



Franklin Public Schools

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To: Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Subcommittee
From: Sara Ahern, Superintendent and Miriam Goodman, School Business Administrator
Date: January 21, 2021
Re: Items for Consideration about Selected Options related to Davis Thayer Elementary School Closing Study

This memo summarizes our thoughts on selected options related to the Davis Thayer Closing Study as presented and discussed at the January 20, 2021 Facilities Analysis Subcommittee meeting. We also provide additional information related to some questions that arose. The points made below are factual in nature. We preface them by acknowledging that the prospect of closing a school is incredibly emotional and comes with many feelings. We all share the same concern for the well-being of students, families, and staff. As always, SEL is paramount to us in Franklin Public Schools and we are poised to provide support to the Franklin community among all options.

As you know, the Facilities Analysis Subcommittee met on January 14, 2021 and discussed financial and educational programming considerations related to the potential closing of the Davis Thayer Elementary School. These financial considerations were based on an assumption of closing DT in FY 22, which had been one of the recommendations from the architect, KBA Associates.

In this memo, we summarize additional, selected potential options for consideration in Stage 2: Evaluating Options. This is not an all inclusive list.

I. Keep Davis Thayer Elementary School Operating as an elementary school in Franklin.

In this option, Davis Thayer Elementary School would remain open as an elementary school in Franklin. The enrollment for DT is forecasted to increase over the next nine years to 269 students by 2029-2030. This forecast predicts 2 sections per grade, and we would have enough classroom space to accommodate these students. School utilization under this scenario would be just over the target elementary utilization rate (95%) at 96%.

The Comprehensive Facilities Analysis extends beyond the physical capacity and also considers educational adequacy, which would not be immediately addressed by this option. In addition to several observations pointed out in the KBA report (page 26), the building would continue to be inaccessible by those (students and staff) with impaired mobility. Addressing the educational

adequacy and accessibility would require additional funds and planning, much of which is outside the control of the School Committee. Funding would likely largely need to come from the Town of Franklin as it is unlikely that the Massachusetts School Building Authority would authorize any funds to renovate the school given the school's age and the enrollment decline/capacity in other school buildings.

An additional consideration is the financial situation of the Town of Franklin and the school department budget. In typical budgeting circumstances (FY 21 is an anomaly due to the pandemic), our fixed costs are rising at a level that is exceeding the incremental support we are receiving from the state in the form of Chapter 70 aid and the support the Town allocates as a result of local revenues. Keeping Davis Thayer open comes at an opportunity cost across the entire district. We do not anticipate that closing DT will cover the entire gap between our fixed costs and revenue from the state/Town. However, keeping DT open will necessitate deeper cuts to programs and services across the district.

II. Close Davis Thayer Elementary School for FY 22

The financial considerations presented at the January 14, 2021 meeting assumed a closing in FY 22 with all DT students being assigned to the Keller Elementary School, since the KBA report recommended this as one outcome of their study. An early estimate shows a potential savings approaching \$1 Million.

Many logistics must be considered related to a closure including transfer of staffing, the establishment of classrooms, transportation routes, and the movement and/or disposal (or sale) of unneeded materials. These logistical considerations would impact both DT and Keller most directly, and also other schools in the District as well. Additionally culture building steps would need to take place for students, families, and faculty/staff. Therefore, a decision on closing for FY 22 would be better done sooner rather than later for planning purposes.

III. Close Davis Thayer Elementary School for FY 23

Closing Davis Thayer Elementary School for FY 23 would keep FY 21 expenses approximately the same for FY 22 with respect to the school and town department budgets. If the school were to close in FY 23, the approximately \$1 Million in budget savings would be realized in FY 23.

This would allow for students at DT to attend school there for one more year. It would also allow the School Committee time to decide if further redistricting in Franklin is warranted.

I have concerns about the ability to staff Davis Thayer for one more year. The District saw a departure of two administrators last year and opted for an Interim principal while the School Committee continued its analysis. I am concerned about the potential departure of staff from the DT school building and inability to recruit replacement educators at a time when we are having a difficult time filling vacancies across the district.

