

# **Critical Choices: Responding to a New Fiscal Reality**

*School Redesign Final Recommendations  
January 21, 2009*

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**“Students who are allowed to attend failing schools or substandard programs will never develop their full human potential, and that is a tragedy that this district and community can no longer tolerate.”**

*--Charleston County School District Superintendent  
Dr. Nancy J. McGinley*

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **I. Introduction: The New Fiscal Reality**

- Budget Adjustment Options

### **II. Key Beliefs**

### **III. Recommendations**

- A.** School Closures
  - School Profiles
- B.** Grade Modifications
- C.** Program Consolidation
- D.** Rural School Covenant
- E.** Delay Actions
- F.** Other Considerations

## **I. Introduction: The New Fiscal Reality**

In June, 2008, the Charleston County School Board recognized the District's worsening economic situation and asked the Superintendent to bring back a school consolidation plan to address the issue of underutilized, inefficient schools. The District's approach to redesign included three goals:

- Strengthen the overall education program;
- Expand services through the reinvestment of resources; and
- Earn savings that would bring stability and equity to schools and the district.

Our "new fiscal reality" arrived with a \$15 million mid-year cut for FY09 and a projected **\$28,000,000** budget deficit entering the next school year (FY10).

### **What does this mean?**

- **Less money is coming in.** Like most public and private companies today, CCSD has had a significant decrease in revenue.
- **Fixed costs are increasing** at the same time inflation has gone up and more money has to be paid out.
- **CCSD has limited ability to raise funds locally** due to laws like Act 388.

## **II. Key Beliefs**

We *can* and *must* act now to adjust our budgetary expenses. Not including any land or property sales, the recommendations in this proposal add up to \$5.3 million in savings next year (with further savings each year to follow), while providing *new benefits* and *better settings* for the students involved. School redesign is one component of a broader, two-to-three year approach to responding to our current fiscal realities.

The proposal is driven by five core beliefs informed by the new budget reality and six months of community feedback:

1. **For our students' sake, the time is now.** Students who are allowed to continue attending failing schools or substandard programs will never develop their full human potential, and that is a tragedy this county can no longer tolerate.
2. **We must be good stewards of public funds.** We must operate our schools in an efficient and effective manner, living within and guided by the realities of our budget.
3. **Schools are centers of communities.** We will continue to strive to serve primary and elementary school children as close to their neighborhood schools as possible.
4. Public engagement and community participation were at all-time highs during this process, evident in all discussions related to school redesign. **We must sustain this level of engagement and involvement, and focus it on improving student achievement year-round.**
5. **All children must be educated in safe buildings.** Capital resources must be used with a sense of urgency to ensure the safety of our children in facilities that meet current standards.

**"Our time of putting off unpleasant decisions has surely passed."**

*President Barack Obama  
Inaugural Address*

### **III. Recommendations**

**A. School Closures:** The five schools recommended for closing have a history of academic struggles, declining enrollment, and excess capacity, and all but one have above average per pupil costs.

#### **District 1: McClellanville Middle**

Academic History: This school, which serves 91 students, has been rated "Below Average" for four consecutive years. The 2008 Improvement rating is projected to be "Unsatisfactory". The school did not make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) in 2006-07 or 2007-08. (See School Profile)

Per Pupil Cost: = \$15,134 (District Average = \$5905) (GOF only)

#### Recommendations:

- 7th and 8th grade students attend 7-12 Lincoln High
- 6th graders attend CD-6 St. James Santee

Improvements for Students: Eliminates negative impact of middle-high transition; opens up increased opportunities for high school credit, career clusters, band, chorus and athletics for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Community Input: The public engagement meeting in District 1 was attended by 179 community members. Of those community members, 179 responded to the survey. The option to close McClellanville Middle School received the highest percentage of acceptance at 52%.

#### **District 4: Brentwood Middle**

Academic History: This school has had an absolute rating of "Unsatisfactory" for six consecutive years. The Improvement rating has also been "Unsatisfactory" for six consecutive years. The school has not made AYP for the last four years. (See School Profile)

Per Pupil Cost: = \$6,632 (District Average = \$5905) (GOF only)

#### Recommendations:

- 6th graders attend accelerated-learning 6th grade academy at McNair or Zucker Middle School
- 7th and 8th graders attend Birney and Morningside (Note: Some 7<sup>th</sup> graders may be zoned for Zucker Middle)

Improvements for Students: 6<sup>th</sup> graders will receive individual attention, intense academic support in literacy and math, and behavioral health and counseling supports to prepare them for middle school success. Entire school "M-GAP" approach. The Brentwood campus is slated to be repurposed as Garrett Jr. Academy – a District 4 program.

Community Input: The public engagement meeting in District 4 was attended by 187 community members. Of those community members, 110 responded to the survey. The option to close Brentwood Middle School and create a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy received the highest percentage of acceptance at 41%.

### **District 20: Fraser Elementary**

Academic History: This school has had an "Unsatisfactory" Absolute rating for four consecutive years and was "Below Average" in 2002-03 and 2003-04. For 2004-05, 2005-06, 2006-07 the Improvement rating was "Unsatisfactory". While the Improvement rating is projected to move to "Average" for 2008, the school has not made AYP for the last four years.

Per Pupil Cost: = \$6,643 (District Average = \$5905) (GOF only)

#### Recommendations:

- Students attend Charleston Progressive, new Sanders-Clyde or new Memminger or Mitchell partial magnets. (Note: Will work with SIC, D20 and County Board to consider a plan for CPA to be a partial magnet.)

