

REPORT ON NORTH ARLINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL INTERIM CAPACITY MEASURES

September 15, 2015

Executive Summary

Middle school capacity in North Arlington is a key area of focus for APS's *More Seats for More Students* initiative. The completion of the new neighborhood middle school at the Stratford site in 2019 will provide an additional 1,000 seats, but until that time capacity-generating measures are necessary to support the growing Williamsburg and Swanson student populations. ***APS remains focused on providing high-quality instruction and student support services as the APS student population continues to grow, and is committed to ensuring that interim capacity measures effectively support and positively complement the high-quality instructional opportunities that all APS middle schools provide.***

Over the past several months, APS staff, School Board, families, students, and other interested stakeholders have had the opportunity to discuss and evaluate different interim capacity-generating options under consideration, including schedule modifications as well as the use of on-site or off-site locations (both of which would require the use of relocatable classrooms) to house a portion of the school populations.

In light of all of the opportunities and constraints associated with the options under consideration as well as the community feedback that has been received, APS Instruction and Facilities staff has determined that the use of **on-site relocatable classrooms** is the most effective, flexible, and least disruptive approach to address interim capacity needs at Swanson and Williamsburg middle schools through 2019. In order to continue to allow the opportunity for families and other interested stakeholders to have a meaningful role in shaping the implementation of these interim capacity measures, school-based facilities committees have been established at both Swanson and Williamsburg middle schools. These committees, comprised of representatives from the Swanson and Williamsburg PTAs, parent representatives from all of the feeder elementary schools for each middle school, as well as near-neighbor community members, have launched efforts this fall to work collaboratively with school principals and staff to develop solutions regarding the additional on-site relocatable classrooms. Given their school-based focus, each committee will be taking into careful consideration the unique physical and programmatic attributes of their particular school community.

The use of additional on-site relocatable classrooms is rooted in enhancing the instructional opportunities and serving the needs of the whole child for all APS middle school students; is responsive to the unique scheduling attributes of the APS middle school model; and provides a flexible, responsive, and efficient approach to managing our growing capacity needs, pending completion of the new neighborhood middle school at the Stratford site in 2019.

Background

The completion of the new neighborhood middle school at the Stratford site in 2019 will provide an additional 1,000 seats to alleviate crowding at Williamsburg and Swanson middle schools. Until those seats come online, interim capacity-generating solutions are necessary to support the growing Williamsburg and Swanson student populations. While some measures have already been put in place to accommodate anticipated enrollment for the 2015-2016 school year, additional steps will need to be taken in the fall of 2016. Several potential capacity-generating options were developed by APS staff, reviewed by the School Board, and discussed with members of the community at two open meetings held in June 2015.

APS remains focused on providing high-quality instruction and student support services as the APS student population continues to grow, and is committed to ensuring that interim capacity measures effectively support and positively complement the high-quality instructional opportunities that all APS middle schools provide.

Specific potential interim solutions discussed included schedule modifications (particularly implementation of the 6/7 model) and the use of on-site or off-site locations (both of which would require the use of relocatable classrooms) to house a portion of the school populations. In addition to input from school staff, students, families, and other interested community members, a number of other factors must also be taken into consideration in evaluating potential approaches, including cost, scheduling/timing, and availability of and access to electives and extracurricular activities for all students.

Community Forums: What We've Heard

APS School Board members, planning staff, and school administrators met with families, students, and other interested community members at two open community forums in June 2015. An overview of population projections and details about specific interim capacity options under consideration were presented for discussion. Several key questions and themes emerged from the two community forums as well as other feedback received from members of the APS community, including the following:

1. Student to Teacher Ratios/Class Size

APS determines the ratio of students to teachers by the number of students as opposed to the number of instructional spaces available. APS has been creative with teaching staff to keep class sizes at levels that meet the instructional needs of our students (and are lower than state standards). In addition, students are assigned to teacher advisors (TAs) who support a smaller number of students. The TA is a key member of the child's team, and becomes an important mentor throughout middle school.

2. Feasibility of Schedule Modifications to Increase Capacity (i.e., implementing the 6/7 model)

The 6/7 model (using each existing classroom for six out of seven periods in one day) has been closely studied as a tool to help address capacity needs at the middle school level, as it has proven to be an effective tool in addressing capacity at the high school level. Specifically, this can be accomplished at high schools by creating teacher work areas that allow for collaboration and one-on-one student interaction while classrooms are utilized during the main classroom teacher's "free" periods. The \$5 million renovation at Washington-Lee High School includes several teacher work areas that have

individual workspaces, lockers, glass walled rooms for one-on-one student interaction, and more. Providing these workspaces for teachers opens more classroom space during the day.

The APS middle school instructional model, however, does not lend itself well to the 6/7 model. While the model can increase capacity by increasing classroom usage, it reduces the ability to use available classrooms for small group and one-on-one instruction. Most importantly, the instructional team wishes to retain grade-level communities as part of the middle school model, and the 6/7 model would make it necessary to mix grade levels within the same classroom wings and decrease that sense of community.

3. Relocatable Classrooms

Do students in relocatable classrooms stay in them all day?

If a grade-level community is located in relocatable classrooms, there are multiple opportunities for students to move to and from the main building throughout the day. For example, students transition to the field space or the gym for physical education, to another classroom for electives, and to the cafeteria for lunch.

Is health a consideration for relocatable classrooms?

APS maintains very high standards for relocatable classrooms. As with any classroom in any school, possible health hazards (such as air quality) are monitored closely and any issues are dealt with immediately. New relocatable classrooms are designed to meet the latest construction code requirements for air changes per hour.

What is the school experience like in relocatable classrooms?

