

The Internal Building Task Force members would like to thank the Wilkes-Barre Area School District (WBASD) Board of Education for inviting us to participate in this challenging and worthwhile endeavor regarding the future configuration and use of district buildings. As representative district stakeholders, we have unselfishly discussed both obstacles and opportunities with great respect for the enterprise of education and its ability to improve lives.

After many hours of reading the WBASD Feasibility Study, identifying current district strengths and weaknesses, and carefully considering the possible implications of the options we were given for all interested parties, we respectfully submit the following recommendations to the WBASD Board of Education for review and consideration:

- **Construct a new building for all WBASD students in grades 9 through 12 (2,500 students) at the Meyers High School site.** In light of the parameters we were given—a limited budget and a choice between the Coughlin High School site and the Meyers High School site—we believe our recommendation will best ensure fiscal responsibility and educational equality.

We have attached our notes listing many possible advantages and disadvantages of the two given sites and configurations for your review, but it is important to add that our unanimous endorsement of this size and location was driven primarily by our aspiration to provide the same opportunities for success to all WBASD students well into the future.

As Dr. Prevuznak stressed in his remarks before the House Democratic Policy Committee at Wilkes University in April, our collective goal during this “critical phase in our district’s history” is one that offers tremendous hope: to “provide the best education possible for our children in order to better prepare for a bright tomorrow.” We are concerned that a two high school model with two different configurations (our existing 7-12 building at the G.A.R. site and a new 9-12 building at the Meyers or Coughlin site) may perpetuate some of the deficiencies we are presently addressing as a district and, in effect, dull that hope for some of our students. The one high school model, however, in addition to more effectively addressing our need to streamline resources, will finally put an end to questions about why a particular WBASD student’s ability to take a course or participate in a sport or activity is determined by the section of the city in which he or she lives or the side of the street on which his or her home stands. Additionally, we have some concerns that a two school model may create a significant dichotomy in terms of student demographics (ELL/Special Ed/Economic Disadvantage/Ethnicity) if current boundaries are retained with a Coughlin/Meyers merger or a G.A.R./Meyers merger. Contrastingly, in a one school model, such a dichotomy is incapable of existing; our only high school’s demographics will reflect our city’s demographics.

In respect to the recommended location, we believe the Meyers High School site (listed in the WBASD Feasibility Study to be 7.731 acres compared to 2.364 acres at the Coughlin High School site) will better accommodate a unified high school and offer more viable opportunities for expansion should student enrollment grow to the numbers

projected by PDE (listed in the WBASD Feasibility Study to be 2,586 for 9th through 12th grade students during the 2021-2022 school year on Table 3.1). Should additional properties near the site of the new school need to be purchased, we are concerned that Coughlin's location in the Central Commercial District—an asset when looking to sell a property—may be a detriment when looking to acquire adjacent lots.

- **Use the G.A.R. building as a middle school or junior high.**
- **Expand or renovate other suitable buildings to accommodate grades K-8 when financially feasible.** Many studies that we found suggest that “as a group, K-8 schools are more effective than middle schools serving similar communities” (Pierson Yecke) and that “the test scores of students who enter stand-alone middle schools experience significant drops in their math and English scores on standardized tests compared to their K-8 counterparts” (Boghossian and Rockoff). With this in mind, especially in light of the fact that we have only one K-8 campus in the district and four K-6 elementary schools, it may be prudent to develop a vision of our district's future that includes more K-8 campuses.
- **Plan for expansion to accommodate the projected increase in enrollment when deciding on the overall facility plan and the size and quality of amenities such as parking lots and an auditorium.** We are concerned, for example, that an auditorium large enough for only a segment of the student population may result in the increased use of rented facilities for school events. In contrast, an auditorium large enough for the entire student population may generate revenue for the district when rented out to private organizations. With this in mind, when possible to do so, we suggest purchasing properties adjacent to or near the site of the new high school to accommodate potential expansions.

