



*Needham Public Schools
Office of the Superintendent*

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High Rock as Satellite Middle School Space

Several questions have been raised by the community, parents, and the School Committee about the two proposed options for the use of High Rock as additional middle school space. This document offers responses to these questions based on current information and thinking.

Question: Why is High Rock being considered for additional space for the middle school program? Why not just add modular/portable classrooms onto Pollard?

Answer: The Pollard Middle School student enrollment continues to grow beyond the designed capacity of the building. The building was designed for under 900 students, and in 2002 modular classrooms were installed to increase its capacity to about 1,050 students. However, core educational spaces, including the gym, auditorium, and the library were not designed for the growing student population. Enrollment at the school on September 14, 2006 was 1,074, and the peak enrollment of over 1,370 students is expected by 2012-2013. After 2013, the student enrollment is expected to level off around 1,300 students.

It is not practical to continue adding many more modular classrooms to the building. Additionally, a middle school with an enrollment above 900 students does not promote the kind of learning environment the community has come to expect. In fact, according to Massachusetts Department of Education statistics for October 1, 2005 (the most recent data available), most middle schools in 16 comparative communities have middle schools with enrollments in the range of 498 (Newton) to 883 (Milton). The one exception is Wellesley with an enrollment of 1,095 middle school students. It is important to note that Wellesley is in the midst of a multi-million dollar middle school expansion project to accommodate this population.

A renovated and expanded High Rock School provides additional space for the growing middle school population and will allow Pollard, during its expected peak enrollment year in 2012-2013, to have an enrollment of around 900 to 920 students with 450 to 470 students at High Rock. Eventually, however, High Rock will be needed for the growing elementary student population and new middle school space will be required.

Question: What is Option A?

Answer: This option would place the entire 6th grade at the High Rock School until new middle school space is provided for Needham's students in grades 6, 7, and 8. At that point, the 6th grade would return to the Pollard Middle School and/or a new facility and the High Rock would become the school district's 6th elementary school.

Question: What is Option B?

Answer: Option B would place clusters of grades 6, 7, and 8 at the High Rock School until new middle school space is provided for Needham's students. Once the community has decided on additional middle school space for its students, the 6,7, and 8th graders would return to the Pollard Middle School and/or a new facility and the High Rock School would become the school district's 6th elementary school. This option would also require redistricting whether on a full-scale or limited basis.

Question: Will High Rock be an elementary or middle school?

Answer: The School Committee will ask Special Town Meeting in November to appropriate funds to design an elementary school at High Rock. Elementary enrollment continues to grow and there is a need for additional elementary space. High Rock will serve that purpose in the long run.

However, in the short term, there is a critical need for middle school space and High Rock, properly designed, outfitted, and staffed can meet that need until a new middle school project is planned. Once an architect is selected, the architect will consult with the Permanent Public Buildings Committee (PPBC) and the school department, including the middle school staff, to plan appropriate educational spaces.

Given that High Rock will eventually become an elementary school, it may be easier to accommodate a 6th grade program at that facility than one that involves older students and more programmatic needs (e.g., portable labs for 8th grade science). However, a suitable program can be designed for either option.

It will be critical to have the architect design a plan that allows for maximum flexibility.

Question: Why not use Newman as additional middle school space?

Answer: While the use of Newman as additional middle school space could be an option in the future, there is no place to put the Newman student population if the middle school program is moved there. The renovated High Rock School will not accommodate the Newman enrollment but will accommodate part of the middle school program.

Question: Why do we need portable classrooms and where will they be?

Answer: The preliminary design for the school includes space for up to 350-360 students. However, in order to move enough students out of Pollard to keep the total enrollment at that school around 900 to 920 students, it will be necessary to place portable classrooms at High Rock to accommodate an additional 110-132 students bringing the total enrollment at High Rock to about 460 to 480 students.

The architect believes up to five or six portable classrooms can be placed adjacent to a renovated and expanded High Rock School to accommodate up to 110-132 students with 22 per class. This additional space would allow the Pollard population to stay around 900 to 920 students. Without the additional portable classrooms, over 1,000 students would have to remain at Pollard at the peak enrollment years.

Question: What are the financial implications of either plan?

Answer: There will be construction costs and additional operational costs involved.

The conceptual design suggests a total project cost of about \$14.5 million (including \$13 million for construction, and \$1.5 million for additional modular classrooms.) These costs estimates may vary considerably, pending final design and construction bids.

In addition, a renovated High Rock facility would carry additional operational expenses for the Town of between \$1.0-\$1.7 million, including:

- Additional utility expenses
- Building repair / maintenance
- Additional administrative staff
- 3 new custodians
- 1 new Nurse
- 1 new Media Specialist
- 1 new Technology Specialist
- 1 new Guidance Counselor
- 3-4 additional specialists (art, PE, etc.)
- 1 new, 12-month secretary
- 2 office aides
- New classroom setup of \$4,000 / classroom (one-time cost)

Finally, the two plans have different operational implications that will influence cost.

