

ADMINISTRATOR ASSISTANCE

116 West 7th Street

Brookston, Indiana 47923

PLANNING STUDY

for

WASHINGTON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

WCS

Completed:

July 20, 2017

Consultants:

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Preface

Administrator Assistance was contracted by the Washington Community Schools to provide input and to assist in the development of a plan to insure all students in the Washington Community Schools receive an equitable and comparable education. Joan L. Keller and Steve Wittenauer served as consultants and are the authors of this report.

In preparing the analysis the consultants examined the academic, demographic, and school population data. They also interviewed representatives from the following stakeholder groups: administrators, teachers, non-certified personnel, parents from each elementary school, community members, and civic leaders. The analysis in this report represents only the opinions of the authors. Any decisions made after reading our opinions should only be undertaken by the superintendent and the Board of School Trustees of the Washington Community Schools.

The consultants would like to thank the board and the superintendent of the Washington Community Schools for the opportunity to work with them and to express our appreciation to the administration, staff, and community members who provided valuable feedback and assistance.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan L. Keller & Steve Wittenauer

July 20, 2017

Introduction

Consultants from Administrator Assistance, members of the Board of School Trustees of the Washington Community Schools, and the school superintendent began meeting in January of 2017. The superintendent and board members were concerned that not all elementary students in the district were receiving an equitable education due to differing accountability grades, students being housed in four different buildings, varied ISTEP+ scores, and the differing demographics of the students enrolled in the individual buildings. The table below illustrates those differences.

	Griffith	Lena Dunn	North	Veale
Enrollment	420	445	407	164
Attendance %	96%	95.2%	96.7%	97.1%
% F/R Lunch	80%	91.2%	51.4%	31.1%
% ELL Students	15%	19.8%	5.2%	-0%-
% Special Ed.	21.7%	27.9%	18.7%	23.1%
ISTEP+				
Math	51.9%	36.8%	58.3%	76%
Language Arts	57.4%	47.6%	70.1%	84.4%
Math/LA	39.8%	31.7%	50.4%	67.7%
Science	40.2%	29.8%	67.8%	81.4%
Social Studies	53.8%	34.6%	75.4%	80.8%
Letter Grade	C	F	B	A

The board of school trustees determined to hire Administrator Assistance to conduct a study of the issue and to offer possible solutions. Consultants then toured the four elementary facilities, conducted interviews, analyzed parent surveys administered by the corporation, and reviewed DOE school and corporation data.

Interviews were conducted during four days in February, April, and May. The following groups were interviewed separately during those days: maintenance director, transportation director, technology directors, special education cooperative director and assistant director, parents from each of the individual elementary schools, teachers from each of the individual elementary schools, math and language arts teachers from the junior high school, non-certified employees from each individual school, administrators, community members, and civic leaders. The mayor, director of Economic and Community Development, and the director of the Chamber of Commerce were interviewed by telephone.

In the spring of 2017, Washington Community Schools sent surveys concerning the education in the elementary schools. Surveys were mailed and included a stamped, self-addressed return envelope for the parents' convenience. Surveys were translated into other languages for parents who do not speak English. Surveys were sent to 550 parents. It is important to note that only 83 (15%) of the surveys were returned.

The most recent school and corporation data on the Department of Education website was 2015-16 for ISTEP+ scores and letter grades and 2016-17 for demographic data. The website was also valuable in our determination of trend data concerning the elementary schools.

Based upon the surveys, interviews, and research of Department of Education data, the consultants determined three critical issues. These issues are academic, capacity of current facilities, and room for growth.

Critical Findings

The most immediate issue confronting the school corporation is how to improve the academic achievement of all students at the elementary (K-6) level in the district. We identified the following challenges:

1. Although collaboration and alignment among all four elementary schools has been initiated, at the current time standards and curriculum alignment among the schools is not realized.
2. Survey results and interviews indicate that high expectations are not defined in the same way in all elementary schools.
3. Student demographics are substantially different in each of the elementary schools.
4. Letter grades for the four elementary schools range from an A to an F.
5. ISTEP+ pass rates for combined language arts and math range from 31.7% to 67.7%.

