

## **Fact Sheet about the ICSD Plan to Close Fall Creek**

### **Overview of the plan:**

This is not a formal proposal but the possibility is being investigated

- **Move K-5 students from Fall Creek to other schools.** Which schools that would involve is not yet clear, BJM is one possibility. Board members have said this could result in cutting at least 8 teaching positions. However, if other schools already have full sections at those grade levels, more sections would have to be created. (If layoffs are needed, those would come from teachers, district-wide, that have the least seniority.)
- **Create a centralized Pre-K program at Fall Creek.** Elementary schools (Belle Sherman, Northeast, South Hill, Beverly J Martin, Cayuga Heights) would lose their pre-K classrooms and their children would be bused to Fall Creek. The director of early childhood programs said it was expected that classrooms at Caroline and Enfield would remain in their schools. Some pre-K teachers may be cut under this plan.
- **Close the old Danby school (or at least partially “mothball it”),** a building not up to code for students and inefficient to maintain.

### **Reasoning why dispersing Fall Creek's students could save money:**

The idea is that closing Fall Creek would make it easier to increase class sizes at the elementary level. Administrators have more leeway to change class size if a school has three or more classes per grade level. Fall Creek typically has two classes per grade level - often too many to combine into one class. However, this doesn't take into account creative approaches such as combining two grades in one class.

### **How much might this plan save?**

Unknown. A "back-of-the-envelope" estimate of \$1.7 million has been used, but is very rough. Does not include additional costs associated with the plan, such as transportation costs, additional classrooms that might be needed in other schools due to discrepancies between numbers of students and grade levels, and building renovation to accommodate pre-K students.

### **The ICSD Budget Projected Picture for 2010-11- an \$8.5 million-plus budget gap:** (according to Superintendent Pastel, 2-9-10)

- \$3.5 million less in state aid than expected **plus** \$7.9 million additional in fixed costs, including greater contributions to retirement funds, health insurance cost increases, debt service
- To get to Pastel's latest estimate (\$8.5 million), it adds in the use of more reserves and increases the amount of state aid expected. Funding the \$8.5

million gap (to sustain all programs and positions) through taxes would be a 13.4 percent tax increase, considered unacceptable.

- Current ICSD budget is \$98.5 million
- Each percent of tax increase brings in about \$650,000
- The board has said it wanted to limit tax increase to 2%. However, even a contingency budget (what the district goes to if voters don't approve the budget) carries with it a 4.4 percent tax increase (according to Pastel, 2-9)
- Budget dates: presented by superintendent March 16, adopted by the board April 20. Public budget vote May 18

### **To address the gap, the district definitely plans to:**

- Cut teaching positions; increase class sizes

### **The district is also considering:**

- Keeping FC open, increasing class size at all elementary schools. On Feb. 9, the superintendent reviewed classes at all elementary schools that could be combined, based on current sizes. (For instance, a school that has a third grade with three sections this year, 16, 14, & 15, could combine to two fourth grades next year.) That would eliminate 8 teacher positions – three at BJM, two at Caroline, one at Cayuga Heights, one at Enfield, two at South Hill. However, at the beginning of the year new enrollment can require adding back a teacher. **The district requests parents notify school offices and the ICSD registrar as soon as possible this year about new kindergarten registration and any planned changes in enrollment.**
- Eliminating 10-12 teacher positions at the high school and reducing 60 classes or sections, eliminating some course offerings and programs; possibly teaching some AP classes as larger lecture classes
- The current eighth grade is particularly small (329 compared to 380 in ninth grade). Having considerably fewer students at one grade level helps in the goal to cut teacher positions. Pastel said she would like to see LACS take more 9<sup>th</sup> graders in particular (rather than increasing the high school across the board) to make it easier to cut teachers at IHS.
- Having middle school and high school students in the city and Cayuga Heights use TCAT bus passes instead of school buses. (In discussion w/TCAT.)

### **Not on the table now:**

- Big cuts at Boynton and DeWitt: both took dramatic cuts last year.
- Structural changes at LACS. Although there is interest in increasing the student body at LACS and cutting staff.

**More background on the district's pre-K program:**

- 14 district-based preK classrooms, 196 students
- Another 13 community based classrooms (such as IACC), 80 students
- District also provides preschool special education services throughout the community to an additional 60 or so children not in a classroom.
- Approximately 67 staff assigned to our Early Childhood Programs not including our private providers.

**Issues and future plans for preK:** The district goal is to provide preK to all 4 year olds and to at risk 3 year olds. The district's early childhood director says more space would be needed besides Fall Creek to serve all children.

**Class size:** 12 to 16 students depending on the integration of students with IEPs. Allowed to serve up to 18.

**PreK staff in the Danby building:** director, chair of committee on Preschool Special Education, program leader, nurse, two secretaries, half-time account clerk. Special Education Evaluation Team adds an additional seven specialists one time a week.

**Update from the 2-23 School Board Meeting:**

While the idea of closing Fall Creek is not yet off the table, four or five of the nine board members have indicated they don't think there is time to carry out the plan this year. "I don't think we're going to have the time to restructure the entire district. We may not close Fall Creek this year, but will we next year, or the year after that?" said board President Rob Ainslie. Brad Granger also voiced that there does not seem to be time this year to adequately evaluate the option. The idea was brought up in the first place because "The board as a whole wanted to visit everything. The message is that this is probably not a six-week process. It's a multi-year process."

Board member and committee chair Jay True said, "Closing a school uproots so much, and moves us in a direction that is difficult to go back. It should be done carefully and for the right reasons, and if we don't have the time to do that and the staff doesn't have time to do that, we need to communicate that to the public... I don't think we have time to close any school this year."

The board did not discuss this issue formally last night, but board chair Rob Ainslie did say that it was unlikely that the board could restructure and redistrict in a matter of weeks. However, he also said that we might be "eight months early," indicating that even if the board takes this off the table for this year, it could very well be looked at seriously for 2011-12.

Last Updated Feb 25, 2010