

Selecting the Best Modular School Location for Forest Pines Drive Elementary

In a special meeting Tuesday, Feb. 22, the Wake County Board of Education reaffirmed that the DuBois Center was the best location for the Forest Pines Drive Elementary modular school. The DuBois location is the only site assured to be ready in time for students Aug. 25; it is in close proximity to the new school; and it is cost-effective. On March 1, the school board approved a two-year lease with the DuBois Alumni Association.

Below are answers to frequently asked questions regarding how the Wake County Public School System reached this decision. As we moved further along in the process, we were able to fine-tune our estimates, both in terms of numbers and dollar amounts.

PLANNING AHEAD

Q: Does WCPSS have long-range plans?

A: Yes, WCPSS has long-range plans and shared them with the public during 12 Community Engagement Meetings across the county in October and November. Part of the discussion centered on Vision 2020, which forecasts facilities and student assignment needs for now through the year 2020. By integrating the facility planning and student assignment processes, the school system can better schedule construction completion dates to lessen student assignment's impact on families.

Vision 2020 involves long-range, intermediate and short-range planning. To determine how many new schools Wake County will need over the next 15 years, WCPSS gathered data, models and projections from many agencies. Based on this information, and to maintain the current student-teacher ratio and have 92 percent of students in permanent classrooms, Wake will need to build more than 61 new schools between 2005 and 2020 (including the 13 PLAN 2004 schools).

Vision 2020 was based on enrollment projections from the Wake County Planning Department that showed WCPSS would have 160,000 students by 2020-21. The plan is being revised to reflect the new enrollment data that the county released Feb. 14; those numbers project Wake will have more than 187,000 students by 2020-21.

Q: Why was there an estimated 5,900-seat shortfall for 2005-06?

A: Up until the past two years, those projections have been within 1 percent of actual enrollment. However, WCPSS' student enrollment has been much higher than projections the past two years; state mandated class size reduction at third grade resulted in the need for 90 new classrooms or two-and-a-half new schools; and approximately 1,900 students returned from private, charter, parochial and home schools. The result was an estimated 5,900-seat shortfall.

Q: How much has student enrollment increased in the last few years?

A: Approximately 114,000 students are enrolled in WCPSS. Since 1990, WCPSS enrollment has traditionally grown by about 3,000 students annually. But in the last two years, enrollment grew by nearly 9,600 students: 4,500 students last year and 5,100 students this year.

Q: How many new schools were originally planned for the 2005-06 school year?

A: Cedar Fork Elementary School in Morrisville was the only new school scheduled to open this fall. Renovations will be completed at North Garner Middle and mobile units will remain on campus, providing space in the Garner area for 178 students.

Q: Why hasn't WCPSS built more schools?

A: WCPSS has built schools as quickly as funds could be made available. WCPSS has built approximately 40 schools in the last 10 years, but student enrollment continues to soar. The current PLAN 2004 building program, which voters approved Oct. 7, 2003, includes 13 new schools and a pre-kindergarten center, comprehensive renovations at 16 schools and re-roofing or repair projects at 61 campuses.

WCPSS must balance the need for new schools with maintaining the existing schools. Wake's older buildings – especially those built in the 1950s, '60s and '70s – are in need of major, whole-building renovations. Top priority is placed on correcting health and safety issues.

Q: How long has WCPSS known about the estimated shortfall?

A: In Aug. 2004, school administrators saw the dramatic increase in new students. They understood the impact this rapid growth would have for 2005 and began looking at options. They discussed a range of options with the Wake County Board of Education beginning in a committee meeting Sept. 7, discussed the options with the school board and county commissioners Sept. 15, and continued discussions throughout the fall.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Q: What options did WCPSS consider?

A: Beginning in September, the school board studied scheduling-, facilities- and program-related options, which bear a significant capital cost, impact instruction, or impact family routines. Special *GrowthMatters* newsletters detailing these options were sent home with students in September and January. Twelve Community Engagement Meetings, held across the county in October and November, also centered on growth. The following were considered:

Scheduling-related options

- 1 – Expand the year-round calendar systemwide or at selected schools on a mandatory basis
- 2 – Create double shifts or flexible schedules for students, extending the school day from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Facilities-related options

- 1 – Add mobile units, modular schools, modular sixth-grade center and a modular ninth-grade center (adopted in part)
- 2 – Renovate the Old Carver Elementary campus
- 3 – Lease the Old Cardinal Gibbons campus
- 4 – Lease space from churches or other locations

Program-related options

- 1 – Reduce, eliminate or outsource some program services
- 2 – Make kindergarten half-day (Half of students would go in the morning and the other half would attend in the afternoon.)
- 3 – Require art and music teachers to work from carts
- 4 – Dissolve Ready to Learn centers at six schools
- 5 – Eliminate Title I pre-kindergarten services
- 6 – Convert cafeterias into classrooms
- 7 – Contract special programs pre-kindergarten with outside agencies

Q: When and how did the school board pare down these options?