Elementary and junior high school buildings in the Washington Community

Schools have reached occupancy capacity, therefore, allowing little if any room for growth or realignment. We identified the following **challenges**:

1. The ability to realign the buildings is limited due to available space.
2. Grants received by the corporation for pre-school and after-school programs must remain at Lena Dunn for the duration of the grant periods or the grants will be forfeited.
3. Of the four elementary schools, three of the schools are housed within the city limits of Washington and one lies 3-5 miles outside the city limits creating transportation concerns with realignment.
4. Enrollment numbers in the Washington Community Schools have seen a slight increase over the past 4-5 years.
5. Portable classrooms are currently in use on two elementary sites.

With the completion of I-69 and the potential for new business and school corporation growth, it is imperative that the Washington Community Schools has the capacity to enroll and educate additional students. Construction of a new facility or facilities is needed. We identified the following **challenges**:

1. Current student numbers in the four elementary schools and the junior high are at or close to maximum capacity.
2. Construction of a new building(s) would require the passage of a referendum in order to allow collection of taxes above the tax caps.
3. Vacant elementary buildings would need to be re-purposed in order to avoid charter schools from leasing them for \$1 per year. The addition of a charter school(s) in the district would increase the competition for students and subsequent dollars.
4. Need to purchase a building site(s) for construction adding to the cost of construction.

Options

(Academic)

- 1. Leave building configurations the same and assign resources to buildings to address student needs.**

Advantages:

- No overcrowding in buildings
- Reduced transitions for students
- Ease of pick-up and drop-off of students for parents
- Transportation routes already established

Concerns:

- Concern for state takeover of lower-performing elementary school in the next 2-4 years
- Resources spread too thin—cannot maximize resource use (Not all schools qualifying for Title I have access to supplemental services)
- Difficulty providing an equitable education and expectations for all students across each grade level
- Lack of curriculum alignment across grade levels and buildings
- Transfer requests among schools (students & teachers)
- No allowance for growth in enrollment
- Difficult to schedule grade-level collaboration

- 2. Leave building configurations the same and redistribute elementary students among the four buildings to equalize diversity.**

Advantages:

- Possible to avoid state takeover of lower-performing elementary buildings
- Ability to equalize class sizes across grade levels
- Equalize the diversity across grade levels and within schools
- No overcrowding in buildings

Concerns:

- Resources spread too thin—cannot maximize resource use
- Difficult for parents whose children will be displaced from one elementary to another
- Lack of curriculum alignment across grade levels and buildings
- Transfer requests among schools (students & teachers)
- No allowance for growth

- Transportation concerns
 - Difficult to schedule grade-level collaboration
- 3. Convert each elementary school to buildings committed to specific grade level configurations. (e.g. Lena Dunn grades pre-K – 1, Griffith grades 2-3, North grades 4-5, and Veale grade 6)**

Advantages:

- Curriculum Alignment: both horizontal and vertical
- Equity in learning opportunities for all students
- Consistent student and teacher expectations across each grade level
- Better use of resources—more efficient
- No intra-corporation mobility among students
- Eliminate immediate need for state takeover of low-performing school
- Ease in grade-level collaboration

Concerns:

- Transportation routes
- No allowance for growth in elementary schools
- Multiple transitions to multiple buildings from K-7
- Multiple pick-up and drop-off times for parents
- Threat of some students transferring to neighboring schools
- Need to alter each facility to be age-appropriate (desks, restroom facilities, cafeteria)
- Need to house life skills class in each elementary building, not just one
- Determination of grade levels to be housed in each buildings

Options

(Capacity and Growth)

- 1. Construct two new buildings and re-purpose vacated elementary schools. (e.g. pre-K-3 building and 4-6 building or pre-K-5 building and 6-8 building)**

Advantages:

- No overcrowding in buildings
- Fewer transitions for students
- Ease in curriculum alignment
- Equity in learning opportunities for all students
- Better use of resources—more efficient

- No intra-corporation mobility among students
- Little if any intra-corporation mobility among staff
- Simplify transportation needs
- Plan allowances for growth in enrollment
- Ease in grade-level collaboration

Concerns:

- Financial burden on taxpayers—need for referendum due to cost of structures and avoidance of further circuit breaker losses
- Empty school buildings—difficult to re-purpose multiple buildings
- Continued maintenance costs of re-purposed buildings
- Construction completion 4-5 years in the future

2. Construct one new building and re-purpose vacated elementary buildings. (e.g. pre-K – 6 building or pre-K – 4 building and house 5-6 at Lena Dunn)

Advantages:

