight's meeting. So, moved

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:48:09

second All

Kay Eggert (Board President) 2:48:10

in favor, please say Aye. Any opposed? All right. Thank you. Have a good night. You.