



SHREWSBURY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Preschool-Grade 4 Capital Planning Study Committee Report

March 4, 2024 (Draft)

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Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management

1. Overview

Charge to the Committee

The PreK-4 Capital Planning Committee was charged with examining the following issues with respect to the future of PreK-4 facilities in Shrewsbury:

1. Create a transparent process to discuss the future direction for early childhood and elementary capital investment.
2. Review the LPA|A PreK-4 Space Study and determine the pros and cons of the various preschool and elementary configurations suggested in the study and make recommendations to the School Committee and Select Board for a preferred pathway forward.
3. Key questions outlined for this Planning Committee:
 - a. In the future will the need for preschool increase, either because of demand or due to the potential of state/federal law requiring universal preschool?
 - b. What is the best model for early childhood and elementary education in terms of size of building? What are the benefits and trade-offs of large elementary schools?
 - c. Should preschool be folded into each elementary school or provided in a separate setting?
 - d. What is the value of “neighborhood” elementary schools?
 - e. How should equity fit into our thinking about preschool and elementary education?

Committee Members

- Sandy Fryc (School Committee Chair)
- Erin Boucher (School Committee Vice Chair)
- Theresa Flynn (Select Board Vice Chair)
- John Samia (Select Board Clerk)
- Bridget Nichols (Director, Parker Road Preschool)
- James Dealy (Parent, Parker Road Preschool)
- Jennifer Foran (Staff Member, Parker Road Preschool)
- Kristen Gasper (Principal, Beal School)
- Rajesh Velagapudi (Parent, Beal School)
- Margaret Aulenback (Staff Member, Beal School)
- Tiffany Ostrander (Principal, Coolidge School)
- Justine Maloy (Parent, Coolidge School)
- Kelly Finnaran (Staff Member, Coolidge School)
- Lisa McCubrey (Principal, Floral Street School)

- Varanasi Pokala (Parent, Floral Street School)
- Krysty Ralys (Staff Member, Floral Street School)
- Scott Mulcahy (Principal, Paton School)
- Colleen Luzzo (Parent, Paton School)
- Aaron Detrick (Staff Member, Paton School)
- Bryan Mabie (Principal, Spring Street School)
- Peter Welland (Parent, Spring Street School)
- Alison Kimball (Staff Member, Spring Street School)
- Keith Baldinger (Assistant Town Manager for Operations)
- William Tuttle (Division Manager, Public Buildings)
- Chris Girardi (Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations)
- Joe Sawyer (Superintendent)

Meeting Dates and Topics

- Monday, September 18, 2024 @ Calvin Coolidge School
 - [Meeting Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting Minutes](#)
- Monday, October 30, 2024 @ Walter J. Paton School
 - [Meeting Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting Minutes](#)
- Monday, December 4, 2024 @ Spring Street School
 - [Meeting Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting Minutes](#)
- Monday, January 8, 2024 @ Major Howard W. Beal School
 - [Meeting Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting Minutes](#)
- Monday, February 12, 2024 @ Floral Street School
 - [Meeting Agenda](#)
 - [Meeting Minutes](#)
- Monday, March 4, 2024
 - Meeting Agenda
 - Meeting Minutes

Supporting Documents

- [Recommendation for PreK-4 Capital Planning Process](#) (Superintendent Sawyer)
- [LPA|A Capital Investment and Assessment Study](#)
- [LPA|A Final Report](#)
- [LPA|A Report Presentation](#)
- [Shrewsbury Administration Enrollment Report](#)
- [Shrewsbury Administration Enrollment Presentation](#)

- [McKibbon Enrollment Study](#)
- [NESDEC Enrollment Study](#)
- [Shrewsbury Redistricting Guiding Principles](#)
- [Recommendations for Elementary Redistricting Plan](#) (Superintendent Sawyer)
- Preschool Presentation (Bridget Nichols)

2. Project Methodology and Schedule

The PreK-4 Capital Planning Committee considered the issues outlined in the Charge in a series of six (6) meetings starting in September, 2023 and culminating in early March, 2024. While the agendas and minutes for each meeting are available through links to this report, following is a brief outline of the focus of each of these meetings:

