

Creating Schools of the Future Community Forum: 6/16/18 Questions and Answers

Below are responses to some of the questions that were not addressed during the June 16 forum. Responses to additional questions will be posted as soon as they're available.

Will the School Board be seriously considering re-zoning to address under-enrollment and over-enrollment to reduce the numbers in school, irregardless of passing of ½ cent bill?

The problem is that even if we were to completely rezone all elementary schools in the district, we would still be short more than 700 permanent spaces. That doesn't include the increase in the number of students we expect over the next five, ten, even twenty years. We also have to consider the issue of transportation. Rezoning more students from west to east in order to fill under-enrolled schools might mean transporting pockets of students who would otherwise be able to walk to school. We also have to ensure that elementary students are not spending more time on a bus than they should be—typically the standard is no more than 50 minutes.

That being said, the district will continue to look at ways to maximize the use of our existing spaces, such as specialized programs within the schools to attract more students and spot rezoning (rezoning limited to smaller geographic areas).

How can I help promote the passage of “half-cent” for schools?

The most important thing any citizen can do is spread the word to family, friends and coworkers about the schools' needs and how the half-cent initiative will address those needs, then encourage them to vote. If you have additional questions about the half-cent, you can visit the district's Half-Cent for Schools website (<http://bit.ly/2te7qFc>) or contact the Office of Communications at (352) 955-7545 or through email at jackie.johnson@gm.sbac.edu.

You can also get in touch with Citizens for Strong Schools, the local advocacy group made up of parents, educators, business and community leaders who will be working hard over the next few months to raise awareness about the half-cent sales tax. You can visit the group's website at www.yesforalachuaschools.org.

When will the follow up meeting take place? We need a follow up to today's meeting.

At least two more meetings will be scheduled in other parts of Alachua County, most likely before the start of the school year. Once those dates and times have been established, they'll be posted on this site and publicized.

How do you plan to agree on a half-cent sales tax? When you say increase taxes, many people think—NO.

As we shared at the forum, representatives from the district and the Alachua County Council of PTAs spent most of the last school year visiting every school in the district to talk to parents, school staff and other citizens about the current facilities crisis and the half-cent sales tax initiative. We've also been talking to civic groups, professional organizations and others in the community. That work will continue through Election Day, and will include printed materials, video, etc.

However, Florida law does not allow districts to spend money on materials asking people to 'Vote Yes' or 'Vote For' the initiative. That's why a local advocacy group called Citizens for Strong Schools, which has been in place since 2008, will be conducting an awareness campaign that will include print materials, advertising, signs, etc. Representatives from that organization are also going out into the community. More information about the group is available on www.yesforalachuaschools.org.

How do we bring more equity in our demographics (race and ethnicity) to our IB, Honors, AP classes to reflect the face of our county? Right now—they do not.

A number of strategies have been implemented to do just that. A few examples include:

- Implementation of AP Capstone program at Eastside High School. Capstone provides AP seminar and AP research courses that help students improve their research, writing, and other skills to promote success in advanced courses and preparation for college.
- In collaboration with the College Board (which administers the AP program), a pilot program was established through which all 8th-grade students at Lincoln and Bishop middle schools took the PSAT this past school year. Their scores were then analyzed using a specialized screening process called AP Potential, which identifies those students who have the potential to be successful in specific AP courses. That data will be used to schedule students for the 2018-19 school year, with the goal of enrolling a more diverse group of students into AP courses.
- The state of Florida pays for all 10th graders in the state to take the PSAT. Through the district's partnership with College Board, all 9th-graders and 11th-graders at Eastside High also take the test. Those scores are also run through the AP Potential program, with the goal of enrolling a wider diversity of students in AP courses. The PSAT scores of 10th grade students in all other high schools are also analyzed through AP Potential, with the same goal.
- In the spring, a representative from the College Board trained teachers and students at Hawthorne, Eastside, Buchholz and Newberry high schools in the use of the Khan Academy, an online educational program shown to help students achieve higher test scores and more success in advanced courses. The Khan Academy programs can be tailored to meet the needs of each student based on his or her PSAT or SAT results. It can be accessed in or out of school.

