

DRAFT  
Expansion Committee Report  
August 30, 2007

**Committee Members:** Marceya Roy, chairperson; Jean Dedam, clerk

**Additional participants:**

School Staff - Martha Evangelista, Wendy Olcott-Nelson, Janice Briscoe, Sarah Parker, Kathy Crum, Kathy Renfrew, Tina Fearon, Alice Ruffner, Nene Riley, Cheryl Stevenson  
Community Members - Neal Gombas, Debra Vogini, Bruce Courtot, Jo Anne Post, Omri Parsons, Cindy McKnight  
Superintendent of Schools – John Bacon

**Other sources of information:** two list serve discussions, articles – see bibliography  
Department of Education website  
Discussions with principals in Danville and Walden  
E-mail response from two  
Data committee material  
2 Peacham school surveys

**Purpose:** To investigate the feasibility of adding 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade or 7-12 grade sections to Peacham Elementary School.

**Process:**

1. The committee decided at its first meeting not to include grades 9-12 in the study because it felt it was not feasible given the physical constraints of Peacham Elementary School.
2. The committee did research the feasibility of adding 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade to the school.
3. The committee met 4 times between April 4 and June 25 – see minutes attached
4. First step was to determine what criteria had to be met including staffing, curriculum, equipment and space.
5. Additional information included budgetary impact, social/emotional/physical needs of students and parental support for expansion.

**General conclusions:**

It is feasible to add 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grades to the Peacham Elementary School in the current physical space with the addition of one full time teacher and some additional time from specials staff. Although the physical and instructional needs can be met, much of the discussion centered on the social, emotional and physical needs of this cohort and the influence of older students on the younger children. The prevailing philosophy has been that middle school students need a special focus to help them transition from elementary to high school. However there seems to be some new interest in combining middle school grades with elementary schools with the qualification that the program be developed as a middle school program and not simply an extension of the elementary school. The committee concluded that Peacham Elementary School's strength lies in its small size and the Personal Learning Plans that it has incorporated into the

instructional program at the school that could be the center of an individualized approach to the specific interests of these students. Superintendent John Bacon has had past experience as a Middle School principal. He suggested that with a small program, it would be more feasible to offer exploratory field trips that are subject specific or would expose students to fields of work or post secondary educational opportunities that would guide them in their selection of high school course work and career planning. It may be possible to identify parents and or other adults in the community who could mentor or instruct students on special projects that would fulfill electives in tech ed, art, etc.

### **Benefits of K-8 cited**

Fewer transitions between schools

More stability

Teachers know the students

Opportunity for leadership

Less travel time where middle schools are located outside the community

Develop stronger community connections

### **Arguments against a K-8 program in a small school**

Physical education program is often inadequate, need more team sport opportunities

Need a stronger science program than is often available but do not need fancy lab equipment

Students are treated like elementary school students and their special needs are not met

Concern about effect of some older and larger student behavior on young children

Not enough diversity in program or student body.

### **Space**

Classroom space is adequate according to State Fire Codes.

In a meeting with school staff, options for utilizing the current space included housing the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> in what is currently a room used for specials and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> in the current 3rd/4<sup>th</sup> grade room. This would put the middle school grades on one side of the hall and the pre K through 4<sup>th</sup> opposite at the other end. Both groups would use the current bathrooms, lunches would be staggered, and the cafeteria would be used for specials, too. The log cabin could be utilized for more storage and special activities. For physical needs, there is a basketball hoop on the grounds and a gym in close proximity to the school.

### **Staff**

One additional full time teacher would be needed. State regulations require 1 teacher for every 25 students in grades 4 – 8. According to John Bacon, superintendent, if a teacher teaches a self contained grade 7 and 8 class (ie all subjects) an elementary license is sufficient, when they teach multiple sections of one or two subjects they need either a MS endorsement or a 7-12 endorsement for those subjects. The current 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher has most of the requirements met for math and science. A new teacher

could then fill the language and social science side. The current principal is certified for pre-K through grade twelve and for special education for pre-K thru age 21.

The Department of Education guidelines stress that schools shall use methods to maximize staff effect by including distance learning, computer tech, partnerships with higher learning, businesses and service providers.

Instruction shall include all basic subjects plus electives in tech ed., world language, family and consumer services, and design.

## **Demographics**

An analysis of historical student population numbers provided by the data committee since the 81/82 school year through 06/07 showed a variation from a low of 11 in 86/87 to a high of 32 in 00/01. The average for the period was 18.7

A projection based on elementary school census at the beginning of the 07/08 school year for the period 08/09 – 16/17 projects an average of 12 students per year in 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grades. It should be noted that 6 additional elementary school students moved into Peacham over the summer of 07. Likewise 5-6 additional middle and high school students moved into town.