A: The Board of Education studied these options and gathered input from the community to determine what was best for all children.

On Sept. 29, 2004, the Board of Education removed the mandatory year-round conversion of elementary schools from the list of possible options at its Facilities Committee meeting. School board members directed staff to continue looking at possibly adding mobile classrooms at all school sites where space is available; building modular schools and a modular ninth-grade center on leased or existing property; and increasing class size at select sites.

At its Oct. 5, 2004 meeting, the school board approved the concept of providing 168 mobile units and four eight-classroom modular units at existing schools; building two new modular elementary schools on leased or existing property; and providing new modular high school classrooms on leased or existing property. This option would provide space for 5,587 students and would cost \$34.4 million.

At the work session Nov. 3, 2004, board members approved staff's priority listing of locations, from which three would be selected to accommodate students for 2005-06: new Wendell area site, DuBois Center, Magellan School (lease of new building), East Millbrook Middle and Wildwood Forest Elementary. If negotiations with DuBois and Magellan were not successful, staff recommended East Millbrook and Wildwood Forest, in that order.

At its Nov. 9, 2004 meeting, the Board of Education approved staff recommendations to add approximately 146 classrooms in mobile or modular units at existing campuses systemwide; add two eight-classroom modular units at Wakefield High School; buy and install a modular elementary school on system-owned land on Highway 97 near Wendell; lease land from the DuBois Foundation in Wake Forest where a modular elementary school would be installed; and lease a new school building and land from the Magellan Charter School.

The Magellan lease proved to not be feasible, so the school board went with East Millbrook Middle.

At its Dec. 20, 2004 meeting, the board approved a three-year lease with the National DuBois Alumni Association of Wake Forest for 6.5 acres for a modular school.

After the Wake County Board of Commissioners did not approve the three-year lease, the school board approved a two-year lease with the National DuBois Alumni Association at its March 1, 2005 meeting.

Q: Where did you look for land?

A: WCPSS originally looked at the Heritage High site, old Carver Elementary site, Noble Road, Wildwood Forest Elementary, Wakefield middle and high, West Millbrook Middle, East Millbrook Middle, new Wendell site, and Lynn Road Elementary as possible locations for modular schools. WCPSS continued looking for leased land and in October became aware of the Magellan and DuBois Center properties. It became obvious in January, however, that Magellan's new school facility would not be ready in time for the start of school in August.

Also in the fall, WCPSS staff contacted developers in the Wakefield area, to determine if there was land available in the Wakefield community for a modular elementary school. They indicated that there was only one location in the entire development that could be made available.

On Oct. 12, 2004, they visited the Queensland Road site and looked at several other properties in the area as well. For various reasons, summarized below, the sites are not suitable for a school or are not available.

Queensland Road Property, Behind the Food Lion

- 5-6 usable acres between two high-voltage transmission lines of 500,000 volts and 230,000 volts (WCPSS tries to stay at least 400 feet away from major power lines for health and safety concerns.)
- Triangular tract of land with little road frontage
- Elevation issues
- Large wetlands area on one side of the site
- Wooded – land clearing and site development costs
- No written guarantee that the property would be ready for the opening of school in August
- There was no offer of free land prior to Monday, Jan. 24, 2005.
- After the Jan. 24 offer, staff looked at the property again and for the above reasons, continue to deem the site unsuitable.

Common Oaks Drive/Craig Davis Property

- Wakefield developer offered use of 10 acres for two years without charging for the lease
- WCPSS would be responsible for site grading and preparation
- After extensive study, can't ensure property would be ready in time for the opening of school in August

Bedford Community on Falls of Neuse Road

- No property available for a modular or permanent school

3 Tracts of Land Fronting Falls of Neuse Road at the Entrance to Bedford

- 2-, 3- and 8-acre tracts
- WCPSS discussed possible purchase of these three tracts.
- Purchase price ranged from approximately \$200,000 to \$430,000 an acre
- These property owners later decided not to sell the property, but to develop the site for a commercial shopping center.

Smith Property on Northwestern Side of Falls of Neuse, Near Durant Road

- Majority of the property is in the Falls Lake watershed
- Utilities are not available to the property

WCPSS Also Looked at the Following Existing Schools

Wildwood Forest Elementary

- Can't ensure property would be ready in time for the opening of school in August
- Traffic is very congested and would require new entrances to the school
- Campus is already overcrowded
- A modular school would eliminate the school's playfields

Wakefield Middle

- Can't ensure property would be ready in time for the opening of school in August
- Traffic is very congested and would require new entrances to the school
- Both the elementary and middle school campuses are already overcrowded
- Would take away the school's athletic fields (except for the track)

Q: What is the estimated project schedule for the considered locations?