- No overcrowding in buildings
- Plan allowances for growth in enrollment
- May reduce number of buildings to be re-purposed
- Less burden on taxpayer than two new structures
- Ease in curriculum alignment
- Equity in learning opportunities for all students
- Better use of resources—more efficient
- Little or no intra-corporation mobility among teachers and students
- Simplify transportation needs
- Ease in grade-level collaboration
- Consolidation of special education classes (e.g. fewer life skills classes)
- Fewer transitions for students

Concerns:

- Financial burden on taxpayers—need for referendum due to cost of structure and avoidance of further circuit breaker losses
- Empty school buildings—difficult to re-purpose multiple buildings
- Continued maintenance costs of re-purposed buildings
- Construction completion 4-5 years in the future

Solutions for Short- and Long-Term Options

A short-term goal of the administration is the equity of education offered for all elementary students and the avoidance of a possible future state takeover of a lower-performing elementary school. Lena Dunn has been the recipient of two grants, an after-school grant and a pre-school grant. Both grant programs must remain at Lena Dunn through the duration of the grants; thus, the corporation is limited in how it can address the low achievement scores at Lena Dunn as compared to the other elementary schools.

With the opening of the I-69 corridor, school and community members are looking at future growth in economic development, and as a consequence, an increase in student enrollment. The corporation's current facilities are near or at capacity making future growth unrealistic. It should be a long-term goal of the corporation to improve and expand its facilities in order to accommodate growth and promote academic excellence for all.

If growth is to be realized, the corporation will need to plan a building project that results in opening a new school or schools no later than the 2022-2023 school year. (This latter date would correspond with the completion of the grants at Lena Dunn.) During the years preceding the opening of a new school or schools, the corporation should work with staff, parents, and community members to get buy-in for the project, do all necessary steps in completing the planning prior to building, and complete the structure(s) for occupancy. The decision on how many buildings are needed and the grade-level configuration in each building would need to be determined. An advantage of eliminating the need for four elementary schools is to join all students under the Washington Hatchet logo and share a single existence and no longer exist as separate elementary entities.

If the corporation determined to build one new structure, multiple alternatives exist. The decision could be made to build one K-6 building to house all elementary students. This would create an elementary school with an initial enrollment of at least 1400-1500 students based on today's enrollment. In order for the corporation to grow, the building would need to be constructed for a larger maximum number.

The corporation could determine to build a K-4 building and house grades 5-6 in one of the other available elementary schools. This would decrease the cost of construction, and it would also leave the corporation with one less vacant elementary building to re-purpose. The facilities and furniture in the elementary building would need to be changed to be age specific, but it should not necessitate adding on to the original building.

The corporation could determine to build a K-3 building, house students in grades 4-5 at Lena Dunn, and house the students in grade 6 at North. This would keep Lena Dunn open to fulfill the requirements of the two grants. Lena Dunn is also one of the bigger elementary schools in the corporation; therefore, by housing only two grades in that facility the corporation would have the space to absorb any future growth. Housing grade 6 students at North would put those students in close proximity to the junior high and high school. This would provide a better opportunity for those students to participate in music opportunities (band/choir) that would give easier access to band and choir directors. By housing one grade level in North, the corporation could absorb future growth without using the existing portable buildings on that site. Life skills classrooms are already established at Lena Dunn for those students, and the grade 6 life skills students could probably be a part of the junior high.

If the corporation determined to build two new structures and not use any of the existing elementary buildings to house students, alternatives again exist. One alternative is to construct a K-3 building and a 4-6 building. This would create buildings with smaller student enrollment numbers. This would give the corporation room to grow in the elementary schools, but it would not help the capacity issue at the junior high.

In order to address capacity issues at the elementary schools and the junior high school, the corporation could build two facilities with one housing students in K-5 and a second structure serving as a middle school housing students in grades 6-8. Several of those interviewed expressed a desire to have the 6th grade students move to the junior high and create a true middle school, and this solution would serve that purpose, as well as, providing room for growth in student numbers.

Constructing new buildings will address the issues of academics and enrollment growth in the near future, but it does not address the issue of academics in the present. During the time between the current school year and the completion of a new structure(s), the Washington Community Schools will need to address the immediate concern of all students receiving an equitable education in the elementary schools and the avoidance of the possible state takeover during this interim period. Several alternatives exist.

The decision to continue the current practices and grade-level configurations in each elementary school is obviously not a good solution. The difference in student performance levels among the four elementary schools is a trend that has existed over time. The one accountability grade of B in the lowest performing school during the past five years appears to be an anomaly that has proven difficult to repeat. The decision to change the grade-level

configurations in the individual elementary schools should also be accompanied by a name change of the different elementary schools. In order to reduce the comparison and competition among the four schools and to erase any prior biases, it is suggested that all unite under one logo.