- Transportation - No additional buses are assumed to be needed for option B (the 6th, 7th, 8th program). However, between 3-5 additional buses may be needed for Option A (6th only school), or if a lottery is used to select students for the 6th, 7th, 8th program.
- Library - Library resources would need to be duplicated for the Option B facility, whereas the existing collection could be used for Option A.
- Some Special Education programs would need to be duplicated at the 6th only facility (e.g., a teacher and aides added), even though no additional classrooms would be required. However, the 6th, 7th, 8th grade program school would not require programs to be duplicated.

Question: **What are the financial implications of either plan?** (continued)

- Students with specialized needs would remain at Pollard.
- Additional operational expenses may be required to support before/after school programming at these facilities.

Question: **What is the impact on core spaces? Will there be sufficient cafeteria, media, gym, and hallway space?**

Answer: The preliminary plan shows classrooms for music, art, instructional technology, and physical education. There will be sufficient cafeteria space to accommodate the number of students planned. However, if a pod of modular classrooms is added, it may be necessary to consider additional bathrooms. Also, modular classrooms could provide additional art or music space based on program needs.

It will be important to engage the architect in a conversation about classroom design, gym, and ancillary spaces (e.g., storage, offices) to ensure there is adequate square footage for the program. For example, the architect will need to determine what can be done with the gym to ensure there are two teaching stations within the gym to accommodate up to two classes at a time.

Depending on how the school is organized, foreign language teachers may have to share classroom space with one another or with cluster classrooms.

There will be outdoor space for students to have recess, gym class, etc.

Question: **What is the impact on staffing?**

Answer: While there will be a need to hire some new staff, most teachers would move from their existing classrooms to High Rock. Art, music, and PE teachers would also need to be hired and/or reassigned.

Option A:

Elective Teachers (with 450-460 student enrollment)

- 1.5 – 2.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Physical Education teachers
- 0.8 – 1.2 FTE Health Education teachers
- 0.8 – 1.2 FTE Art teachers
- 0.8 – 1.2 FTE Technology teachers
- 1.0 FTE Chorus/Band teacher
- 2.0 – 2.5 FTE foreign language teachers

Special Education

- 1.0 FTE Special Education teacher to be added
- 2.0 FTE Teaching Assistants required

Question: **What is the impact on staffing?** (continued)

Option B:

Elective Teachers (with 450-460 student enrollment)

- 1.5 – 2.0 FTE Physical Education teachers
- 0.8 – 1.0 FTE Health Education teachers
- 0.8 – 1.0 FTE Art teachers
- 0.8 – 1.0 FTE Technology teachers
- 1.0 FTE Chorus/Band teacher
- 2.5 – 3.5 FTE Foreign language teachers

Question: **Will there be after school programs?**

Answer: An analysis of the most recent data available on the Pollard After School program (PAS) indicates that 42% of the PAS registrations are 6th graders, 33% are 7th graders and the remaining 25% are 8th graders. Most individual classes reflect the same mix of registrations although a few tend to attract younger or older students.

	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	All Grades
Fall 2005	175	136	98	409
Spring 2006	137	108	90	335
Total	312	244	188	744
Percent	42%	33%	25%	100%

Should High Rock become a school for either all 6th graders, or a second 6th-8th configuration, we should be able to continue to offer PAS at both sites. Changes would include:

- potential slight fee increase to support overhead at both sites (e.g. on-site coordinator);
- possible decrease in the number of “niche” courses (chess, anime, Italian) due to low enrollments with a smaller pool of students;
- fewer offerings at each site, also due to lower overall population of both teachers and students;
- cross-country, field hockey and intramural basketball teams would be more difficult to coordinate with two school sites.

At the same time, there may be some unique opportunities for students that do not presently exist. Additionally, providing transportation to either site is an option to consider.

Question: **What will happen to KASE if High Rock is needed for middle school students?**

Answer: High Rock would no longer be available as a site for KASE (Kindergarten After-School Enrichment). School staff are already searching for alternative space for the KASE program to use in September 2007. The School Committee is scheduled to discuss options for KASE at its meeting on November 21, 2007.

Question: **What about Special Education programs and services?**

Answer: Special Education Staffing and space allocations would be impacted by the two options for the High Rock Middle School in the following ways:

Option A would require an additional 1.0 FTE special education teacher position to meet the intensive needs of the 6th graders with multiple challenges in cognition and behavior. Special education teaching assistants (TA) would need to be added in direct correlation to the number of 6th grade students in the program.

Additionally, with this option, four separate learning centers, designed within two classrooms would be needed to accommodate all the programming options that are offered in grade 6. It might be possible to have one or two students transition directly to the Pollard from the fifth grade if their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) indicates and the Special Education team determines this is developmentally appropriate.

