

**Franklin Public Schools
Franklin, Massachusetts 02038**

Action Required

Subject: Retirement of Davis Thayer

Date: February 9, 2021

Dept: FPS

Reason: Required Vote

Enclosure: yes

Recommendation:

Retirement of Davis Thayer Elementary School

I recommend approval of the retirement (closing) of Davis Thayer Elementary School for FY22 as discussed.

Action Requested of the School Committee:

Majority vote of the School Committee is required.

Vote Tabulator

A Bergen: Y / N T Keenan: Y / N

J D'Angelo: Y / N M J Scofield: Y / N

J Pond-Pfeffer: Y / N D Spencer: Y / N

E Stokes: Y / N Action: _____

To: Franklin School Committee

From: Ad Hoc Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Subcommittee

Date: February 3, 2021

Re: Recommendation for Davis Thayer Facility Closure FY22

In September 2019, the Franklin Public Schools Superintendent recommended a comprehensive closing study be conducted for the Davis Thayer Elementary School building. The Ad Hoc Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Subcommittee was established in November 2019 and has worked diligently to complete the closing study in accordance with the School Committee policy FCB: retirement of facilities.

This report summarizes the process we followed, information we gathered, ways we communicated, options we evaluated, and recommendations we set forth to the Franklin School Committee.

**Ad Hoc Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Subcommittee Final Report
February, 2021**

Recommendation for Closing Study

In September 2019, the Franklin Public Schools (FPS) Superintendent made a [recommendation](#) to the previous School Committee to enact [policy FCB - Retirement of Facilities](#), which mandates that a comprehensive closing study be conducted when a facility is considered for retirement. The factors that contributed to her decision to make the recommendation include:

- 1) the age and design of the facility
- 2) decreased enrollment across the district
- 3) economic efficiency

The recommendation for a comprehensive closing study of the Davis Thayer Elementary School (DT) was authorized by the previous School Committee on 9/10/19. The Superintendent and the School Committee chairperson held meetings that week to follow up directly with the DT community about the recommendation and process.

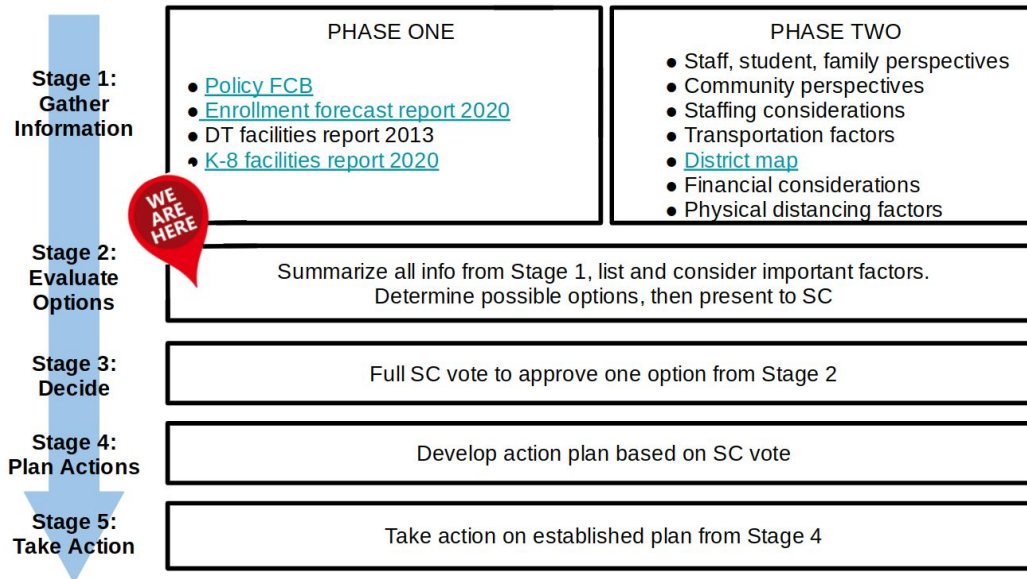
Ad Hoc Subcommittee

The Ad Hoc Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Subcommittee was established in November 2019 to complete a comprehensive closing study of the Davis Thayer Elementary School. Subcommittee members are: Elise Stokes (Subcommittee Chairperson, School Committee member), Judy Pond-Pfeffer (School Committee member), Mary Jane Scofield (School Committee member). Dr. Sara Ahern (FPS Superintendent) is an ex-officio member and Miriam Goodman (FPS School Business Administrator) serves to advise the subcommittee.