To house all students in a grade level in one building is a way to provide equity and common high expectations for all students at each grade level. It is difficult to consider this option without including all elementary students in the corporation including the students at Veale Elementary. In determining which grade levels to house in which elementary school, several factors will play a role. Each elementary school has the capacity to add at least one other classroom by converting the computer labs into regular classrooms. This is possible with the corporation's 1:1 initiative.

1. Lena Dunn Elementary

- Pre-school and after-school programs will be part of Lena Dunn for the next four years. With that in mind, one scenario is to make Lena Dunn an early childhood center with grade configurations of pre-K-1. This provides continuity and consistency for students and fosters both horizontal and vertical alignment in the early grades.
- Another consideration at Lena Dunn is the athletic facilities. Junior high students use the athletic facilities for extra-curricular activities. Another scenario is to house grades 5-6 at Lena Dunn, in addition to the pre-school, for greater convenience with after-school activities. The after-school program would also benefit those students who would have a time lapse between the end of the school day and the beginning of athletic practice or other extra-curricular activities. Another advantage of housing older elementary students at Lena Dunn is that the Life Skills classrooms are already equipped with a kitchen facility (which is needed for the upper elementary students) and the appropriate classroom and sensory room requirements.
- If the corporation were inclined to move some of their corporation owned portables or to construct additional classrooms at Lena Dunn, grades 4-6 could be housed in this facility along with the pre-school.

2. North Elementary

- This facility is located closest to the junior high and the high school. Portable classrooms are currently in use on this site, and we anticipate the need to continue using those with any configuration.

- The determination of which grades to house at North will be dependent on how students in other grade levels will be dispersed. The corporation will also need to take into consideration that North Elementary is one of the smaller schools.
3. Griffith Elementary
 - This facility has had some fairly recent renovation and is larger than North Elementary.
 - The athletic facilities are better suited to younger students.
 4. Veale Elementary
 - Veale is the only elementary school located outside the city limits of Washington. Portable classrooms are also in use at Veale Elementary.
 - Only one grade level can be housed at Veale. In order to limit the number of student transitions from one building to the next, it seems appropriate to put either kindergarten or 6th grade at Veale.

As a short-term solution, the corporation should be prudent in its decisions to spend money on the existing elementary schools. Some expense will need to be realized so that each school can be age appropriate in restroom facilities, furniture, etc. It is not recommended that the corporation spend additional monies to renovate or add classrooms if the buildings are not going to be in use in five years.

Recommendation:

Based on what we think is best for the students of the Washington Community Schools, it is our recommendation that the Washington Community School Corporation determine to build one new building to open no later than the 2019-20 school year. This building should house students in grades K-3. Students in grades 4-5 should be housed at Lena Dunn, and students in grade 6 would be housed at North Elementary. It is suggested that the names of these two schools be changed to reflect a new beginning.

Kovert Hawkins gave us an estimate of \$17,000,000 to \$20,000,000 as the cost of building a new K-3 building. The building would need to initially house around 825 students but should be built to accommodate any future growth in the corporation. The current assessed valuation (AV) for the Washington Community School Corporation is \$561,484,945. At this AV the corporation would raise approximately \$56,149 for every \$.01 added to the tax rate. The corporation's current tax rate is .8863. (See Appendix B for tax rate comparisons of neighboring school corporations.) With the interest rates rising, it would be prudent to proceed with the bonding sooner more than later. Because of the cost of the building and the current circuit

breaker losses, it would be necessary for the bond issue to go to referendum during a primary or general election. (Any cost of a referendum vote other than during a primary or general election would need to be fully funded by the corporation.) This estimate does not include the cost of purchasing the ground needed to house the K-3 campus.

Two current elementary schools (Veale and Griffith) would no longer serve as elementary schools. Based on IC 20-26-7-1, these two schools would either need to be re-purposed for educational purposes or made available to any Charter School organization for \$1/year. Re-purposing could take the form of a vocational center, an alternative school, a pre-school, etc. This decision would need to be based on the needs and desires of the corporation administration and stakeholders.

The portable classrooms housed at Veale and North should not have to be used as elementary classrooms with this proposed recommendation. The ability to keep all students within one major structure during the school day is a major improvement in the safety of all students.

