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Reconfiguration Proposal Comparison

January 19, 2024

Dear Coventry School Committee, Coventry Employees, and Coventry Residents,

I have been in education for almost 30 years. I have been a teacher assistant, a teacher, a principal, a curriculum director, an assistant superintendent and now a superintendent. I have worked in Coventry for 10 years and have worked to do everything I can to improve our school district, no matter what position I have been in. I would never introduce a change like this lightly, knowing the impact it has on everyone. Although I knew some residents would speak out against the proposal, I feel that I have an **obligation** to provide the Coventry School Committee with options during difficult times. Status quo is acceptable in some situations, but it has impacts that are unsustainable, especially in times such as our current budget situation. The superintendent is the educational leader of the district and has a responsibility to provide options that support students socially, that are educationally sound, and fiscally responsible. The decision to introduce options is to give the school committee and community something different to consider as we navigate through a difficult budgeting process. In the end, the committee, administration, and community may believe that staying with the K-5 model is the best course of action at this time. I believe the proposal is the best option as you will see in the below presentation, but if the community and SC decide to remain status quo, I will have to oblige but would be very concerned about future sustainability. Residents asked many questions at the last school committee meeting and I want you to know that I heard your concerns as both a parent and educator and completely understand your worries. I truly want what is best for this district both now and into the future which is why I have developed this proposal and I will do my best to explain my rationale.

Problem: Coventry Public Schools has identified a projected deficit of at least 1.8 million dollars for the 2024-2025 school year. This deficit was identified in the three year budget projection presented in November 2023 to the School Committee and Town Council. Enrollment is down almost 1000 students and has been in decline since 2013. The Commissioner of Education discussed the funding struggle based on enrollment and federal funding decrease in a recent [interview](#). Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) noted in their [Fiscal Year 2025 report](#) with President and CEO of RIPEC Michael DiBiase stating “With federal ESSER funds set to expire in September 2024 and with the Assembly unlikely to continue to fully fund empty [student] seats, many districts may have to reduce staff and classrooms to match the reality of their student populations. Given the dramatic shifts in our education system, it is high time to reform the education funding formula.” The potential impact on our school department is a substantial reduction in staff and programs in an effort to balance the budget. The school department is looking at many different options to address this deficit while maintaining successful programs, providing equitable class size across the district, and moving forward to continue to improve educational supports and services. The timeframe of these proposals is based on the Coventry

Budget calendar which requires the school department to present a balanced budget by the beginning of March. Any changes to our instructional model would have to be identified and accounted for in the Fiscal Year 2025(FY25) budget that is presented.

In the end, the administration is working to balance the educational needs of students with long-term fiscal responsibility. The original [proposal](#) was presented to show the educational impacts of this model. The budget work with my administrative team has been ongoing since early October. We considered more disruptive alternatives, i.e. redistricting and closing a school, but narrowed it down to these two options below. I do believe Plan A sets up our community for long-range stability. The table below provides the specific information many of you requested. I will continue to answer your questions and work with the Coventry School Committee to make the best decisions for Coventry Public Schools. You have asked for more time to reflect on these plans and therefore, we have delayed the next meetings. I am committed to this community. These are some tough decisions that impact us all. Thank you for your time to consider both plans.

Respectfully,

Mr. Don Cowart II
Superintendent
Coventry Public Schools

	Plan A - Reconfiguration Model	Plan B - Status Quo K-5 Model
Potential Cuts	<p>In the reconfiguration proposal Coventry would consolidate K-5 services from 5 buildings into 4. The number of elementary positions impacted by cuts is between 10-15 which would result in approximately 2.1 million dollars in savings with pending retirements, while maintaining the intervention and support services for students.</p> <p>Minimal cuts based on enrollment at the middle school and high school level will help to create a fiscally responsible budget.</p>	<p>Using enrollment data across all schools will only result in a reduction of approximately 4 elementary classroom positions and two interventionists, which would result in approximately 1.04 million dollars in savings with pending retirements.</p> <p>Hence, deeper cuts will be needed at the middle school and high school level to create a financially responsible budget. For example, we will need to consider positions, programs and extracurricular activities.</p> <p>Without consolidating resources, the impact of cuts is less strategic and unsustainable. It's the approach that has been taken in the past and has limited options.</p>
Building Configuration and Use	<p>Blackrock: Early Learning Center (not closing and preserves the building for educational expansion and/or future use)</p> <p>Tiogogue: K-2 Elementary School</p> <p>Hopkins Hill: 3-5 Elementary School</p> <p>Washington Oak: K-3 Elementary School</p> <p>Western Coventry: Grades 4 & 5 Elementary School</p>	<p>All four elementary schools will be K-5 and Washington Oak will be a PreK-5 (due to increasing need for preschool seats, we may not be able to house all preschool classrooms at Washington Oak starting with the 24-25 school year).</p>
Timeline	<p>The school department has started the budget process for FY 25. To include the savings and estimated cost associated with the reconfiguration the decision needs to be made well in advance of our budget submission to the Town in March. Implementation will be for the 24-25 school year. Administration started to explore the proposal in the fall of 2023. Once it was determined that the proposal is feasible, the district began collecting feedback</p>	<p>The timeline is to follow the budget calendar and required legal dates for non-renewals and lay-off. Other than accounting for the reduction in staff and shifting of staff between classrooms and schools, the timeline would be the same as any other school year.</p>

