

Report of the Ashland School District
Space Needs Committee
January 22, 2015

I. Committee Members:

The Space Needs Committee is comprised of:

Barbara Durand, Assistant Superintendent	Kathryn Silva, Director of Student Services
Patricia White, Pittaway Principal	Eric Heideman, Director of Facilities
Michael Caira, Warren Principal	Melissa Mercon Smith, Director of Extended Day
Greg Irvine, Mindess Principal	Michele Hudak, Parent
David DiGirolamo, Middle School Principal	Marc Terry, Parent
Ryan Quigley, Athletic Director	

II. Mission:

To collect and review data on current and projected space needs for the district, assess existing infrastructures regarding feasibility of addressing those needs, and develop short and long term options, keeping as a priority recommendations that best support the needs of our students.

III. The Committee's Work to date:

The Committee held regular meetings to discuss the different issues regarding our stated mission. Over the course of several weeks, the group visited and toured each school to gain an in-depth understanding of the most pressing needs. We further polled local experts to gain an understanding of expectations for the future as well as limitations. Subgroups also visited other school districts that have addressed shortage of space issues to tour their facilities and then reported back to the larger group with visual references as to what is possible.

IV. The Problem:

While each school has its own challenges and ambitions regarding the best use of the available space, it became quickly apparent that two schools, Warren and Mindess, are at a critical juncture with regards to their limitations. Warren, in particular, is operating under extremely challenging conditions and the focus of our report will be how to meet the challenges at Warren.

The Henry E. Warren Elementary School was built in 1961 and had a major renovation in 1996 which added 11 classrooms, new boilers, kitchen equipment and some HVAC equipment. Over time, the school has undergone a variety of changes with the most recent transition being the move of the Third grade to Mindess and the Pre-K program to Pittaway to enable the school to focus on the younger K – 2 group.

In recent years, we have seen changes to the standards for our special needs population which has an impact on how the space in our schools is used. Our district has seen both an increase in the percentage of

students requiring specialized services, and the level of need for that servicing. Classrooms have been transformed into space specifically designed to address the needs of a growing special needs population. Areas of the school have been redesigned to allow for service providers to offer direct instruction in a safe and appropriate space. In Warren, office space has been converted into rooms more appropriate for meeting the needs of these populations.

Perhaps most impactful, however, has been the increase in demand for full day kindergarten. Across the state, Massachusetts has seen an increase from 29% in 2000 to 87% in 2014 of children enrolled in full day kindergarten (per Amy O’Leary, director of Strategies for Children’s Early Education for All Campaign as quoted in <http://eyeonearlyeducation.com/2014/04/14/massachusetts-towns-making-their-way-to-full-day-kindergarten/>) . This increase in demand state-wide mirrors what is being experienced in Ashland. Of necessity, Warren has steadily increased the number of classrooms that house the Full Day Kindergarten program. In FY15 we were able to meet the demand with 7 classrooms dedicated to the full day program and 2 classrooms accommodating the remaining 3 half day kindergarten sessions and the Wrap program.

With current enrollment, Warren has been able to maintain class sizes for all grades at or slightly above the optimal size for these age groups. However Warren is clearly out of space and has begun converting closets to office space in order to meet the needs of their students, teachers, and staff.

Mindess has been effectively meeting the needs of its current student population, but swelling class sizes are expected to tax the resources available for its student population creating the need for one additional classroom space in 2016-17. We must also keep in mind that the population of students presently requiring specialized service delivery in Warren School may need continued service once they age out of Warren and shift over to Mindess School.

V. Projected Enrollments:

Looking to the future, there is great concern about further growth for both the Warren and Mindess populations. To get a sense of the upcoming needs of our schools, we first looked at the historic trends in our community. The chart below speaks to the historic data throughout the district. As you can see there are spikes in population that move through the system. For instance, Grade 3 often sees a spike in enrollment due to private school students returning to the district at this grade level. It’s helpful to keep in mind the ‘kindergarten-conundrum,’ remembering that the demand for full-day has increased steadily so the FY04 enrollment, while higher in number, could be housed in fewer classrooms than the FY15 enrollment.