The subcommittee has worked diligently in accordance with the policy FCB, and has completed our assigned task of conducting a comprehensive closing study of the Davis Thayer Facility (DT).

Process

The subcommittee began our work by reviewing [policy FCB](#) and creating a visual to guide our process in accordance with the requirements detailed in the policy. We strictly adhered to this process, and publicly reviewed our progress and current Stage/Phase at all subcommittee meetings and during Information Matters at School Committee meetings.



Information Gathering

Stage 1: Phase One was centered around gathering information from independent sources. As a subcommittee, we reviewed and discussed the [2019 McKibben Demographic/Enrollment Forecast](#), the 2013 Kaestle Boos Associates (KBA) DT Facility Report, and the [2020 Kaestle Boos Associates Facilities Assessment Report](#). As you are aware, we hosted [McKibben on 2/25/20](#) and [KBA on 10/27/20](#) to present their findings and recommendations to the full School Committee.

- The McKibben Demographic/ Enrollment Forecast report showed elementary enrollment has decreased over the last 4 years and is forecasted to continue to decrease over the next 5 years. This report referenced the continuation of decreased enrollment the district has been experiencing over the last 13 years: in 2008-2009 the FPS enrollment was 6,244 compared with 4,830 in 2020-2021. FPS elementary enrollment was 2,920 in 2008-2009 compared with 1,974 in 2019-2020 and 1,878 in 2020-2021 (some decrease attributed to pandemic).
- The 2013 KBA DT Facility Report offered a list of major repairs required to meet code compliance, it outlined several functional space issues which make the building “insufficient to provide a comfortable teaching environment”, it provided a renovation/addition estimate of \$22.4 million, and a new construction estimate of \$28.8 million.
- The 2020 KBA Facilities Assessment Report results showed that 1) the FPS schools are running under capacity and capacity is anticipated to continue to decline in the next 10 years, and 2) the three stand-alone elementary schools are aging and need attention and 3) DT has the lowest educational adequacy score across elementary schools.

- The KBA report recommends that to optimize functional capacity, FPS should close 1-2 elementary schools now and work to develop a Master Facilities Plan to delineate future elementary redistricting and middle school consolidation. As one option, the report recommended closing DT and moving the current DT students to Keller, which would increase the Keller/Sullivan School utilization rate from 59% to 80% currently and 49% to 74% in 10 years.

Stage 1: Phase Two focused on gathering stakeholder and district information. We [surveyed perspectives from stakeholders](#) (which included DT families, DT staff, other FPS families, other FPS staff, and community members). Survey results showed that about 27% of respondents were “not at all concerned” about the possible closing of DT and about 26% were “extremely concerned” about the possible closing of DT. The main concerns about closing that were identified in the survey were redistricting, increased class sizes, and losing staff positions. The main reasons identified for continuing to use DT as a FPS school building included small class sizes, small school setting/ sense of community and walkability as a neighborhood school. The top three types of support identified to ease a potential transition to a new building were:

1. Thoughtful transition process (including tour of new school building, meeting admin and staff, connection-building, preparations to meet all needs of DT students in the new building, etc.)
2. My child placed in a class with other Davis Thayer students
3. Familiar DT staff continue to work with my child(ren)

Throughout our process, we encouraged and received emails from stakeholders about a variety of topics related to the work of the facilities analysis subcommittee. Overall, during the last year, we received emails from:

- 8 people (including DT families, DT staff, residents, etc) who requested keeping DT open for FY22 &/or forever
- 20 people (including DT families, DT staff, residents, etc) who supported closing DT

A summary of opinions specific to the potential closure, disaggregated by role is below:

- 5 out of 157 DT families (3.2%) emailed their support for keeping DT open for FY22
- 5 out of 157 DT families (3.2%) emailed their support for closing DT
- 0 out of 47 DT staff members emailed their support for keeping D open for FY22
- 6 out of 47 DT staff (12.7%) emailed their support for closing DT
- 3 residents emailed their support for keeping DT open (for FY22 &/or forever)
- 8 residents emailed their support for closing DT

At the end of each facilities analysis subcommittee meeting, we reserved time for citizens’ comments and during this time we heard perspectives related to various areas of our work. A summary of comments that specifically shared opinions on the potential closure is below:

- 2 parents publicly commented to keep DT open for FY22
- 3 parents publicly commented to support closing DT
- 2 DT staff publicly commented to keep DT open for FY22
- 0 DT staff publicly commented to support closing DT

During this Stage1/Phase Two, we also examined [financial and educational programming considerations](#) presented by the district. This document focused on the areas required by our policy FCB, and also covered additional factors: enrollment, staffing, other cost savings, transportation, building costs history, continuity of instructional and community programs, pandemic considerations related to physical distancing, considerations for Keller and Sullivan, and the [district map](#).

