

School Building PLAN 2000

A Status Report on the April 12, 2000 Recommendations of the Citizens Advisory Committee for School Facilities and Funding *Revised after July 28 Presentation*

- INCORPORATED: **21**
- IN PROGRESS: **6**
- NOT INCORPORATED: **1**

New Schools

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- 1. We RECOMMEND that the PLAN provide seats for at least 3,500 additional students a year over a 3-year period to handle projected growth.

PLAN 2000 Status: Approximately 11,600 seats are planned during this period, averaging 3,800 seats per year resulting in a permanent/mobile seating ratio of 91 to 9%.

- 2. We RECOMMEND that the capacity models for new schools—the total number of students to be accommodated—be reduced to the lowest number feasible.

PLAN 2000 Status: Capacity models remain at 672, 972 and 1600 students for elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively. Reducing school membership is desirable and will be reconsidered when current schools are populated at the appropriate levels. This will occur as a result of building additional schools coupled with strategies to maintain individual school memberships below their recommended maximum capacities (115 percent of design capacity).

- 3. We RECOMMEND that the space standards be reduced by 15% to 17% (to the low end of state guidelines) for middle and high schools.

PLAN 2000 Status: Space standards have been reviewed and reduced to the minimum level recommended to maintain support for the instructional programs. The results are a reduction of 4.10 percent, 10.23 percent and 4.07 percent at elementary, middle and high schools, respectively. This would realize \$11.5 million in savings. Any further reduction in the space standards will require a loss in educational program offerings.

- 4. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS adopt a long-range goal of 92% permanent seats vs. 8% mobile.

PLAN 2000 Status: The current plan achieves a ratio of 91% of students in permanent seats with 9% in mobiles by 2004.

New Schools (con't)

- 5. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS provide more optional year-round schools, especially in areas where the year-round option does not currently exist.

PLAN 2000 Status: An additional “module” of multi-track year-round schools has been added, which includes 3 elementary schools and 1 middle school. This capacity gain results in savings of \$18 million.

- 6. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS construct some new schools less expensively—with only selected non-classroom facilities—but make them magnet schools with unique instructional programs to attract students.

PLAN 2000 Status: This recommendation requires a comprehensive assessment of current magnet programs and the development of new instructional programs for future magnet schools. This discussion will include a reassessment of the role of magnet schools and how they must change to support student needs in the future.

- 7. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS try using modular (not mobile) construction, alternative contracting methods, private lease-purchase contracts, off-site food preparation, and other alternative methods to build and finance new schools at lower cost.

PLAN 2000 Status: Various construction methods have been used during previous building programs that include pre-engineered buildings, pre-cast concrete systems and modular block buildings when cost effective. For PLAN 2000 the use of tilt-up concrete panels for larger middle and high school projects is being explored. This has proven not to be a good value for smaller jobs. WCPSS’s prototype designs are conceived around a modular concept or building blocks. Each program space; classroom wing, administrative offices or cafeteria can be rearranged and placed to conform to differing site conditions or educational program requirements. Preliminary discussions are underway with two private development firms that are interested in providing private lease or lease-purchase facilities. Studies of existing off-site food preparation facilities in other school systems have shown that this option is not cost effective for Wake County Schools at this time. This option continues to be explored.

Renovations to Existing Schools

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- 1. We RECOMMEND that the capacity models for renovated schools be reduced to the lowest number feasible, and that space standards be reduced by 15% to 17% (to the low end of state guidelines) for middle and high schools.

PLAN 2000 Status: Renovation projects have incorporated a more conservative approach in compliance with reduced space standards.

Renovations to Existing Schools (con't)

2. We RECOMMEND that renovation and updating of existing, inadequate facilities have a priority equal to that for new school construction, as long as the renovations are needed to meet minimum health and safety standards and a standard of minimum adequacy for education.

PLAN 2000 Status: This has been included. Projects necessary to address health and safety deficiencies and to meet minimum support levels for instruction are highest priority. The optimum and most cost-effective solution will have be developed for each individual renovation project.

3. We RECOMMEND that some WCPSS schools be renovated at less expense—with only selected space improvements or non-classroom amenities—but made magnet schools with unique instructional programs to attract students.

PLAN 2000 Status: WCPSS is committed to supporting the magnet programs and to keep those facilities attractive in order to utilize them 100%. A comprehensive assessment of current magnet programs and the development of new instructional programs for future magnet schools is required. This discussion will include a reassessment of the role of magnet schools and how they must change to support student needs in the future.