## **Finances**

Using the FY 07 end of year tuition numbers an average of \$10,881.64 was spent on 73 students for a total of \$794,360. This number includes both middle and high school.

The projected cost for an average of 12 middle school students per year would be \$130,579 plus an annual increase for inflation.

Projected costs for adding a middle school program to Peacham Elementary  
\$60,000 - \$70,000 for staff: One full time teacher, additional guidance, nurse  
Equipment: no tables, some chairs, tech or science equipment – grants?  
Curriculum: Phase in over two years and utilize current library budget for some  
Transportation for special events, sports or special classes

## **Results of Parent Survey**

Expansion Committee Surveys were distributed to all families (33). Of those, 9 were returned. (see attached form)

4 of the nine favored expansion, 3 said maybe but had questions, 2 were opposed.

Anticipated benefits of expansions cited by parents:

1. Keep students in Peacham longer
2. the school is wonderful
3. Fewer transitions
4. Parent time is not split between 2-3 schools
5. Less travel time for the children, less expense for parents
6. Hot lunch program would be more cost effective

7. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders could be involved with community service
8. Peacham would see and be in touch with our students
9. More stability, more confidence, sense of place
10. Lower overall school costs/less tuitions
11. Continued personal learning plans
12. Students would have a sense of belonging and identity
13. Students would be well known by teachers and community
14. May be a unifying force
15. Opportunity for more leadership from older students
16. 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders would be allowed to be kids for that much longer in their familiar environment.
17. It might be nice

#### Anticipated negatives as cited by parents in the survey

1. Space may be inadequate
2. Not enough sports, or contact/relationships with other middle schoolers
3. Present scheduling of academics/specials would be affected
4. Some students need a change at 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> grade
5. Need more music, band, school dances and sports teams
6. Resources will be spread too thin
7. Larger schools will have more to offer
8. Some groups in the community will not support it.
9. Many residents live here for the choice they get at grade 7.

#### List serve responses to this posting by Kathy Renfrew

Our school is currently a K-6 school with a declining population. Today we had a great conversation about expanding our program to grades 7 & 8, basically keeping our students and at the same time finding a focus “math & science” something that would make parents want to send their child to our school. Have any of you done this or know a small school that did? What are some of the things you find good with this proposal? What are the detractors?

#### Teacher comments from list serve [middleschoolscience@yahoo.com](mailto:middleschoolscience@yahoo.com)

1. From a teacher in a small private K-8 school of 40 years – success due to having lower grades school and upper school within the system with a coordinator for each section and standards that are set high and caring teachers.
2. In a system (K-8) with an emphasis on math and science, a teacher commented that it is important to have a plan in writing to make the focus a reality.

#### Teacher comments from list serve [MiddleTalk1@LISTS.NMSA.ORG](mailto:MiddleTalk1@LISTS.NMSA.ORG)

1. Basically the answer is that the grade configuration is not the determining factor in the success of the school. The important thing is to make sure the students enrolled in the middle level grades have programs that meet their developmental needs in all three areas – mental, emotional, and physical. However, the research also shows that many times students in K-8 schools do not have the

same opportunities – especially in related arts – as students in a more traditional middle school setting.

2. My school moved in the opposite direction as yours, Kathy, adding a middle grades program to an existing high school, with pretty strong success in general. We focused relentlessly on what middle school kids need, with 'This We Believe' as our guiding principles. Additionally, what makes us different from other schools in the area is being all-girls, and having a focus on the arts...I think if you focus on what middle school kids genuinely need, and tie that to what you already offer in the younger grades, adding 7-8 is likely to work out for you.
3. Benefits?-With careful planning and collaboration you might capitalize on the connection between elementary and middle levels to enhance transition between the two levels. In k-8 schools with strong positive, student centered cultures these values can be communicated and supported right up through the whole school. This can also be true with curriculum development and implementation. Detractors? – In K-8 schools the middle level students tend to receive less support, fewer academic choices, and less diverse co-curricular and extra curricular offerings than in 6-8 schools.
4. I think that it is vital for a K-8 school to have the parents and students actively involved in the planning of the school programs. Our schools found that their parents and kids wanted “exploratories” at the grades 5 & 6 levels as well as the 7 & 8. This made a closer integration of the 7 & 8 programs/teachers with the rest of the school. Many opportunities arise for having the 7 & 8 classes work with the 1-6 students. These schools have found success by integrating the parents and the local community as much as possible. By becoming a cooperative part of the community (not just a “bussed in” school) they maximized student/parent /staff. That is the true source of the success. Two of the above schools have found some of their greatest success by having elders from the local First Nations tribes volunteer at the school. The others have found it easier to use parent/grandparent volunteers to maintain their sense of community and help prevent their “small school” world from imploding.