A: The DuBois Center is the only location that can definitely be ready for students the first day of school Aug. 25; there is no written or contractual guarantee that any site, other than DuBois, would be ready for students in time. A design is already complete for the DuBois site and bids will be presented for approval March 15. The installation of modular units is scheduled to be complete the first week in June, providing flexibility for any unforeseen circumstances.

Even looking at an extremely aggressive schedule with no room for any errors or delays, the earliest that modular units could be installed at Common Oaks Drive, Wildwood Forest Elementary or Wakefield Middle is August. Installation at the Queensland Road property could not be complete until Sept. 4. School starts Aug. 25.

The time for installation would be approximately 12 weeks at any of the sites, but the real issue is getting to that stage. A design has already been created for the Wildwood Forest site, but the other locations would need a survey and design. All four would need to go before the Raleigh planning commission, complete the lengthy grading and building permit process, receive approval from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, and undergo site work before installation may even begin.

Once installation is complete, staff will still need to move in furniture, equipment and supplies; teachers will need to organize their new classrooms; and contractors will need to work on punch list items. In addition, the week before school starts the principal typically holds regular meetings and the cafeteria staff arrive.

Q: How do the costs compare for these locations?

A: The DuBois, Common Oaks, Wildwood Forest Elementary, Queensland Road and Wakefield Middle sites would all require approximately \$2.5 million to manufacture and set up a modular school and \$948,000 for installation and equipment. The estimated site improvement costs (including playground equipment and installation) are as follows:

DuBois Center	\$575,000
Common Oaks	\$663,969
Wildwood Forest	\$605,000
Queensland Road	\$660,000
Wakefield Middle	\$635,000

The annual lease cost of a two-year lease at DuBois is \$36,000 per year, \$26,000 of which will be paid in the form of a credit against a Note of DuBois to the Board of Education. The three-year lease cost for the Common Oaks site would be \$3.

Q: Can WCPSS shorten the bid process?

A: State law requires a minimum seven-day bid process.

THE BEST SOLUTION

Q: Why is the DuBois property the best location for the Forest Pines Drive modular school?

A: The DuBois location is the only site assured to be ready in time for students Aug. 25; it is in close proximity to the new school; and it is cost-effective.

Forest Pines Drive Elementary will open in 2007. The students who live closest to the new school's permanent location were chosen to attend Forest Pines Drive. For example, the farthest driving distance from Wakefield students' homes to the new school is only 1.3 miles. In the

interim, the driving distance from the modular school at DuBois to the farthest point in the same Wakefield node is 5.2 miles.

The DuBois site has adequate water, sewer and electrical; no easements are required. DuBois has adequate roads, access and stacking; is within proximity guidelines for Growth Management and Transportation; has sufficient land area; and minimal site work is necessary.

Q: Is the DuBois location safe?

A: Yes. WCPSS has 10 schools in a six-mile radius of the DuBois Center, and they are safe. There is also a police substation on site. Employees and volunteers at the historic DuBois Center provide tutoring, recreation programs and training classes for the Town of Wake Forest, area agencies and other members of the community. The DuBois Center also partners with Wake Forest schools, cultural arts organizations, churches and businesses to perform service projects.

Q: Who owns the DuBois Center?

A: The DuBois Alumni Foundation owns the property.

Q: Is the gymnasium included in the lease?

A: No.

Q: Will the modular school have the same amenities as a traditional school?

A: Yes. WCPSS offers the same comprehensive program no matter what school students attend. The modular school will have a multi-purpose room, cafeteria, media center, office space and play areas in addition to four eight-classroom units.

Q: Are modular units safe during severe weather?

A: Yes, the modular units are safe. They are constructed to withstand 130 mph winds; the North Carolina building code requirement is 110 mph. The units have cementitious or "Hardiplank" siding; and wood truss, flat EPDM or rubber roofs, not metal or shingle roofs. A modular unit consists of eight to 10 sections bolted together. Each unit is individually anchored to the foundations and has tornado straps along each section. Professional engineers plan for the wind load to be the same as that at our existing brick and mortar schools. The modular units performed well during the recent hurricanes in Florida.

Staff is preparing emergency preparedness plans for modular schools. School staff will undergo training and practice once they report to the campuses.

Q: How do modular schools help?

A: Opening three modular schools and adding 146 mobile or modular classrooms units allows Wake to cover the majority of a 5,900-seat shortfall for 2005-06. Growth Management identified students for the new Wakelon Elementary and will have them begin school two years early at a modular school at the new Wendell Boulevard location. Then, students and staff will move together to the new campus once it is ready. Similarly, Forest Pines Drive Elementary students begin school two years early in a modular school at the temporary DuBois location, and Harris Creek Elementary students start a year early in a modular school at East Millbrook Middle on Spring Forest Road.