



Managing Growth in the West Chester Area School District
Revised March 2018

ISSUE:

The WCASD has seen a great deal of rapid and recently approved residential development in the school district, including about 2,800 new units that have been approved in the last 18 months. We believe the strength of our educational programming is attractive to new families, and we expect to see about 750 new students from these homes, 500 of which will attend elementary schools. The bulk of the growth is in the northern end of the school district.

HOW WE PLAN TO ADDRESS THIS:

It is critically important to our administration and school board that we protect class sizes. We need additional classroom space in order to do that. **The administration's preferred option is to build a new elementary school to accommodate about 500 students on a 24 acre tract of land that we already own, behind the Wawa at the intersection of Route 100 and Greenhill Road in West Goshen Twp.** The administration will make this recommendation in February, and the board will make a decision later in the spring. If approved, this would become our eleventh elementary school.

There are two additional options, which include building a new, larger elementary school and closing Mary C. Howse (sending those students to the new, larger school), and adding classrooms to other elementary schools.

Also, for the past five years, we've been adding small additions to elementary schools throughout the district to accommodate pockets of growth. This has worked in some parts of the district, but it will not be sufficient in the north to handle the number of new approved residential units.

FINANCES:

We estimate the average tax increase required to build an 11th elementary school would be \$7.02 per year over the next 20 years, or a total of \$140.30 per household. That option is just a few cents more per year than either of the other options, and it gives us more educational flexibility.

REDISTRICTING:

Any time our enrollment numbers change significantly (by a few hundred students, up or down), slight redistricting may be required. The influx of new students from large new developments would require us to redistrict, but we are committed to maintaining current feeder patterns wherever possible. We are extremely sensitive to the emotional nature of redistricting and will work closely with parents to ease any transitions required. No redistricting will occur until a new school would be built (2021 at the earliest.) Most redistricting would be in the northern part of the school district.

PLANNING:

We work closely with well-respected demographers, but we can only responsibly plan for growth based on approved developments. Over-building for students who 'might' come would not be fiscally sound.

TIMELINE: Building a school takes about three years, given the layers of approval we must meet from local and state agencies. New homes can be constructed in 6 months or less. Construction has begun or is set to begin on several new

developments, including the Woodlands at Greystone in northern West Goshen Township, so it is imperative that we move quickly.

IMPACT ON MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Because we have three large high schools we have enough room at that level to accommodate this new enrollment growth. Middle school space should be adequate to handle the growth, as well.

FUTURE GROWTH:

We are closely monitoring proposals for housing developments. The Crebilly Farms development proposed by Toll Brothers in the southern end of the school district was recently denied by Westtown Township. However, it is likely the developer will mount another proposal and possible legal fight for the land. Projections show that development, if approved, could bring as many as 266 students, K – 12. The current plan calls for additions at Starkweather, Penn Wood, and Westtown-Thornbury Elementary Schools to accommodate this growth.

EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Our current enrollment stands at 11,928 students and is projected to rise to 12,677 by the 2023-24 school year. While the increase in students is significant for our facilities, it should not have any significant or negative impact on our programs.

We have worked very hard to provide smaller learning environments at the elementary level. At the middle school level, our teachers work in small teams to better serve our students and develop closer relationships with them. In 2006, the district opened a third high school rather than operating two large ones to provide our students with more educational opportunities. The size of our schools provides closer school communities and allows students to be involved in more activities. In 2011, our School Board decided to maintain smaller elementary schools, leaving us with our current 10 instead of closing one and adding additions to the others, which would have created nine larger schools.

We are committed to providing spaces that accommodate our educational philosophy that relationships between teachers and students are critically important, and that school environments must support collaborative learning.