- Monday, September 18, 2024 @ Calvin Coolidge School. Sean Brennan from LPA|A, presented a summary of the recent LPA|A *Pre-K Through 12 Capital Investment and Assessment Study*.
- Monday, October 30, 2024 @ Walter J. Paton School. Dr. Sawyer and Mr. Girardi presented the October 1st enrollment data, along with future enrollment projections provided by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC), McKibbon Associates, and the Town Administrator's office.
- Monday, December 4, 2024 @ Spring Street School. Members of the Committee worked in small groups to consider the importance of neighborhood schools in Shrewsbury. These groups generated questions and observations for discussion.
- Monday, January 8, 2024 @ Major Howard W. Beal School. Bridget Nichols, Director of the Parker Road Preschool, provided the group with a presentation on Preschool in the Shrewsbury Public Schools, including locations of classrooms, morning and afternoon sessions, and a historical context on enrollment (including students with IEPs). During the second half of the meeting, Committee members divided into five (5) groups to consider the following question: *Is there consensus regarding maintaining the current neighborhood school configuration v. potentially consolidating to fewer, larger elementary schools? Reasoning?*
- Monday, February 12, 2024 @ Floral Street School. Committee members divided into five (5) groups to consider the following questions: (1) *Is there consensus regarding which elementary school should be the first priority for replacement or renovation? Why? Next after that?* (2) *Is there consensus regarding whether Shrewsbury should consider expanding preschool seats and how that is best accomplished?*
 - *Stand-alone new construction*
 - *Renovated/Expanded Stand-alone building*

- *Combined New Elementary with Full New Preschool Space*
- *Spreading Preschool Across Elementary Schools*
- Monday, March 4, 2024

3. Key Findings and Recommendations

1. There appears to be consensus that future PreK-4 building projects should focus on consolidating students and programs into larger schools in order to maximize resources, rather than maintain more, smaller schools.

However, there was also strong advocacy for ensuring that the district take specific steps to ensure that these larger schools maintain the more personal approach that Shrewsbury Schools, including Floral Street and Beal, currently provide. These factors include establishing a sense of belonging for all, fostering PTO involvement, making a big community feel small, and fostering family connections.

Note: For the purposes of this study, “neighborhood” is seen as a synonym for “smaller,” that is, all of Shrewsbury’s smaller schools serve multiple neighborhoods across attendance zones that are not all “walkable.”

2. There appears to be consensus that, given the need for support from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) and the current condition of Shrewsbury’s smaller schools, the next elementary school project should address as many of the current space issues as feasible. This could certainly result in consolidation of elementary schools and redistricting.
3. There appears to be consensus that of all existing PreK-4 school buildings, Coolidge is the greatest priority to address in some fashion due to its age and physical condition. However, there are multiple ways in which this could be addressed, depending on the approach.

One of the challenges that this solution could face is the reduction in seats that would be available at Paton and Spring Street, given that the LPA|A space study report indicated that modular classrooms will need to be removed from Coolidge, Paton, and Spring Street when they get to the end of their useful life (the space study report indicates that they have already “outlived the anticipated lifespan of the construction”).

4. There appears to be consensus that preschool space needs beyond the current 6 classrooms at Parker Road and 2 classrooms at Beal will need to be addressed, both due to family preference/demand and in anticipation that some level of public preschool will very likely become a state mandate at some future point. Specifically, expanding opportunities could include providing for students to attend for more days per week and longer days, such as a 5 days/week for 5 hours/day, as opposed to the current 3 or 2 days/week for 2.5 hours/day.

In addition, expanding opportunities could include providing preschool experiences to more students (currently room for 242 individual students attending for various combinations of days, while incoming kindergarten cohorts have been about 345)

Variables Impacting Capital Planning

1. Enrollment

- a. The LPA|A study is based on existing modular classrooms at Coolidge, Paton, and Spring Street being phased out due to their age and not being replaced. This is a key variable, as is how long the current modular classrooms will remain viable. Replacing the modular classrooms will not only come with significant cost for new modular classrooms themselves, this may also trigger ADA compliance requirements for the entirety of the school where they are being replaced.

Moreover, given that any solution(s) to the preschool to grade 4 facilities challenges may not begin implementation for five (5) to seven (7) years, assuming the need for MSBA funding, it is critical to understand the maintenance plan for Shrewsbury's elementary schools in at least the immediate future. In addition, there appears to be a significant question regarding replacing the current modular classrooms at Coolidge, Paton and Spring Street; specifically whether doing so could trigger a need for full ADA compliance at the site(s).

With respect to the modular classroom question, according to Sean Brennan (LPA|A Architect), Shrewsbury would need to differentiate between temporary and permanent if considering a modular upgrade. If it is determined by building officials that the modular classroom is permanent, then it must meet all current code including ADA and sprinklers. If it is determined to be temporary, then code may not be triggered. Temporary can be defined as a portable space to be used during a transition period, i.e.

displacement during a building project, etc.; however, the length of the transition period can be interpreted in many ways.

If the total add-on exceeds 30% of the building value, it would trigger the entire building to be brought up to current code, including ADA compliance and sprinklers throughout. Costs are currently estimated at \$1,000 per square foot for educational construction, resulting in a full-size classroom costing approximately \$1,000,000 each.