Improvements for Students: Eliminates negative impact of elementary-middle transition; opens up magnet choices and access to world-class, state-of-the-art Sanders Clyde facility with a Jonathan Green-inspired arts theme. Students attend schools with strong academic performance.

Community Input: The public engagement meeting in District 20 was attended by 355 community members. Of those community members, 186 responded to the survey. The option to close Fraser Elementary School and Charleston Progressive Academy received the highest percentage of acceptance at 55%. However, this recommendation represents a compromise between the original option and an option submitted by concerned District 20 community members.

### **District 23: Shroder Middle School**

Academic History: This school has had an absolute rating of "Unsatisfactory" for four consecutive years and was "Below Average" in 2002-03 and 2003-04. The Improvement rating has been "Unsatisfactory" for six consecutive years. The school has not made AYP for the last four years. (See School Profile)

Per Pupil Cost: = \$6,044 (District Average = \$5905) (GOF only)

#### Recommendations:

- Rising 6th graders stay at home elementary schools
- 7th and 8th graders attend Baptist Hill (becoming 7-12)

Improvements for students: Eliminates effects of middle-high transition. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders have increased opportunities to take courses for high school credit, gain early knowledge of career clusters, and participate in band, chorus, and athletics. Students leave a failing middle school and attend a 7-12 program at a good school.

Community Input: The public engagement meeting in District 23 was attended by 466 community members. Of those community members, 262 responded to the survey. The option to close Jane Edwards Community School and EB Ellington Elementary School received the highest percentage of acceptance at 13%. However, a plan submitted by concerned District 23 community members opposed closing elementary schools.

### **Countywide Magnet: Charlestowne Academy**

Academic History: This K-12 school receives three report cards. The elementary school has been "Below Average" for two years, with a projected Improvement rating of "Unsatisfactory". The middle school has followed the same pattern with "Below Average" for two years with a 2008 projected "Unsatisfactory" Improvement rating. Although the high school program has a projected 2008 excellent rating, it includes only 78 students, and has not made AYP for two straight years.

Per Pupil Cost: = \$5,774 (District Average = \$5905) (GOF only)

#### Recommendations:

- Hearing Impaired program stays intact, elementary grades move into North Charleston Elementary;
- Hearing Impaired middle and high school move as a "program within a school" to School of the Arts;

- Elementary and middle-school students return to home schools or partial magnet choices;
- Current high school program becomes “school within a school”, phasing out when current 9th graders graduate (two locations are being evaluated).

Improvements for students: Provides excellent facility for Hearing Impaired program to continue and grow; elementary and middle school students can attend partial magnets, home schools with comprehensive athletic and academic offerings; slow phase out of high school

Community Input: The public engagement meeting in District 4 was attended by 187 community members. Of those community members, 110 responded to the survey. The option to close Brentwood Middle School and create a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy received the highest percentage of acceptance at 41%. In addition to the surveys, there was considerable response from the parents of hearing-impaired parents and community members. As such, this recommendation relocates the hearing-impaired program to a site with improved accommodations without dismantling the program.

**Note: Per Pupil Costs based on General Operating Funds only. Does not include additional categorical funding.**

## **B. Grade Modifications**

### **Jane Edwards**

- Maintains CD-6 program
- Grades 7-8 attend Baptist Hill (7-12)

### **Charleston Progressive Academy**

- CPA remains as K-6 school at Courtenay campus
- Grades 7-8 move to Sanders-Clyde, home schools, or partial magnets
- Fraser re-districting increases enrollment at CPA
- District will work with D20 Board, County Board, School Improvement Council, parents and community members around possible conversion of CPA into partial magnet, serving downtown attendance zone and returning to original attendance ratio (60% district 20 students, 40% countywide)

### **District 23 and District 1**

- Baptist Hill and Lincoln High Schools add grades 7-8
- Elementary schools keep rising 6th graders
- Example: CD-6 St. James Santee

## **C. Program Consolidation**

**Child and Family Development Center**, currently renting space in North Charleston, moves as “school within a school” at Burns Elementary

## **D. Rural School Covenant**

The district and Board are fully committed to the importance of rural schools as centers of communities, and will work with these schools and their communities to keep schools open, enhance cost-effectiveness, and deliver services. Therefore, the District will work with principal, School Improvement Council, and community partners to bring per pupil costs closer to the district average.

Per Pupil Plus:

- Average per-pupil expenditure plus 20%
- Example—if the district average per pupil spending is \$6,500 then the school receives \$7,800 per child. The school’s programs and needs are designed based on that budget and supplemented by community support.

Conditions:

- Elementary school (CD-6)
- Long distance to nearest school
- Strong community support for providing school services

Targeted Schools

- Frierson (District 9)\*
- Jane Edwards (District 23)\* (Pre K to Grade 6)

\*Note: Academic progress will be evaluated annually. The District will work with the Constituent Boards to possibly modify enrollment boundaries and work with the school to decrease overhead.

**E. Delayed Actions**

**District 3:** Delay Relocation of Clark and related land sale

**District 20:** No change for Charter School for Math and Science

**F. Other Considerations**

- **Move forward Montessori School's Request for Expansion**
  - Only viable space currently available at Frierson (Program within a school)
  - District explored all options—future possibility would be to rebuild James Simons with the Montessori program as a “program within the school” in District 20
  - Will continue to explore options for Montessori school moving forward
- **District 9 - 7-12 high school configuration.** Closely monitor enrollment and academic trends in D9 and elsewhere. Continue to engage the Board and communities to develop future efficiency plans as necessary.
- **Maintain Archer and Fraser campus as swing spaces**
- **Move forward with construction of E.B. Ellington, projected to be open in 2011.**