- 4 We RECOMMEND that the routine maintenance of WCPSS buildings be significantly improved.

PLAN 2000 Status: The board reallocated \$5.5 from capital funding to address annual maintenance needs for the 2000-01 fiscal year. This raised the level of funding for maintenance from 1 percent in 1999-2000 to 1.5 percent of replacement value for 2000-2001. PLAN 2000 assumes an increasing annual budget for maintenance of buildings to the recommended level of 2 percent of replacement value by 2004. A \$550 million capital plan (which includes \$500 M in bonds) may allow additional current expense funding for building maintenance.

5. We RECOMMEND that a low priority be placed on renovations that reduce the stock of classrooms as well as renovations of non-classroom facilities, such as upgrading athletic facilities or parking lots, so that high-priority needs such as health, safety, and adequate classrooms are addressed first.

PLAN 2000 Status: All educational programs for existing schools have been reviewed with consideration for this recommendation. Renovations reducing the stock of classrooms have been eliminated, except in cases where minimal building costs offer very high program and support benefits. The proposed upgrades of non-classroom facilities are health and safety related with an emphasis on modernizing the mechanical and electrical systems and finishes.

6. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS try using modular (not mobile) construction and other alternative contracting and construction methods when renovating schools.

Renovations to Existing Schools (con't)

PLAN 2000 Status: Various types of construction have been used for simple classroom additions, such as modular prefabricated buildings, pre-engineered buildings and pre-cast concrete construction. Several renovation projects are under construction using single-prime contractors. Legislative efforts may permit the use of other alternative contracting methods, like design/build. Until passage, the State Building Commission will be asked to permit use of design/build in one or more renovation projects.

Technology

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1. We RECOMMEND that there not be a separate “technology” component in the Capital Spending Plan.

PLAN 2000 Status: There is not. New schools and major renovations to existing schools include the infrastructure and cabling necessary to support future technology.

2. We RECOMMEND that sufficient operating funds should be provided to allow system-wide e-mail and Internet access for teachers, administrators, and other staff.

PLAN 2000 Status: All teachers, administrators, etc. now have system-wide access.

3. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS integrate technology into the curriculum as completely as possible, making use of the latest research and focusing resources on those grades and subjects where the greatest benefits are likely.

PLAN 2000 Status: The Wake County Public School System instructional technology program (Technology Connections) has focused on the improvement of student learning, teacher effectiveness, and communication. The program is based upon quality professional development, appropriate hardware and software, a networked environment, and technical support.

A committee was convened at the end of the 1999-2000 school year to recommend options for school level implementation of instructional technology. A consensus was reached around the following points:

- A grade level at elementary, a grade level at middle school, and a subject area at high school will be designated. This will provide uniformity across the system.
- Additional grade levels and subject areas will be implemented in subsequent years.
- Implementation will be guided by academic achievement data and Goal 2003.

4. We RECOMMEND that WCPSS allocate sufficient funds within its operating budget for teacher training to ensure the effective integration and use of new technology and that it actively seeks financial and in-kind contributions of computers from the private sector.

PLAN 2000 Status: Funding for teacher training to ensure the effective use of technology was requested in the 2000 - 2001 operating budget. Sufficient funding for

teacher training was not approved in the current budget; therefore, staff is exploring ways to reallocate current resources and is actively seeking financial and in-kind contributions for hardware, software, and training from a variety of sources (the private sector, grants, and state and federal funding sources).

The instructional technology program within the WCPSS recognizes that quality training is critical to the effective integration and use of technology. To date, comprehensive instructional technology training has been provided for teachers in 462 elementary and 108 secondary classrooms. Additional school-based and system-wide training has been provided in the use of productivity tools such as PowerPoint, Excel, word processing.

Other Facilities

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1. We RECOMMEND that so long as there is a substantial shortage of classrooms, non-classroom facility construction be deferred.

PLAN 2000 Status: No “non-classroom” facility construction is included in PLAN 2000. Support facilities, e.g. a satellite transportation and maintenance service center, will be added to the plan only if justified based on return on investment and if funding is available from project savings or program contingency.

Operating Budget Issues

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1. We RECOMMEND that the county devote more funding to maintenance and repair.

PLAN 2000 Status: PLAN 2000 eliminates the maintenance backlog by one half.

2. We RECOMMEND that the Wake County Commissioners and the Board of Education establish a Wake County Public Building Authority to oversee the design, construction, and maintenance of all county facilities not already under the jurisdiction of a preexisting authority.