- Establishment of AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) pilot program for the 2018-19 school year at Westwood, Mebane and the high schools they feed into, Gainesville and Santa Fe. AVID is a college readiness program that places special emphasis on promoting writing, critical thinking, teamwork, organization and reading skills.
- Universal screening of second-graders for gifted programs (piloted at five schools in 2017-18, to be expanded in 2018-19 to an additional 8-10 schools)

These are examples of the work being done to increase diversity in advanced courses. Much of that work is being done collaboratively between our schools, district staff and our Office of Equity and Educational Outreach, which was established during the last school year to promote equity and reduce the achievement gap. A comprehensive, district-wide equity plan developed by the Equity Director will be presented to the school board in August.

What is the real reality of the community's contribution, will it really be considered as a part of your decision making? Or is this just a way to kind of entertain us—you really have made your decision.

Community input is critical to the development of a comprehensive, school-by-school project list. That's why representatives from the district and the Alachua County Council of PTAs spent months visiting every school in the district to talk to parents, teachers and others in each school community. The ACCPTA also conducted a community-wide survey to ask citizens what needed to be done at their schools, and of course this community forum and the ones that follow will also provide additional input into the plan, which should be completed in late August.

Is there opportunity that maintenance of ACPS become a vocational program in itself?

State laws, rules and regulations governing apprenticeships and career technical education would not permit any students under the age of 18 to do something like this—for example, work on air conditioners. Apparently the state is looking at some ways of expanding apprenticeship programs, but what that will look like or what students could possibly benefit is unknown at this point.

New elementary school is being built in 2020 – where at?

A committee called the School Planning Advisory Committee, or SPAC, has spent several months reviewing the same information that was presented at the forum, but obviously in more detail. Every local municipality and Alachua County Government was invited to send representatives to serve on that committee. Based on all the factors that were shared during the forum—size, current and future land use, whether or not it's on a flood plain, proximity to the airport, waste sites, etc., environmental conditions, accessibility, etc.—that group has come up with five potential sites to recommend to Superintendent Karen Clarke. She's in the process of asking additional questions and gathering more information before making a recommendation to the School Board.

We really have questions with regards to the appropriation of the current \$13 million received through the 1 mil tax initiative. How can we feel confident that should the ½ cent sales surtax be approved that those funds will be used for the uses you are promising today given the current board’s history?

Each year the independent One Mill Oversight Committee meets to review expenditures from the one mill revenues, school by school. This includes a breakdown of how much is spent on music and art, guidance counselors, media specialists and all the other categories that were specified in the ballot language. During the 2017-18 school year, the One Mill funded 164 teacher positions and eight additional positions for the technicians who install and maintain classroom technology. The report from the meeting held on February 27 of this year is available at:

http://www.sbac.edu/files/IUCpY_/618af4977a441b803745a49013852ec4/Finanical_Packet_2-27-18.pdf

If you’d like a hard copy or would like additional information, you can call the district’s Business Services Office at (352) 955-7559.

A similar oversight committee will perform the same function for the half-cent sales tax initiative, reviewing all expenditures to ensure the money is being spent as voters intended. We will, of course, have a comprehensive, school by school project list, and the plan is to have signs out in front of every school outlining what will be happening at that school.

And keep in mind, all spending by the district is also reviewed by outside auditors and by the state of Florida.

Have magnet programs positively impacted zoned students? Is there a better plan?

Some zoned students actually are enrolled in the magnet programs at their schools. Those who are not help build a healthier enrollment at the school, which in turn brings in additional resources that benefit all students.

There’s no way to predict what achievement/test scores would be for zoned students if there were no magnet programs at their schools. However, the district certainly recognizes the achievement gap between groups of students, including magnet and non-magnet students, and is working very hard to address that gap through the Office of Equity and Educational Outreach and a wide variety of strategies outlined at <http://bit.ly/2K4NP0L>. That Office will be presenting a formal equity plan to the School Board in August.

Has Alachua County School District considered using a current school to pilot a paperless school model? Will it save the district money?

