

PK-8 School Building Update March 2019

Greetings Families, Community Members, and Faculty:

I would like to share an update of the new PK-8 Elementary School Project with you. The building design phase has been very intense and rewarding. We continue to work on finishes and materials and will offer a presentation to School Committee in April. Additionally, our monthly Building Committee Meetings are taped by Easthampton Media for viewing by Charter Cable subscribers in Easthampton, so tune in each month to Channels 191, 192, and/or 193 to see what we have been working on and get the latest glimpses into the architect's drawings. Non-Charter Cable subscribers can view meetings by visiting www.easthamptonmedia.org.

Our PK-8 Building Project is still set to begin this fall. Initial planning estimates projected that the building would be completed in two years, with demolition of the old White Brook Middle School occurring in the summer of 2021, along with delivery and set-up of furniture, technology and materials right before the students moved into the new school. This timeline was always tight with very little wiggle room to account for delays in materials, deliveries, or weather factors.

Now we know more specifics about the design of the building and what is needed to complete the rest of the site work. In this phase of the project's development, we are moving from conceptual to reality, and the Building Committee has come to the realization, with help from consultants and experts in the field, that our original timeline is not realistic for the scope of the project. The consultants that have recently been meeting with the architects and our Owners Project Manager (OPM) have expressed concerns about the timeline, given market factors and unknowns (such as weather).

Revised Timeline

From the school district perspective, as well as mine as your superintendent, our first priority is always to do what is best for our students. With this vision, and based on the updated information from our architects and the OPM, the Building Committee met this week to announce that we are revising the timeline and will have a staggered entry into the new school. We feel this will allow us to do the project *RIGHT*, making sure we are mitigating risks and being prudent in our decisions.

What does this mean for everyone?

In January of 2022, *White Brook Middle School* students in grades 5-8 will move into the new school, with all the current staff and administration in place. This class will have the final group of fifth graders with the distinction of being considered "middle schoolers." The following year's fifth graders will be designated as elementary school students. Once students in grades 5-8 move in, WBMS will be abated and torn down. Then the actual site that WBMS sits on will be graded and the parking lots completed.

All PK-4 students and faculty will move into the new school in the fall of 2022 for the beginning of the school year. We will not uproot our youngest students during the middle of a school year, but rather leave them, and our faculty in their familiar surroundings.

What will be the anticipated benefits of this change?

We feel there are many benefits to planning for this staggered entry.

1. Better transition into the school- WBMS students and faculty will have time to fully orient to the building before the PK-4 students arrive
2. Better opportunities for elementary student and families to become familiar with the new school. Moving from three small elementary schools into one larger school, in a new location, will be a significant change for families, students and staff. This change will allow for time to visit the building, participate in activities, and get familiar with the layout and location, hopefully putting some students and families more at ease.
3. Having only a portion of the eventual student population on site when half of the site is still under construction is both more logistically sound and safer. Approximately two-thirds of the students will be elementary school age, and only about one-third of the parking can be completed before the existing building is torn down. By staggering move-in dates, we will eliminate an enormous amount of congestion and potential confusion while the remaining site work is completed.
4. Every project has a punch list – a list of things to complete before the building is handed over. This time will allow for the punch list to be addressed without rush.
5. We will provide opportunities for staff to get acclimated to the new building and its state-of-the-art technology through professional development and team building in the new space.

Why the staggered entry?

1. We need WBMS students out of the current school building before we tear it down and complete the parking lots. The current elementary school buildings will not be torn down, so there is not the same urgency for the elementary school students.
2. Moving four (4) schools into one is an enormous undertaking and we want to be particularly sensitive to the anxiety some of our youngest families will have around this. A staggered entry allows for our youngest families to visit the school, take part in walking tours, and get used to the physical layout prior to moving in. They will be able to participate in events on site to get more familiar with the new building. It also allows for furniture, technology and equipment to be delivered on a rolling basis, with thoughtful planning.

As with most large building projects, delays are expected, and I appreciate that our Building Committee is acting thoughtfully and proactively. This is preferable to finding out our project is delayed at the end and we are scrambling to house our students. This new proposed timeline allows ample time for contingencies – such as weather or market conditions, so we can maximize our budget without being pressed. We believe this will allow for the smoothest transition into the new school for families and staff.

I hope you will reach out to me via email at superintendent@epsd.us with questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Dr. Allison LeClair