PLAN 2000 Status: This recommendation requires legislative authority and will be reviewed with the board of commissioners and county staff prior to the next session of the NC General Assembly.

Legislative/Policy Issues

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1. We RECOMMEND changes in state statutes to remove constraints over how the WCPSS budget(s) the funds it receives from the state and to remove the upper limit on charter schools in Wake County, provided that all new charter schools meet basic financial criteria to ensure their long term stability.

PLAN 2000 Status: This recommendation requires legislative authority and will be reviewed with the board of education for policy direction prior to the next session of the NC General Assembly.

- 2. We RECOMMEND changes in state statutes to allow WCPSS a choice of delivery methods in building and renovating schools, including traditional general contracting, construction management at risk, design/build, or other methods as deemed appropriate.

PLAN 2000 Status: The board of education and the citizens' advisory committee supported House Bill 1760 in the recent short session of the NC General Assembly. The bill was not ratified in this session. The board of education will continue to support legislation that increases flexibility in school design and bidding methods.

- 3. It is our understanding that the WCPSS currently pays some sales tax on the cost of materials for new construction (without full reimbursement), as well as for some operating expenditure. Wherever this is occurring, we RECOMMEND that the relevant statutes be changed to stop this.

PLAN 2000 Status: We are receiving full reimbursement of State sales tax on our building program expenditures at this time.

- 4. We RECOMMEND that the Wake school board, county commissioners, and the proposed Authority encourage and provide incentives to developers and local companies (to) make land and/or facilities available for public schools, to the extent that state statutes and state and local policies allow. Wherever statutes and/or policies prohibit or restrict the likelihood of this action, we RECOMMEND that they be changed.

PLAN 2000 Status: No reduction in building requirements is included in PLAN 2000 based on this recommendation. Current offers from municipalities to have developers build and donate/lease schools include a "non-supplanting" provision for the full term of the lease. The board of education continues to explore these proposals in the interest of increasing school seats at minimal cost to the citizens of Wake County.

- 5. We RECOMMEND that Wake County and its municipalities form a voluntary compact to provide countywide expedited permitting and inspections of schools. Failing the formation of such a compact, we RECOMMEND changes in state statutes to consolidate those functions and provide Wake County with the authority to hire or contract with inspectors to provide such countywide permitting and inspections.

PLAN 2000 Status: An interlocal agreement has been drafted and is being distributed to all municipal governments in Wake County requesting their concurrence with countywide inspections of schools.

Outline of a Capital Plan for WCPSS

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- 1. We RECOMMEND a Capital Spending Plan for the 3 _ year period from November 2000 to June 2004 to range between approximately \$500 million and \$600 million, depending on the extent to which WCPSS chooses to, and is allowed to, pursue innovative approaches to school facility construction, renovation, and finance as we have recommended.

PLAN 2000 Status: The total funding requirement for PLAN 2000 for the period November 2000 to June 2004 is \$550 million.

Strategies for Broader Inclusion of the Community for Future Capital Spending Plans

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- 1. We recommend that in order to garner additional public support, the WCPSS needs to publicize its construction and instructional successes.

PLAN 2000 Status: In support of this recommendation, the school system has employed a public information administrator for the auxiliary services division. This individual will be a major contributor to an increased public awareness of the construction successes of the school system and our continuing needs. Technology and an Internet presence will be used to maximize this effort.

- 2. Beyond the bond referendum, however, we believe strongly that elected officials should put in place an ongoing advisory group that will work to monitor the WCPSS’s progress on meeting its growth needs, analyze unmet needs and provide the School Board and County Commissioners with a steady stream of information about the community’s concerns and perceptions of the schools.

PLAN 2000 Status: The school system administration intends to convene a citizens’ advisory and oversight committee that will include local building contractors for the purpose of monitoring the school system’s progress and offering input during implementation of PLAN 2000. This committee will be formulated and a meeting schedule announced in the next few weeks.

Issues Raised, But Not Adequately Studied by the Committee.

We recommend that these be referred to the subsequent Committee:

- A. What are the terms of the system’s contract with the Heery Corporation? What does WCPSS get for this money? Is the value received worth continuing the cost? Without the Heery contract, what of their information/services could the systems staff could provide?
- B. Discussion, analysis, and priority setting for other facilities.

C. Are the schools in Wake County too large, especially the high schools? If so, what can be done about this?