

Fall 2007 Parent Survey Results School Expansion Proposal

The survey form had been distributed in spring of 2007 to all school families (33) with a return of 9 or 27%. The Expansion Committee decided to distribute it a second time with a copy of the draft report that would provide parents with more information about the proposal. The reports and survey forms were placed in a prominent location at school during parent conferences the week of September 17. Committee members were available to answer questions two of the three nights conferences were held. 17 forms were returned (no names were collected) so they were not combined with the spring surveys to avoid possible duplication. All comments are recorded here.

Of the 7 questions, 3 could be quantified. They are;

Should the school board consider adding 7th and 8th grade to Peacham School?

13 of 17 respondents said yes, 1 said maybe and 3 said no.

Should the school board decide to add 7th and 8th grade to Peacham School, how should that transition occur? 8 said to add both at once, 8 said to add 7th first then add 8th the following year, 1 said they did not know.

Do you feel the decision to expand Peacham School to a Pre-K – 8 program should be made by the community or by the school board? 11 respondents said the community but some qualified it with a proposal by the board and a well informed electorate. 2 respondents did not know. 2 respondents said school board and staff (and parents 1). 1 said either community or school board is fine.

Each of the questions with the responses is listed below.

1. Should the school board consider adding 7th and 8th grade to Peacham School?

YES – 13 Maybe – 1 No – 3

2. Why or Why not?

Pros

- Make better use of the facilities. Keep students close to home.
- Keeping students in town. Cohesive K-8 program. More control over secondary tuition budget.
- I think it is better for the children and will save the town a lot of money.
- I would love to have my children stay in the Peacham community for 2 more years and then make 1 school transition. 9th graders are much better able to handle school transitions than 7th graders.
- It makes sense financially. It's the model for schools in this area and other areas; K-8 is the norm and it's been proven to be the best way to teach children. The staff is quite capable to take this on; they are dedicated, and have proven themselves. Peacham School turns out great student into the world – a whole lot of bang for the

buck!! We can use our rich community and surrounding communities to meet all of the student's needs.

- Makes sense financially. Most schools are K-8.
- Money in the town's pocket, we have room.
- There is room, we can educate them as well as anyone if not better.
- It may help keep the Peacham School going and that is imperative. Look at any town around here that has lost its school in the last 30-40 years. Much of the heart and soul of those towns is now gone, while the education of those towns' children has not improved significantly. If Peacham School closes we're dead.
- Peacham Elementary School has done a good job in providing elementary students with a solid educational foundation, and a true sense of place in their successful efforts to tie the curriculum to the community. It's exciting to think that 7/8 graders could continue in this capacity and remain closer to the Peacham community in doing so.
- Beneficial to students and community.
- Makes sense financially. Stronger sense of community for students. Students don't have to adjust to new culture, staff, etc. Peacham has an AWESOME staff. One less transition.
- And, by so doing, solidifying a growing Peacham community. Affordable housing will come to Peacham.
- Save \$\$\$. Keep kids in their community. Most schools are K-8.

Cons

- Stevens school provides a quality program already. More than \$ required – commitment of board, staff and community to create a quality middle school program.
- The students are ready to move on to bigger schools at this age. More students to interact with and learn with
- Even with all the positives listed in the report, I do not believe that today's 7th & 8th graders can have their social/emotional/academic needs met in such small numbers.
- I think children need more opportunities in space/teachers/friends/classes/extra curricular events, etc.

3. What problems/challenges/concerns do you foresee with the expansion of Peacham School?

- Lab facilities; athletics; Steven's School will do everything to undermine.
- None
- Particularly divisiveness caused by withdrawing tuition from Stevens School.