Relocatable classrooms offer the same technology and similar configuration as regular classrooms, and they provide access to water and bathrooms. The staffing and quality of instruction expected from APS schools remain at the same level for both relocatable and traditional classrooms.

Are relocatable classrooms part of a long-term solution for APS?

APS has encountered 5.2 percent growth just in the last year and 30 percent since 2007. Relocatable classrooms have and will continue to play an important part in managing our ongoing enrollment growth. Given that our district has limited and finite resources we need to be mindful and strategic about what we build. As we continue to plan for enrollment growth in an instructionally supportive and cost-effective way, interim solutions such as relocatable classrooms will be part of our plan.

Can relocatable classrooms have more than one floor to decrease their footprint?

Relocatable classrooms are designed to be temporary and, as the name suggests, truly “relocatable” classrooms that can be moved around the County to accommodate enrollment. “Modular” classrooms may be multistory but they require elevators and stairs to meet ADA requirements and they are not easily relocatable. The cost of modular classrooms approaches the cost of new permanent construction and is therefore much higher than the cost of relocatable classrooms.

How safe are relocatable classrooms?

State and county building codes apply to relocatable classrooms in the same manner as they do with traditional, permanent construction, and accordingly all phases of design and construction of relocatable classrooms are subject to the review and approval of a certified Commonwealth of Virginia engineer as well as Arlington County Zoning and Inspection Services divisions. APS continuously works with County inspection teams to ensure compliance for all our locations in terms of access and security protocols. All relocatable classrooms are connected directly to the APS 24/7 security monitoring service and linked with the school's main PA system. Relocatable classrooms are considered as separate buildings for the purposes of fire egress and related regulations, and their foundation systems are rated as required by code for 90 mph winds.

4. Feasibility of Off-Site Opportunities

Reed and Madison

If middle school instructional space is located at off-site locations such as the Reed School and Madison Community Center sites, APS would face challenges in striving to offer all students a comparable middle school experience. Electives and physical education classes would have to be offered at both locations, or, alternatively, students would be transported to the main middle school to take certain classes. Afterschool activities would likely be offered at the main middle school site with transportation provided, and the challenges of providing cafeteria and regular-sized gymnasium facilities would need to be resolved. At the same time, Reed and Madison may be better suited for other APS uses which are currently under evaluation.

What's the possibility of working with organizations such as churches for additional common and parking spaces?

APS has worked with nearby churches to provide more parking for teachers and school functions. We will continue to explore utilizing available space within churches and other proximately located facilities for classrooms and other common spaces.

Could leasing office spaces in commercial buildings be a solution?

While office vacancy rates may be high in commercial buildings in urban areas of the County such as Crystal City, it is generally not practical or economically feasible for APS to lease office spaces for classrooms. Configurations of buildings that are available are rarely conducive to school use and there currently are no nearby opportunities that would help alleviate Swanson and Williamsburg capacity issues. Despite these challenges, APS continually monitors leased space availability throughout the County for opportunities that may present feasible options for APS use.

5. Capacity Status at Other APS Middle Schools

Swanson and Williamsburg middle schools will have greater capacity needs in 2016 than Kenmore, Thomas Jefferson, and Gunston. All middle schools are projected to be at or over capacity by 2019 and as a result APS will need to address capacity issues at Kenmore, Thomas Jefferson and Gunston in the coming years.

Staff Analysis and Anticipated Direction

Since the June community forums, staff has continued to evaluate the various options under consideration in light of the comments received as well as other information that has become available with respect to certain options. Notably, two of the potential off-site locations that had been discussed at the forums (specifically Reed and Madison), are currently being considered for other uses that may be better suited to the constraints and challenges associated with each site.

In light of these developments, coupled with all of the considerations and the feedback outlined above, APS Instruction and Facilities staff is recommending that **on-site relocatable classrooms** be utilized as the most effective, flexible, and least disruptive approach to addressing interim capacity needs at Swanson and Williamsburg middle schools through 2019.

Specifically, the use of additional on-site relocatable classrooms provides a sound and comprehensive approach that is rooted in enhancing the instructional and programmatic opportunities which serve the needs of the whole child for all APS middle school students. The approach reflects the unique attributes of the APS middle school model, which does not easily lend itself to the implementation of the 6/7 scheduling model as a method to increase capacity. By allowing all students to remain at their home school, access to extracurricular and elective opportunities will be maintained, and student and family relationships with faculty and staff can be consistent across the school population. Issues raised about the safety and security of relocatable classrooms are a priority to APS, and all relocatable classrooms are and will continue to be closely monitored to ensure that conditions are safe, comfortable, and secure for all APS students and staff. Finally, while cost is not the leading consideration in issues regarding instruction and the educational experience of our students, it remains an important factor given the realities of the budget constraints under which we operate. Use of relocatable classrooms provides a flexible, responsive, and cost-effective approach to managing our growing capacity needs.

APS staff and the school board recognize that these interim measures will necessarily impact some students and families, particularly those with current Swanson and Williamsburg middle school students, in ways that may appear to benefit future APS students at their expense. APS is committed to ensuring that the implementation of these interim capacity measures will be undertaken in such a way as to minimize any adverse impacts, and in fact seek out ways to enhance and enrich the academic and social experience of students who will be directly impacted by the implementation of these interim capacity measures.

Next Steps

In order to continue to allow the opportunity for families and other interested stakeholders to provide input and have a meaningful role in shaping the programming considerations associated with the implementation of these interim capacity measures, school-based facilities committees have been established at both Swanson and Williamsburg middle schools. These planning groups are actively collaborating with APS staff and school administrators to determine the most appropriate and effective use of the additional relocatable classrooms, given the unique physical and programmatic attributes of each school community. It is anticipated that these school-based facilities committees will meet through the fall and finalize their recommendations by January 2016.