

From the School Committee:

As of May 1, 2007, three thousand, two hundred and eighty-nine students inhabited the Sudbury Public Schools [SPS] in our K-8 system. These students are served by the 413 professionals that work at the SPS. These 3,700 people spend at least 180 days per year in our 5 schools.

During the last year, the Sudbury Public School Committee has begun a process of analyzing our facilities to define our mid- to long-range needs, as we continue to address challenges caused by enrollment growth, program shift and the desire to deliver expanded services to the students of Sudbury. In 2004, the School Growth and Space Task Force completed a comprehensive study of our facilities. Using this study as a starting point, Committee members and Superintendent Brackett recently toured all 5 schools while school was in session, over a three day period, to analyze current usage. Based on this updated assessment, a number of facts became evident.

- Our schools are at or near full capacity due to both enrollment and current program needs.
- To differing degrees, portions of all of the schools are being used in ways not originally intended. For example, computer labs are being used as rooms for music instruction, conference rooms and offices are being used for small group instruction, closets have been converted into makeshift offices and partitions have been installed to address space needs. Similarly, in all of the schools, it is not uncommon for small group instruction to occur at small tables in the hallways. While using an available conference room for small group instruction may not be cause for concern, having small groups meet routinely in the halls where they are subject to interruption by every passerby is hardly an optimal learning environment.
- The increasing need for mandated services required by small groups of students with common issues (i.e., ELL, autism, need for occupational/physical therapy, etc.), is putting a strain on the facilities due to the fact that the facilities were not designed with these services in mind.

- There is a system-wide shortage of small group meeting space. This type of space is needed for activities such as small group instruction, SPED team meetings and staff and parent conferences.
- We suffer from a system-wide shortage of storage space. In some schools, like Nixon, this is a serious problem leading to the storage of supplies in virtually all available spaces like the rest rooms.

As noted, enrollment growth continues to create space challenges for the SPS. In January 2005, the New England School Development Council prepared “Demography and Enrollment Projections” for Sudbury. This report noted that since 1994, SPS enrollment, pre-K through 8, grew by 1,002 students from 2,223 to 3,225 students. According to this report’s projections, by the 2009-10 school year our Pre-K through 8 system will have 3,450 students, or about 150 more students than we now have. While the projections in this study must be compared with actual data to determine what weight to give them in any decision making process, the fact that SPS enrollment continues to grow cannot be ignored. During the ongoing facility use analysis, areas for possible expansion (perhaps with temporary classrooms) needed to meet increased demand were identified as existing at Nixon, Haynes and Curtis. The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as actual enrollment data continues to become available.

In addition, earlier this year, the Committee formally adopted a goal relating to full-day kindergarten. This goal appears to comport with community interest in such a program as well as educational research that confirms the value of early childhood education. Simply put, however, the facilities do not currently exist to implement such a program. As we all know, Sudbury’s structural deficit has led to an across-the-board erosion of services in town that many find frustrating. Early childhood education, however, appears to be one area where additional state aid might become available. Regardless of whether such state aid materializes, however, given the community interest in such a program, and the demonstrated value of early childhood education, any facility planning decisions will take this goal into consideration.

While the Administration has done well in shuffling programming so that every class and activity has a home, the pressure related to growth and the desire to continue to improve our programming will keep facility usage issues at the forefront for the foreseeable future.

As always, you should feel free to contact any Committee member with your questions or input.

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For the School Committee