**Ashland Enrollment**

<u>Year</u>	<u>District Total</u>
FY03	2553
FY04	2590
FY05	2629
FY06	2654
FY07	2653
FY08	2,671
FY09	2,630
FY10	2,640
FY11	2,624
FY12	2,583
FY13	2,573
FY14	2,581
FY15	2,594
FY16 (Projected)	2,645
FY16 Building Totals:	

By Grade

<u>PK</u>	<u>K</u>	<u>Gr.1</u>	<u>Gr.2</u>	<u>Gr.3</u>	<u>Gr.4</u>	<u>Gr.5</u>
141	182	217	215	201	196	204
142	218	191	218	207	204	201
121	214	244	179	221	209	201
129	178	224	239	188	220	205
119	190	195	210	237	185	220
120	202	196	192	213	242	187
100	193	205	186	189	205	234
120	191	203	211	199	191	206
126	172	212	209	217	194	194
109	187	186	201	211	213	189
122	183	192	189	206	210	219
122	196	192	188	184	208	215
123	193	206	199	193	183	212
123	200	210	205	200	194	186
123		615			580	

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FY16 Building Totals:	

<u>Gr.6</u>	<u>Gr.7</u>	<u>Gr.8</u>	<u>Gr.9</u>	<u>Gr.10</u>	<u>Gr.11</u>	<u>Gr.12</u>
195	195	191	180	150	145	141
200	192	191	167	173	143	143
209	196	184	171	166	169	145
193	208	194	176	176	163	161
194	193	200	186	185	175	164
209	199	190	184	184	178	175
182	200	202	198	171	185	180
214	173	209	190	192	168	173
194	210	178	183	186	186	163
173	191	206	171	186	176	184
172	172	191	188	172	185	172
192	173	173	192	185	175	186
198	194	175	174	188	189	167
211	198	191	174	172	192	189
	600			727		



We then reviewed census data, noting that there are already 175 children in Ashland who will be of age to enter Kindergarten in FY16 and 168 who are expected to enter Kindergarten in FY17. That number is expected to grow when housing sales increase in the spring / summer and new families move into the area.

Additionally, a subcommittee met with representatives from the Ashland Building Department to discuss anticipated building and development areas. The increase in additional single family housing as well as condos and townhomes under development, points to a potential substantial increase in new families to the area. The Town of Ashland currently has 96 housing units under construction with some percentage of these to be 40B units containing 3 bedrooms. In addition there are approved projects for new construction on 6 lots in Ashland which will add approximately 621 second and third bedroom units (for purposes of our enrollment projections we did not count the 1st bedroom in these approved new construction projects as they are anticipated to be adult units). Nevertheless, given the potential for over 700 new construction bedrooms to be built in Ashland, we do not know the impact per grade level but with Warren already at maximum capacity and Mindess also at its maximum capacity, there is an urgent need for both short term and long term solutions in order to be able to accommodate even modest growth in enrollment in these schools.

VI. Impact of Special Initiatives:

Currently, there are a number of special education services that are, of necessity, outsourced or operated outside of school grounds. There has been some discussion of bringing these programs back into our school system and this will require some changes with regards to the available space and how individual spaces are designed in each school.

Additionally, there has been a push from within the district as well as from the surrounding communities to complete the transition to a Full Day Kindergarten program for all. There has been a strong push for this state-wide and currently Ashland is one of approximately 50 districts in the state that has not made this transition. Regardless of the reason for the transition, the demand for the Full Day Kindergarten program has continued to increase each year and the ability at Warren School to meet this growing demand is incredibly limited within the current facilities. In order to maintain an optimal class size for our kindergarten program, a minimum of 1 additional classroom is needed at current enrollment numbers and this would be sufficient even for a modest enrollment increase as is anticipated for FY16.

VII. Short Term vs. Long Term needs:

As the committee readily reached consensus that a short term solution is needed at Warren School for the 2015-16 school year and for the Mindess School in the 2016-17 school year it also became clear that a long term solution will be needed in the district within the next 4-5 years. Therefore the committee first looked at potential long term solutions. Once a long term solution had been identified the committee then looked at many possible short term options keeping in mind where the district needs to be long term. The committee believes that any potential short term solutions should feed easily into a long term solution so as to reduce the impact of transitions on our students over the next 5-6 years.

VIII. Long Term Recommendations:

The committee reviewed many possible options for maintaining Ashland's level of service, (while potentially moving to a full day kindergarten model for all students), while looking at our current infrastructure and projected future enrollment numbers.

Infrastructure Issues

Pittaway School (Pre-K) – Constructed in 1929, with an addition added in 1949 and a major renovation in 1988. Student capacity is 252 children. Current student population is 123 children. The core of the building is in need of a considerable amount of capital upgrades, to include new boilers, roof replacement, and heating controls. We are recommending this school be taken off line as a school building in the near future and either leased or sold to generate possible income for other school building needs.