We recognize that some desirable features of a new building may need to be forgone due to budgetary restrictions; however, we propose that the WBASD Board of Directors consider options that may present the opportunity to incorporate these omissions at a later time. If the land/space is available, but the budget necessitates the need to cut, for example, the size of a computer lab in half, we ask for consideration to make it whole as soon as the funding permits.

- **Consolidate some extracurricular activities such as clubs, organizations, and sports while the new school is being planned and constructed.** Doing so may have the dual benefit of saving money and building camaraderie among students from the three existing high schools prior to a merger.
- **Sell inactive properties that are not part of the district's long-term plans.** The money gained from the sale of properties that are not part of the district's long-term plans could help pay for needed renovations and expansions.

- **Seek corporate sponsorship to defray the costs of new and/or improved athletic facilities.**
- **Form a committee of stakeholders similar to our task force to meet periodically during the planning and construction of the new building.** Once a decision is finalized on where the school will be and how large it will be, there will still be many details to consider that will impact the school's day to day operations. A committee of stakeholders will be able to help solve problems that arise and offer useful suggestions to make the transition from our traditional configuration to a new configuration a less difficult one.

We hope these conclusions and recommendations are helpful in your deliberations regarding district buildings. Our experience was as pleasing as it was productive because the fourteen of us set aside our loyalties to buildings, colors, and names to frankly discuss the challenges we face and the possible impacts of the difficult choices you are about to make. The Wilkes-Barre Area School District, remarkably rich in history and tradition, is clearly at a crossroads; although we cannot continue down the road we have followed for nearly a century, we trust in you to direct us on a new road that will truly lead to a better future for our students, their families, and the communities we serve.

INTERNAL BUILDING COMMITTEE
ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES
NEW BUILDING AT MEYERS

ADVANTAGES

1. Larger property size (7.7 acres)
2. Less transportation would be required
3. Traffic patterns are less complicated
4. Campus like setting along with Kistler Elementary
5. More parking for staff and students
6. Room for future growth
7. Close proximity to Wilkes University for extended learning opportunities
8. Neighborhood school

DISADVANTAGES

1. Loss of athletic complex
2. Longer commute for Northern population
3. Possible loss of parental support from northern population

NEW BUILDING AT COUGHLIN

ADVANTAGES

1. Central location in city
2. Access to extended learning (King's & Wilkes)
3. Student parking
4. Close proximity to LCTA transportation hub
5. District gets to keep stadium at Meyers HS

DISADVANTAGES

1. Less property (< 2.5 acres)
2. Additional transportation costs
(90% plus of student population would need to be transported)
3. Lack of faculty parking
4. No room for future growth
5. No green space or outdoor space available
6. Traffic patterns for transportation congested
7. Coughlin is a much more marketable site to sell than Meyers is.
8. Possible loss of parent involvement from the southern population of WBASD

BUILD A 2500 STUDENT HIGH SCHOOL (COMBINE ALL THREE: GRADES 9-12)

ADVANTAGES

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS
2. Larger variety of extra-curricular activities may be offered to student population
3. More efficient operating costs
4. Ease with regards to staff development
5. More efficient availability of resources
6. Ability to team teach (teachers with common preps)

DISADVANTAGES

1. Limited flexibility
2. Transportation costs

BUILD A 1750 STUDENT HIGH SCHOOL (COMBINE MEYERS AND COUGHLIN)**ADVANTAGES**

1. Better flexibility
2. Neighborhood school
3. Keeps construction costs down

DISADVANTAGES

1. Unable to provide an equal opportunity for the entire secondary high school population in the WBASD
2. More operating costs having to continue to run two high schools
3. Limited on the extra-curricular activities that may be able to be offered
4. Staff development will now have to occur at two sites instead of one.
5. Less efficient availability of resources
6. Less opportunities for team teaching and grouping educators with common prep periods.