Option B would not require any new teacher or teaching assistant positions because the students requiring special programming would remain at the Pollard Middle School. Two separate learning centers, designed within one classroom would be needed.

Question: **What does research say about the impact of transitions on middle school aged children?**

Answer: Most research indicates that students' self-esteem and academic performance can be negatively impacted by transitions. Particularly at risk are those students for whom school is already a struggle. However, developmentally responsive programming and careful attention to transitions have been shown to lessen the impact.

Question: **What are some of the things the school, staff, and parents can do to mitigate transition issues?**

Answer: There are a variety of steps that can be planned to ensure a smooth transition into and from the High Rock Middle School Satellite Program.

For example, if Option A is chosen and the 6th grade moves to High Rock, some of the preliminary plans could include:

- Offer more interdisciplinary programs to ensure students and teachers know each other well and that students are supported with a strong

Question: **What are some of the things the school, staff, and parents can do to mitigate transition issues?** (continued)

curriculum program that builds connections and achievement.

- Establish a Teacher-Family connection program involving a teacher home visit in the summer and follow up for the most vulnerable students.
- Ensure staff understands transition issues and concerns through ongoing training and intervention efforts.
- Provide comprehensive orientation programs for parents and staff.
- Hold 5th Grade Open Houses in the evening and during the day.
- Implement a Pollard Mentor Program for incoming 7th graders: 7th grade students are paired with four or five 6th graders in the spring and help transition the new students into the fall. Activities include ice cream socials, podcasts, contests, small group meetings, etc.
- Have the grade level administrator and counselors remain with their class from grades 6 through 8 minimizing the effect of new faces, administrators, etc.
- Expand Camp Sargent and consider team building programs, including Project Adventure.

Question: **Do we need to redistrict?**

Answer: Option A does not require redistricting, but Option B would require redistricting or require a lottery for placement. Redistricting would potentially eliminate the need for additional buses. Since each school then would serve a different portion of the Town, routes would not have to be duplicated at each school, causing the need for additional buses. A 6th only facility, or a 6th, 7th, 8th facility that was chosen by lottery would require additional buses, since both schools would draw children from the entire town and buses would likely be visiting many neighborhoods twice.

Question: **How would students be organized at High Rock School?**

Answer: There are a number of possible organizational options that the middle school staff is considering.

Currently students are placed in four teacher clusters (math, science, social studies, and English) at Pollard. This model could continue with some variation. Students could also be organized in five teacher clusters with a foreign language teacher becoming the fifth teacher. Alternatively, students could be placed within two teacher clusters with one teacher teaching math and science and the other teacher providing English and social studies instruction. There could also be a mix of four, five, or two teacher clusters depending on the enrollment, program, and student needs.

Option A, with all of the 6th graders at High Rock, would allow for some innovative thinking around student placement in two, four, or five person clusters.

Option B, with a portion of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade enrollment at High Rock would require an even number of clusters in each grade level, regardless of the cluster's teacher configuration, so that the maximum

Question: **How would students be organized at High Rock School?** (continued)

number of students can be assigned to High Rock and no children are moved back and forth between the two schools.

Question: **Will High Rock be able to accommodate up to 483 6th graders in the 2012/13 school year?**

Answer: The plans call for a renovated and expanded High Rock School with 16 regular classrooms (there would be additional space for art, music, etc.) and up to five or six portable classrooms.

The administration is planning for 22 students in a class. With 21 regular classrooms (including five portables; a sixth portable could be used for specialty space such as art), 462 6th graders can be accommodated with 22 in each class. When the student enrollment grows to 483, class size would need to increase to 23 students per class.

Question: **If High Rock accommodates a satellite middle school program will there still be a need to build a new middle school?**

Answer: Yes. High Rock can provide space in the short term for the middle school program. However, there soon will be a need for High Rock to become an elementary school to provide appropriate space for the growing elementary population. If elementary class sizes are to remain at about 20 students per class, there will be a need for 400 new elementary seats in 2008. High Rock will provide the needed space for the increased enrollment.

The School Committee has traditionally supported a middle school program that meets the developmental and academic needs of younger adolescents. In the long term, then, it will be necessary to create additional space to meet the needs of the middle school student population.

Question: **What is the timeline?**

Answer: High Rock Renovation:

- Nov 1, 2006 - Special Town Meeting votes to appropriate funds for preliminary design work.
- November through April - Building design and planning
- April 10, 2007 - Debt exclusion override vote to raise funds for final design and construction.
- May/June 2007 - RFP/designer selection
- October 2007 - Design completed/ construction begins
- May/June 2009 - Construction completed
- September 2009 - Renovated High Rock opens to students.

Additional modular classroom space is planned to be installed temporarily at Pollard for the start of the 2008 school year to accommodate students.