IV. Stage the closing of Davis Thayer Elementary School

The School Committee could decide to close the school beginning in FY 23 and have Kindergarten students and their siblings attend Keller Elementary School in 2021-2022. It is not anticipated that this would yield cost savings in FY 22 and it could, perhaps, be more expensive depending on the numbers of students attending Keller while maintaining Davis Thayer as an elementary school. At a minimum, there would need to be up to 2 buses from the DT area to Keller, increasing the cost of transportation to the district. This could be confusing to families and neighborhoods with multiple buses coming through and going to different schools.

This option would result in approximately 40 Kindergarten students moving to Keller, expanding Keller's Kindergarten classrooms from 2 to 4. Kindergarten staffing would likely be a net of zero in that the sections would collapse at DT. The unknown variable is the number of siblings and impact at Keller. At this time, we anticipate that many siblings could be accommodated in open seats particularly in grades 1-4 at Keller with current staffing. Based on the census (25 incoming K students), there are 10 siblings distributed across grades 1-3 next year. This number could be accommodated at Keller but there is some uncertainty as Kindergarten registration has not yet occurred and we will see additional K students who are not on the census list who may also have siblings.

There are 33 students in VLA during 2020-2021 who will be enrolled in grades 1-5 next year. I anticipate a mix of feelings regarding closing DT in FY 22 versus FY 23.

From a school culture perspective, it could ease the transition for individual students but this plan would stagger the transition and may make the establishment of a new school culture more challenging.

Fully staffing Davis Thayer Elementary School could be a challenge during FY 22 under this circumstance as noted above.

V. Close Davis Thayer Elementary School and redistrict Franklin elementary students

The possible closing of Davis Thayer Elementary School raises the question of redistricting students across Franklin (refer to district map). Notably, the utilization of Parmenter is at 90% and projected to increase in the coming years. Additionally, Kennedy Elementary School space utilization is at 79%, which is below the optimal capacity. Although enrollment at Kennedy is projected to decrease, the modulars at Kennedy are also scheduled to be removed in July 2021 thereby reducing usable space. Additionally, both schools are home to specialized programs that are growing to meet the needs of students.

As noted in the KBA report, it is likely that Franklin elementary/middle school districts will need to be addressed in the future. The question remains as to whether or not redistricting is

something that should be considered as part of closing Davis Thayer Elementary School or planned for in the future. It would be prudent to avoid any situation where Davis Thayer Elementary students are attending school at Keller and then redistricted at a later point in time. Additionally, it would also be wise to avoid redistricting now and then again in the near future for all students in FPS. It would be best to redistrict once with a look ahead at space needs.

The development of a Master Facilities Plan is a likely School Committee pursuit in the next several years, I recommend that there not be redistricting at this time as it is likely to be involved in any future changes that the Committee may consider.

As for keeping Davis Thayer Elementary School open and redistricting, the recommendation to study the school’s closure did not stem from imbalanced enrollment across the district. The recommendation to study the closure involved both a significant decrease in enrollment (going down to 1920 in 2024-2025, which can be more efficiently serviced in 5 buildings) as well as concerns related to the physical space and security of an aging building. It is the oldest school in the district and has a relatively high cost for maintenance. In the years since the study began, our financial situation has not improved and is, perhaps, more concerning as a result of the recession we face. For these reasons, I would not suggest keeping Davis Thayer open and redistricting.

BUILDING EXPENSES BY SCHOOL LOCATION	2018 ACTUAL	2019 ACTUAL	2020 ACTUAL	2021 BUDGET
FHS	1,362,936	1,410,851	1,428,576	1,228,152
RMS	423,598	412,872	393,922	354,753
HMMS	413,156	470,654	444,180	373,763
KELLER	383,561	378,620	344,402	390,967
ASMS	310,483	309,210	257,424	400,467
DAVIS THAYER	298,433	268,263	273,426	145,670
OAK	291,303	294,721	251,500	346,263
JF KENNEDY	271,110	284,596	302,795	275,313
PARMENTER	262,946	209,011	227,432	312,313
JEFFERSON	252,370	252,810	232,239	341,753
ECDC	112,890	139,528	153,917	103,169
TOTALS	4,382,786	4,431,136	4,309,813	4,272,583