	<p>from building administrators. If approved the following would take place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On-going communication and feedback from families and staff about the process. ● Begin to notify BR students of their new school by February break ● Reconfiguration Job Fairs for CTA by the end of April ● Regular Job Fair time for SRP (within one week of last day) ● Looking to hire a moving company to assist. ● Packing and moving directions by April vacation ● Hold Extended School Year at ASFMS ● Open schools in early August for teacher set-up 	
<p>Transitions</p>	<p>The downside of a sister school model is it adds an extra school transition to a student's elementary career. We believe the impact of the transition would be decreased by moving with a consistent stable cohort of students. Some students may struggle with an extra transition and additional support and integration between sister schools is crucial.</p> <p>There would be an opportunity to have only 2 consistent, stable groups of students transitioning into middle school versus 5.</p>	<p>There would not be an added school transition during elementary school. Students would stay with their current school-based cohorts.</p> <p>Students will transition into middle school as 5 separate cohorts ranging from 40-100 students. Students are introduced to a new and different learning environment with a new and much larger group of students all at once. This transition can be very hard on students.</p>
<p>Transportation</p>	<p>We have met with the bus company three times, and will continue to meet with them regularly if we move forward with reconfiguration. We recognize that there will be obstacles to designing bus routes and minimizing time spent on the bus. <u>Goal is to keep all bus rides less than 1 hour.</u></p>	<p>Current transportation would not change. There will be students displaced from full classrooms to other neighborhood schools. When grade level classrooms close due to class cap, Coventry is forced to displace new students to a different school often separating siblings.</p>

	<p>Sister school students will ride on the same bus. At this time, there is not any anticipated need for more buses.</p> <p>It is our intent to have school times and bus schedules finished before the end of this school year.</p> <p>We anticipate school start times for elementary to be similar to what they are now. Times will fall anywhere between 8:15 and 9:00am.</p>	
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Class Size	<p>The class sizes under this consolidation plan would be equitable and level across the district with between approximately 19-23 students in each elementary class across all schools and room for move-ins. There would be enough teachers and classrooms for every student ensuring that each student gets the support they need.</p>	<p>We currently have class sizes that widely range from 14-25 students depending on the grade and school they attend. Class sizes will continue to be unbalanced and there will be schools with 14-16 students in a class and some with 23-25 students. When classrooms hit the contractual class cap (K-2: 23 students, Grades 3-5: 25 students) then students are displaced and transported to a neighboring school.</p>
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Projected school enrollment, number of classes, class size for each school:

Sister School Numbers									
Tiogue					Hopkins Hill				
	Kinder	1st	2nd			3rd	4th	5th	
Students	120	116	131			Students	139	128	114
Classrooms	6	6	6			Classrooms	6	6	5
Avg Class Size	20	19.3	21.8			Avg Class Size	23.2	21.3	22.8
Total Enrollment	367					Total Enrollment	381		
Washington Oak					Western Coventry				
	Kinder	1st	2nd	3rd		4th	5th		
Students	150	135	176	182		Students	163	162	
Classrooms	7	7	8	8		Classrooms	7	7	
Avg Class Size	21.4	19.3	22	22.75		Avg Class Size	23.3	23.1	
Total Enrollment	643					Total Enrollment	325		

<p>Special Education</p>	<p>In this model, caseloads will be balanced at approximately 10-12 students and teachers will become grade level experts and have increased opportunity to participate in Professional Development and learn grade level curriculum. There will be at least one special education teacher and assistant for each grade with more support in grades that require more teachers based on student need. This will provide students with more consistent support from educators. Consideration can be given to special education teachers interested in looping into next grade with current caseloads.</p> <p>Specialized programs such as Life Skills, SCORE, and STRIVE will have the current staffing model.</p>	<p>This year, we have had special educators with caseloads from 3-15 students depending on the school. Currently, each special educator supports students across multiple grade levels. They are responsible for many different content areas which makes it challenging to plan for inclusion opportunities. Layoffs would result in larger and still inequitable caseloads.</p> <p>Specialized programs such as Life Skills, SCORE, and STRIVE will have the current staffing model.</p>
<p>PreK and Early Learning</p>	<p>Early Learning Center consolidates all PreK and walk-in services under one roof. Allows for expansion of programs to service more PreK students in Coventry.</p> <p>There is a cost for making classrooms, bathrooms, and play space to meet RI PreK requirements. The labor costs can be offset by some work being done by our maintenance department and the retrofitting to PreK standards for bathroom and playground will be minimal.</p> <p>Blackrock School was selected as the site for the Early Learning Center for a number of reasons: 1) It housed PreK classes in the past and already has some bathrooms and a fenced playground space, 2) It has a consistently small enrollment and, 3) The location is in close proximity to proposed lower schools, Washington Oak and Tiogue.</p>	<p>At this point, it is not certain whether all PreK classrooms can continue to be housed at Washington Oak. Therefore, it is possible we may need to retrofit another school to house overages.</p>