Warren School (K-2) – Constructed in 1961, with a major renovation in 1996, which added 11 additional classrooms, new boilers, kitchen equipment, and HVAC equipment. The Warren School is in good mechanical and structural condition. The roof was replaced in 2014 as part of a MSBA project. A major problem with Warren School is that the student population has quickly overgrown the school's size. The occupancy certificate issued by the Town of Ashland allows for 597 students. Current student population is 598 children. The plot of land that the school is built on is quite small, at 17 acres, and thus creates issues with parking and traffic, especially during student pick up and drop off times.

Mindess School (3-5) – Constructed in 1954, with a major renovation in 1996 that included replacement windows, boilers, unit ventilators, and exterior doors. Student capacity is 690 children, as listed on the occupancy certificate issued by the Town of Ashland. Current student population is 588 children. Mindess has ongoing issues with electrical, sewage, traffic and parking congestion. This school will also require extensive capital upgrades in the near future, to include boiler and domestic hot water heater replacements. We recommend that this school be taken off line as an Ashland school building. There are concerns with the land the school is built on and ongoing water table issues (The current building is built over a stream). We, as a group, are unsure whether a new school building can/should be built on this site.

Middle School (6-8) – Constructed in 1964, with two additions in 1968 and 1996. Student capacity is 977 children, as listed on the occupancy certificate issued by the Town of Ashland. Current student population is 567 children. Two-thirds of the Middle School's roof was replaced in 2014 as part of an MSBA project. The boilers are currently in the process of being replaced as part of an energy conversation project. The Middle School building requires some maintenance and renovations, but is able to remain in service for many years to come. Current space is sufficient for grades 6-8, the rental of 5 classrooms to ACCEPT and housing the district's Central Office staff, but if grade reclassifications are needed district wide and the Middle School becomes a grade 5-8 school (more on this configuration to follow) then ACCEPT and Central Office would need to be moved.

High School (9-12) – Constructed in 2005. Student capacity is 1,050, as listed on the occupancy certificate issued by the Town of Ashland. Current student population is 718 children. Ashland High School is the newest building in the district and is currently in good shape. This school was built to be quite energy efficient, but requires extensive ongoing preventive maintenance to the mechanical systems that are installed to produce energy savings. The Ashland High School currently has sufficient space for their student population, but is extremely limited on storage space. If more space is need in the future, there are currently multiple rooms that are rented to the ACCEPT program that could utilized.

It has become clear that we are at a critical juncture and this Committee's strongest recommendation is to:

1. Order a feasibility study to research the possibility of building a new elementary school with the intent of housing the district's K-5 population under one roof. The new building should be sufficient to house the current population but also should allow enough space for anticipated population growth in the district and should offer the flexibility for conversion to a full-day kindergarten schedule for all as this reflects both the growing demand and the industry trend in Massachusetts.

If a new K-5 school building is developed as the long term solution then the Pittaway building could be leased or sold for potential income to offset the new building costs. Mindess also would no longer be needed and taken off line. Several options for the Mindess plot could be considered such as turning the land into fields, selling/leasing the building, etc. The Warren School could then become home to the Pre-Kindergarten Program and house the Central Office Staff and possibly some ACCEPT classrooms. This would free up space at the Middle School for future enrollments.

2. Build modular units at both Warren and Mindess to accommodate growing class sizes in the short term (3-5 years) while new construction is being considered. We anticipate the need for 3-4 additional classrooms at Warren and 2 additional classrooms at Mindess. Preliminary costing data has been estimated at \$125,000 for 3-4 modulars and an additional \$100,000 for site work at Warren for 2015-16. Following years are estimated at \$125,000 per year but firm bids would need to be obtained.

IX. Short Term Recommendations:

This Committee spent significant time discussing possible alternate options for maintaining program equity across the district within an existing infrastructure. All options were discussed and none were left off the table. Each had its own challenges and none resolved the space issue in the long term.

Without the use of modular classrooms for the short term needs at Warren and Mindess, it is apparent that the impact would be redistricting of the towns elementary schools, possible class size increases, and movement of drama, art, music classes to untraditional spaces and/or “On a Cart.”

Two of the possible options are discussed below in terms of their impact on space, specifically:

Alternate Option A. Districting K-5 between Mindess and Warren: Speaking strictly from a space perspective, this option comes the closest to meeting the space needs of the district in the short term. Assuming current enrollments, the full population of K-5 is able to be absorbed between Warren and Mindess for the next 1-2 years. However, this option does not take into consideration any further increased demand for full day kindergarten and cannot accommodate a full-day program for all kindergarten students. The challenges associated with this option are:

1. Maintaining the equity across districts
2. Managing the Special Education resources across districts. Effectively addressing these challenges is not expected to be sustainable long-term. Increased population growth and increased demand for full day kindergarten will soon tax the resources of both schools. Please see Appendix 1 for the details of this option.