As part of our process, as required by the policy, we discussed possible alternative educational uses of the building at our subcommittee meeting on 1/20/21. The district leadership team had discussed and considered possibilities of repurposing the current DT building to house:

- an alternative high school/ diversion program
- an employee daycare program
- a professional development center
- additional office space

Two relevant factors would impact the feasibility of any of these possible options: FPS enrollment is declining, especially in the middle schools, which gives the district extra space elsewhere. Also, the DT building’s educational adequacy, age, and accessibility would remain as critical concerns and would need to be addressed if the building was used for an alternative educational purpose.

Stakeholder Communication

The subcommittee made it a priority to communicate in a variety of ways with both the Davis Thayer community as well as the greater Franklin Public Schools community throughout our process. The [frequency and methods of communication with stakeholders](#) were extensive. Some examples of stakeholder communication are highlighted below:

- The DT families and staff were updated through monthly email communication from the Superintendent, as well as opportunities to engage in dialogue at family meetings and faculty meetings.
- We created a [Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis website](#) for easy access to all facilities analysis information; a link to contact the subcommittee directly by email was also included on our website to help encourage increased communication.
- The DT School Council and Joint Parent Communications Council (JPCC) were updated.
- The greater FPS community received communication updates through quarterly emails.

- The DT community, greater FPS community, as well as the Franklin community as a whole were able to hear detailed updates twice monthly at School Committee meetings, and at facilities analysis subcommittee meetings.
- Franklin Matters and others publicized frequent updates through their online communication channels (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.).
- The Facilities Analysis Subcommittee held two public Community Information Sessions to engage the community in dialogue about our findings at two critical points: the [first community session was on 3/5/20](#), after the McKibben Demographic report was presented to the School Committee, and the [second community session was held on 11/4/20](#) after the KBA report was presented to the School Committee. The entire FPS community was invited to participate in these info sessions, and they were recorded and posted on our website for all to view.
- During this process, the subcommittee encouraged and received emails from various stakeholders and we reserved time in subcommittee meetings for citizens to comment, give input, as well as share questions or concerns. All information gathered through these [communications were documented](#), summarized, and considered as part of our evaluation process. In the interest of transparency and equity, all emails and citizens' comments were given the same general response that thanked them for their interest and encouraged continued involvement. All issues that were brought through emails and comments were addressed publicly in a future meeting.
- Since mid March 2020, all subcommittee meetings were held virtually due to pandemic precautions. This virtual setting allowed convenient access for community members to attend remotely.
- Superintendent Dr. Ahern and subcommittee chair Ms. Stokes completed an interview about the work of the facilities analysis subcommittee on the [Franklin Matters podcast in November, 2020](#).
- We recently developed a [FAQ section](#) for our website where the community can gain answers to some common questions.

Evaluation of Options

Based on the information gathered by the subcommittee during Stage 1, in combination with knowledge of the FPS current structures and supports, the district compiled [5 reasonable options for the subcommittee to consider](#). These options were introduced to the subcommittee for questions and initial discussion at our meeting on 1/20/21. Subcommittee members were asked to spend time on their own between meetings to consider all the information gathered during our process, independently evaluate pros/ cons of each option, then select the 1 or 2 options that they believed were best for the Franklin community.

The 5 options were presented and discussed a second time on 1/28/21, then the subcommittee members were each asked to share their individual evaluation of the options and share their recommendations(s). [Pros and cons of each option](#) were considered and discussed.

The recommendation to close DT in FY22 was independently selected by each of the subcommittee members, and supported by FPS administration. On 2/3/21 the subcommittee reviewed, discussed, and finalized this report then voted unanimously to present the recommendation via this summary to the full School Committee at their meeting on 2/9/21.

Recommendation

After completing a comprehensive closing study for the Davis Thayer School, the Ad Hoc Facilities Analysis subcommittee has voted to present this final report to the Franklin School Committee with our recommendation that the DT facility be closed for FY22.

Additionally, we also recommend that the Franklin School Committee establish a standing subcommittee focused on creating a Master Facilities Plan to address other facility needs in the district.

Respectfully submitted,

The Davis Thayer Facilities Analysis Sub-Committee:

Elise A. Stokes

Mary Jane Scofield

Judith Pond-Pfeffer