- b. Based upon enrollment projections combined with the loss of modular classroom space, there is not enough capacity at the 2031-2032 school year projection point to close one school and consolidate students within the remaining schools (see slide 7 of the [LPA|A slide deck](#)).

Note: These enrollment numbers do not include projections for the Emerald Run development planned for Green Street or the MSBA zoning proposal for the current Christmas Tree Shops/Shrewsbury Commons area, as these potential projects were not yet known when the demographer's report was completed.

- c. Enrollment trends need to be carefully monitored, etc. For example, Coolidge's enrollment increased by 42 students this year, while Paton's decreased by 20 students and Spring Street's decreased by 31 students
- d. Currently, Shrewsbury utilizes the following class size guidelines in administering elementary schools: Kindergarten - 17 to 19 students; Grades 1 and 2 - 20 to 22 students; and Grades 3 and 4 - 22 to 24 students. While MSBA has class size guidelines that they utilize in working with school districts on facilities planning, they will utilize the policies of local School Committee's where such policies exist.
- e. Throughout this process we have experienced a great deal of variance with respect to the current enrollment of Beal School v. the capacity of the building. Specifically, questions have been raised regarding the potential role of the Beal building in housing redistricted students from other buildings in a "one step" building solution.

The LPA|A study references an enrollment capacity of 808-888 the Beal. However, according to Sean Brennan (LPA|A Architect) this number includes all classroom spaces at Beal regardless of programming. This includes the four (4) full-size special education classrooms (2 ELC/2 ILC). This type of

enrollment report does not differentiate the chosen use of space by the district but, rather, takes all full-size classroom spaces available in providing enrollment capacity.

The Beal capacity provided through the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) is 790. Current enrollment at Beal is 623 (as of February 29, 2024)..

Beyond the Beal discussion, this is important to note as all Shrewsbury elementary schools use full-size classrooms for special education programming, which makes the projections for each school in the report even tighter than that provided at face value.

2. Demographic trends and program needs

- a. The English language learner population in Shrewsbury increased by 63% this year compared to last, with fewer than half of these 115 students residing at the emergency homeless shelter. Additional space for English language education programming may be required in future years if this becomes a trend.
- b. The opening of the new Beal school provided more room across all of the K-4 elementary buildings for dedicated spaces for music, art, special education, and English language education spaces; continued evolution program needs, especially for mandated services such as special education and English language education, may create additional space pressures.

Potential Future Solutions

1. The LPA/A report shows an option to build a new school on the Coolidge site that would replace Coolidge and Parker Road Preschool, addressing the age/condition of both schools and providing additional preschool seats. This option holds strong appeal for many study committee members as a potential option.
2. There are varying opinions on how to best solve the preschool space and program needs, whether through adding dedicated preschool spaces to a K-4 new building project as noted above (making those preschool spaces eligible for MSBA funding), or spreading preschool classes across multiple K-4 schools, which will be highly dependent on actual enrollment trends.

While there is not right or wrong model with respect to including preschool classes in one v. multiple locations, each option does have advantages. The single location, whether included in a pk-4 building or separately, allows teachers to collaborate with one another, provides a dedicated team of specialists to service the needs of students, and can be more efficient for leadership with respect to implementing policies and procedures throughout the program. Conversely, the option of including programs in multiple pk-4 schools can permit many students to attend preschool where they will attend elementary school, provides families with an opportunity to be part of an elementary school for 1-2 additional years, and allows preschool educators to collaborate with partners from other grades.

As noted above, and in other sections of this report, a key factor for Shrewsbury may be the ability to garner MSBA participation in creating preschool space by including classrooms in an upcoming elementary school project.

4. Summary

5. Consultant

Dr. William Lupini has worked as a school superintendent for over 25 years, having held the position in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania, with the majority of that time spent with the Public Schools of Brookline and the Beverly Public Schools. These experiences have taken place in cities, towns, and regional school districts, as well as career and technical schools and educational collaboratives. He has also served as a Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Assistant High School Principal, Program Specialist with the New Jersey Department of Education, and a Marketing Education Teacher. Bill served as President of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) Governing Board. He was the 2015 Massachusetts “Superintendent of the Year” nominee. He has also served on several statewide working groups in Massachusetts, including the Special Commission on Education Collaboratives, the Commission on Achievement Gaps, and the Next Generation MCAS Procurement Review Team. Bill teaches school law and other educational administration courses in several programs for aspiring administrators. Bill holds a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership and Administration from Lehigh University, a Master of Education degree in Leadership, Administration, and Supervision from Rider University, and a Bachelor of Science Degree in Marketing and Business Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

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