Pros:

No modular costs
Only affects Warren and Mindess
Less transitions for elementary students

Cons:

Maintaining equity across the district
Major redistricting at elementary Level
Unknown transition costs over Summer 2015
EDP would be impacted at Mindess
Neighborhood program split between 2 schools
Additional specialist/SPED staffing needed
Not sustainable long term

Alternate Option B. Moving Grade 5 to Ashland Middle School (AMS) (Disbanding of Neighborhood Program) and Grade 2 to Mindess School: This option frees considerable space at Warren and would permit the transition to a full-day kindergarten for all students. To accommodate this change, the administrative offices would need to be relocated off-site so that AMS can absorb the 5th Grade population. The Neighborhood Program would be disbanded which would create issues with curriculum planning. It might be possible to disband the program over 3 years – in 2015-16 Neighborhood would only be grades 4 and 5, in 2016-17 the program would only be grade 5 and then totally disbanded in 201-18. To free up the needed space at Mindess, the Mindess EDP program would need to be relocated, posing difficult challenges for the after school program. The challenges associated with this option are:

1. This would significantly swell the population of Mindess and there is concern that it would overburden Mindess' limited space
 2. Sufficient space for the EDP program (classrooms, gym, cafeteria, etc.) have not been identified if they need to be moved out of Mindess
 3. There would be significant cost to re-locating the administrative offices
 4. This is not expected to be sustainable long term.
- Please see Appendix 2 for details of this option.

Pros:

No modulars needed at Warren

Open space for FDK in 2016-17

Cons:

Mindess needs 1 modular 2015-16 and an additional 2 modulars in 2016-17

No Neighborhood Program

Earlier transitions for students

Central Office needs rental space ~\$125,000/year

Alternate Option C. No changes to current operations: While it is anticipated that Mindess can operate at the status quo for approximately 1 -2 years without their space being overly burdened, Warren faces significant challenges. All available spaces are currently being used to maximum capacity. It is already noted that there is a need for an additional 2nd grade classroom in 2015-17 for which there is currently no available space. Even a small enrollment growth or minimal increased demand for full-day kindergarten would have significant impact on the use of space in Warren. In the very short term, temporary measures could be taken to absorb this impact such as increased class sizes or transitioning special programs to non-permanent classrooms (i.e. putting music 'on a cart'). However, it is felt by this Committee that these are not sustainable solutions and that relief in terms of additional space is needed at Warren at the earliest possible schedule. At the Warren School the current class sizes of 20-21 students are already at the top of the acceptable range and are already squeezed into small classrooms. If enrollment numbers continue to climb but no new space is added then it is reasonable to expect classroom sizes of 23 students.

X. Conclusions:

Ashland, as a district, has outgrown its current infrastructure at the elementary school level. Anticipated population growth along with a growing demand for full-day kindergarten has rendered our existing resources insufficient. There is an immediate need for additional space at Warren School and a growing need for additional space at Mindess. In the long term, we recommend exploring the option of new construction to best house the K-5 elementary population of the district. In the short term, we recommend the use of modular units at both Warren School and Mindess School.

Appendix 1

Space Committee Alternate Plans						
Plan #A						
Mindess School, Grades K-5	NBHD in both schools					
Warren School, Grades K-5						
Warren	Enrollment	#of classes	NBHD	Traditional	Teachers	
Kindergarten	110	5		Teachers		
1	104	5				
2	102	5				
3	100		30	70	3	
4	97		30	3 reg 67	3	
5	93		30	1 SPED 63	3	
				XXXXXXX		
	606	28				
Mindess	Enrollment	# of Classes	NBHD	Traditional	Teachers	
Kindergarten	90	4		Teachers		
1	104	5				
2	103	5				
3	100		30	70	3	
4	97		30	3 reg 67	3	
5	93		30	1 SPED 63	3	
				XXXXXXX		
	587	27				
District Results:						
Mindess Totals:					Central Office stays	
27 Classrooms + 9 Additional Spaces = 36 Spaces Total Used out of 36 Available					One less transition for younger students	
3 Subseparate rooms, 2 EDP, 1 music, 1 art, 1 STEM					EDP stays at Mindess	
					No modulars needed at this time??	
District Results:					No changes to Pitt, AMS, AHS	
Major redistricting / political issues					NBHD would need Dual Cert / ESP in each building; staffing change needed	
Large number of teachers and support staff need to change buildings					SPED delivery service model would need to be evaluated	
Warren School has 1 open room; Mindess would have no open classrooms					Redistribution of support staff needs to be considered	
Accept Classrooms stay						