The district is currently using classroom technology in ways that reduce the need for paper (interactive projectors, online textbooks, assessments and home-school interactions, classroom laptops/iPads, etc.) The district also has a policy allowing for the use of personal electronic devices under certain guidelines. However the reality is that there there are still many significant barriers to any sort of full implementation—initial costs, ongoing maintenance, internet access in the home, etc.

Since Williams Elementary has a great reputation and is almost at full capacity, would not an expansion at Williams drive more students to Williams as opposed to increased migration to charter schools?

It's hard to predict whether or not expanding Williams Elementary School's capacity would draw any potential magnet students who would otherwise choose to attend a charter school. Any student who already lives in the zone is certainly not prevented from attending based on the school's current capacity.

My comment about ethnicity relates to incorporating designs on the furniture and other environmental structures. Question: What is your resource for making sure this concept is included?

The district will be hiring architectural firms and interior design firms which specialize in educational facilities to ensure we have state-of-the-art, environmentally-friendly classrooms and other spaces. District staff will visit other districts to review the newest facilities and their furnishings.

At what point is it a better investment to tear down-rebuild vs. remodel?

The Department of Education has a formula for determining this which must be followed. The Castaldi formula referenced in the presentation made by CRA architects during the forum addresses this issue. That formula includes factors such as the age of the building and how much money has already been spent on repairs and improvements.

CRA has completed a preliminary review of schools in the district, which includes an analysis of which buildings may be eligible for razing. Ultimately the state must approve the razing of any school buildings.

What delivery process--design and construction--are to be used to reduce overruns to cost and time?

The district will select architectural firms and construction management firms based on their qualifications, with a focus on school design and school construction experience. The construction management firm will assist in the early stages of the design by providing estimating services to ensure the district stays within project budgets. The architectural firm and the construction management firm will be hired independently and will be under separate contracts with the school district.

When is it projected that a new middle and high school would be needed and how will this be paid for?

The critical need for the District at this time and the foreseeable future is at the elementary school level.

Meadowbrook was built on busy 39th Ave. Was special consideration given for its construction?

The Meadowbrook site was selected as the best site available to relieve overcrowding at Hidden Oak Elementary, Talbot Elementary, Chiles Elementary and Newberry Elementary. The chosen location off of 39th Ave. provides access to the school for the students within walking distance without requiring them to actually cross 39th Ave.

New school, state-of-the-art facilities, furniture, material, and equipment, but what about upgrading and ensuring that all existing facilities are upgraded to be on par with the new schools being built?

The focus of the sales tax is to have all schools at a standard that provides a quality learning environment regardless of a student's zip code.

What schools are being visited to use as Best Practice/Goals?

Alachua County Public Schools is in contact with other school districts across the state to continually share information. ACPS is a member of the Florida Education Facilities Planners Association (FEFPA) and networks with these professionals regularly. Visits to other school districts will occur in the near future.

Classrooms should be designed to create a learning environment. Look into flexible furniture, the color of the walls, the mood lighting. Will you hire someone that knows how to design schools for learning?

Yes. The CRA architect group that presented at the forum is under contract to carry out this work and has extensive experiences in this area. The district also has architects under contract who have worked with the school sales tax initiative in Orange County. The architects currently under contract have designed projects such as the redesign of the Eastside High School media center.

Alachua County Public Schools is the recipient of a grant from The Education Foundation, which will fund a pilot project to redesign two middle school classrooms with MeTEOR, an innovative classroom/educational design system that has been used in Sarasota County.

How much money has the state allotted for us to build a new elementary school?

The state has not allotted any funding for the construction of a new elementary school. Currently, the only funding source is the 1.5 mil property tax, which does not provide enough funds to construct a new elementary school, revitalize existing schools and meet the ongoing maintenance needs of the district. The half-cent sales tax is the only viable mechanism which will generate the funding necessary to address the district's extensive capital needs.

It's also important to note that the state limits how much a district can spend on new construction. The cost of each 'student station' must fall below a certain dollar amount, depending on the type of school—elementary, middle, high, combination, etc.