Finally, no additional life skills classrooms would be needed in the current existing buildings. Lena Dunn currently has life skills classrooms and facilities in place, and the 6th grade students at North Elementary could be housed with the nearby junior high students. The new elementary building would include in its plans life skills classrooms to address the needs of students in grades K-3.

By putting all students of a grade level in only one building, the corporation should be better able to address the needs of all students. The use of resources (e.g. Title I, special education, classroom instructional assistants, etc.) should be available to more students and be used more efficiently. At the current time, it is difficult to provide the needed resources for all students because of the limits placed on those resources.

Conclusion

The Washington Community Schools is at a crossroads. Stakeholders must decide if they want to move forward or keep the status quo. It is difficult to maintain the status quo today with school choice, unpredictable funding, and changes in the education landscape surrounding testing and accountability. With state takeover a possibility for at least one elementary school, it is imperative for the Washington Community Schools to embrace needed change. Anthony Robbins is credited with saying, "If you always do what you've always done, you will always get what you've always got."

In addition to the academic issues facing the Washington Community Schools, the need to retain current students and to plan for future enrollment growth is a concern. Neighboring school corporations (i.e. Jasper, Barr-Reeve, Vincennes) are renovating their current buildings or building new facilities to alleviate overcrowding and to prepare to accommodate future growth. These new and renovated buildings provide a viable option for parental school choice and create attractive communities for parents to choose to live. Although people do not want to pay more taxes, it is sometimes necessary to add to the tax burden in order for a community and a school to move forward.

The city of Washington and the Washington Community Schools are at a crossroads. With the completion of I-69 in the Washington area, it is an opportune time for the community of Washington to grow and expand the choices available to its residents. The school system is an important part of this growth and expansion. The status quo is not going to be acceptable.

APPENDIX A
Survey Questions and Results

**Washington Community Schools
Parent/Community Survey**

Please complete the following survey based on your thoughts and opinions concerning the education of elementary students in the Washington Community School Corporation. Rate each statement as a 1 being the lowest (Strongly Disagree) to 5 being the highest (Strongly Agree) by placing an X in the appropriate box. We appreciate your participation in this survey.

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	
1. Teachers have high expectations for students at each elementary school.	2.4%	36%	21.9%	40.2%	31.7%	99.8%
	2	3	18	33	26	82
2. Student expectations are the same in all elementary schools.	16%	19.7%	29.6%	21%	13.5%	99.8%
	13	16	24	17	11	81
3. My child's elementary school is excellent.	2.5%	2.5%	16.2%	30%	48.7%	99.9%
	2	2	13	24	39	80
4. Other people see my child's school as excellent.	16%	8.6%	18.5%	24.7%	32%	99.8%
	13	7	15	20	26	81
5. Comparison among elementary schools is a problem in our community.	6%	12.2%	19.2%	14.4%	47%	99.8%
	5	11	16	12	39	83
6. The four elementary schools should remain in the same grade configurations as are currently being practiced.	19.9%	5.2%	16.8%	15.5%	42.8%	99.7%
	15	4	13	12	33	77
7. Buildings should be aligned by grade-level configurations.	31.3%	6%	21.7%	12.2%	27.7%	99.9%
	26	5	18	11	23	83
8. Teacher training in grade-level alignment would Enhance a successful transition to this configuration.	13.4%	2.4%	28%	21.9%	34.1%	99.8%
	11	2	23	18	28	82
9. Placing all students in each grade in the same building will improve student achievement.	36.1%	8.4%	21.7%	13.2%	21.5%	99.9%
	25	7	18	11	22	83

I currently have a child at the: 62 Elementary Level
18 Junior High Level
35 High School Level

When completed, please return in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. Thank you.

APPENDIX B
2017 Tax Rates for Area Schools

Tax Rates

County	Unit	2017 Tax Rate
Daviess		
	Washington Community Schools	0.8863
	North Daviess Community Schools	0.7515
	Barr Reeve Community Schools	0.7697
Martin		
	Loogootee Community Schools	0.9136
	Shoals Community Schools	0.8605
Knox		
	North Knox Schools	0.6348
	South Knox Schools	0.6601
	Vincennes Community Schools	1.2596
Dubois		
	Northeast Dubois Schools	0.9818
	Southwest Dubois Schools	1.1186
	Southeast Dubois Schools	0.9833
	Greater Jasper Schools	1.0938
Pike		
	Pike County Schools	0.9313