<p>Bond Impact</p>	<p>The \$25,000,000 bond is to address structural needs at each school. Each school was budgeted for \$500,000 in improvements. Western gets more for other improvements including the well, windows, and bathrooms. The work to improve school infrastructure will continue. The reconfiguration proposal does not impact the scope of work approved in the bond.</p> <p>The \$25,000,000 bond addresses some structural needs identified by the building committee. The ability to do significant improvements or construction is limited so Coventry will do the best it can with the funds available.</p>	<p>The \$25,000,000 bond is to address structural needs at each school. Each school was budgeted for \$500,000 in improvements. Western gets more for other improvements including the well, windows, and bathrooms. The work to improve school infrastructure will continue.</p> <p>The \$25,000,000 bond addresses some structural needs identified by the building committee. The ability to do significant improvements or construction is limited so Coventry will do the best it can with the funds available.</p>
<p>Other Districts</p>	<p>EWG, East Greenwich, and Barrington were presented as examples of districts that have implemented this model successfully in the past. This proposal was not presented to copy what other districts are doing or to make comparisons to them. The intent was to show that each of these districts is a top 10 in the state while using a similar model. This model has worked in these districts for many years and is reflected in their test scores. This proposal is about doing the best we can with the resources we have.</p> <p>The decision for Barrington and East Greenwich to return to a K-5 or 1-5 model is influenced by significant school construction bonds (Barrington-\$250 million and East Greenwich-\$150 million). Both communities will be closing a school <u>and</u> building/renovating their schools. Coventry Building Committee attempted a similar approach but unfortunately was unable to secure a bond amount needed for significant renovations/construction.</p>	<p>There is nothing wrong with the K-5 model, and implementing it has been very effective for many districts in Rhode Island including Coventry. There are many benefits including peer role models, fewer transitions, and shorter bus rides. Maintaining K-5 in Coventry would be the path of least resistance.</p>

<p>Teaching Positions and Stability</p>	<p>With reconfiguration, the majority of teachers would be able to continue to teach the grade they are currently teaching, either in their current school or in one of the sister schools. In some cases, the least senior teacher(s) at each grade level across the district will be displaced. Layoffs and displacements will be offset by some retirements.</p> <p>This plan allows us to put a behavioral interventionist at each school at no additional cost. A full time social worker will be located in each building as well.</p>	<p>Moving forward with this plan would result in eliminating a number of positions based on certification, enrollment, and seniority. This would create vacancies across the district and senior teachers will move between grade levels and schools. Layoffs and displacements will be offset by some retirements. Resulting in many teachers teaching in grades/contents for the first time with lack of curriculum knowledge.</p>
<p>Professional Development</p>	<p>Allows consolidation of teachers into fewer locations which maximizes impact of PD on groups of 6-8 teachers at each grade level versus 2-4 teachers across each of the five schools.</p> <p>A two school model for PD implementation is more efficient than a five school model. Allows for principals to specialize in a smaller scope of curriculum areas, fewer staff to deliver PD, and fewer PD sessions. Increased teacher collaboration when implementing new curriculum materials or teaching strategies has a significant positive impact on the students.</p>	<p>Keeps the model we have where PD is delivered to the five schools of teachers at each grade level.</p>
<p>Social Impact</p>	<p>There are two larger groups that represent about half of the graduating class. Groups range from 114-182 students in the sister school model. This is an opportunity to have a wider circle of friends from across town, which overlaps with sports, scout groups, and other town organizations. More flexible grouping options because of more same-grade classrooms. Safety Patrol would look different with additional opportunities for students to take on leadership roles on the bus and during</p>	<p>In the K-5 model neighborhood students stay in neighborhood schools. K-5 does allow for older student role models. It also has smaller groups of students at each grade level. In some cases it is a very small cohort of 38-46 students with two teachers. This creates a smaller friend group which also results in difficulty separating students who struggle with particular peers. The transition to middle school is from 5 sending schools with 5 different student groups integrating into one</p>

	<p>drop-off of the younger students. Additionally, Safety Patrol can help support and lead Sister School Collaborative events and transitions.</p> <p>The middle school transition will be two stable groups moving into the middle school. Students have the opportunity to know approximately 50% of their overall graduating cohort.</p> <p>PTOs/PTAs have the opportunity to merge as sister schools. This will allow for parents with students in two schools to participate in one PTO/PTA for the elementary years.</p>	<p>grade. Students in grades 4-5 sometimes participate in Safety Patrol and are school wide leaders and models.</p> <p>5 separate PTOs/PTAs.</p>
<p>Coventry Schools is doing its best to present options that support students now and into the future. We are motivated to try to create the best educational experience using the resources available. No matter which model we move forward with, this educational community is dedicated to the success of all our students. Thank you for taking the time to read through this document.</p>		

Next Steps:

1. Please submit additional questions here: <https://forms.gle/KswBEXyYtPBEmj579>
2. School Committee Meeting in Early February to Present Additional Information
3. Second School Committee Meeting in Early February for the School Committee to Vote on the Proposal.