- None really. Maybe have to bus students to bigger schools for some things.
- Any change is hard, but the benefits will out-weigh the drawbacks.
- Not that many problems with the great staff we have. Might have to bus kids to Danville or Barnet for Family and Consumer Science classes or some other classes. Stevens school might be mad.
- Anger private school in town.
- Steven's school
- It will be a challenge at first to prove that it can be done - especially to the naysayers. So, we'd better get it right fairly quickly. A big hurdle is convincing the common folk that despite the wealth and ivy-league-esque education that many private schools "boast" with, they really are mediocre, at best in sincere, genuine, whole child education. They just think they know better because of their "class". Some of the worst teachers I've seen in 40+ years are in private schools.
- The physical space seems to be available. I would encourage the hiring of a middle school teacher well versed in curriculum content and knowledgeable regarding this unique time developmentally. A 7/8 grade program must reflect the needs of this dynamic age group – not just offer more of the same. Communication with other K-8 schools in the area and possible sharing of resources would seem warranted.
- Backlash from Steven's School.
- Stevens School will have issues. People thinking that the kids need a bigger world – it comes soon enough! Logistical problems maybe – where to put students, transporting to other schools for extension, etc. Nothing too major if we put our heads together.
- Money concerns and teacher certification especially with highly qualified teacher certification for specialized degrees – Is an elementary certification truly sufficient to teach 7th & 8th?
- The need to "re-invent the wheel" to assure students would have music/PE/sports/art/tech ed/home arts experiences that other students have. School choice for 7-12 is a reason some give for moving to Peacham and that would be lost.
- The same problems/challenges/concerns will exist in an expanded Peacham School as exist now whether it's Peacham School or neighboring town schools ---class size, teacher proficiency, progressive curricula, budget constraints, parent and community involvement, and access to learning programs at the local, regional, national, and international levels.
- Space for "large" children; behavior issues due to lack of space and variety.

4. What benefits do you foresee with the expansion of Peacham School?

- More economical. Help hot lunch economics
- Less issues with students trying to fit in at other schools. Continue PLP's into 8th grade. Students can stay in their town.
- Lots – I could go on & on. It would make family life easier and our children could continue on in our amazingly excellent school!
- Keeping a major part of Peacham Town's heart and soul. The invaluable benefits that come from small schools (intimate knowledge that the teachers have of the kids and vice versa)
- The greatest benefit would be that of most small schools in Vermont – knowledge of each individual student, their strengths and weaknesses coupled with “what works” for each individual.
- Children stay in their community, they are comfortable here, the staff knows them and their families, they know the school culture, they can have continued growth with the PLP program, any special ed needs, any extensions needs, etc.
- Many
- Financial gain; community strength; K-8 has been proven as the best school model. Peacham needs to keep its public school. All students deserve an equal educational opportunity.
- Utilizes building and staff we already have more fully. Parents could stay involved through middle school, and not be as divided having students in 2 or 3 schools at once.
- ?
- Would keep the school open!
- Keeping our children in town (at Peacham School)
- Teachers know students; students feel more comfortable.
- Many, too many to list. Happy, comfortable kids staying in their community. Teachers know kids, kids know teachers. Parents won't have to transport kids anywhere.
- None
- See No. 1 above (And, by so doing, solidifying a growing Peacham community. Affordable housing will come to Peacham).

5. Should the school board decide to add 7th and 8 grade to Peacham School, how should that transition occur? (i.e. add 7th first then 8th the next year, etc.)

- Grandfather 7th grades, 6th graders go to 7th in Peacham
- Yes (add 7th first the 8th the next year)
- Yes, any other way would be horrible for the children.
- Add 7th next year then 8th the following year.
- Add next year 2008-2009 both grades at once if possible, if not add 7th next year and then 8th the following year.
- Jump right in and do both. Why prolong it?
- Same year!

- Go for it. Make it K-8 from the start. Don't hurry in to it, use Danville and Barnet and Monroe, etc. as resources.
- Add 7/8 at the same time. The middle school teacher comes here with a 2 year curriculum cycle – making sure the first entering 8th graders would get what they need to make a smooth transition to H.S. the following year.
- 7th first, then 8th. It should be done sooner rather than later – take the plunge, next year would be great.
- 7 & 8 next year
- All at once
- Add 7th & 8th next year 2008/2009.
- Unsure
- Add 1 year at a time. It would be very detrimental to bring kids back from a larger program.
- I hope not...but if so definitely gradually.
- Easy does it! 7th first then 8th the following year.

(overall results were 6 for adding one grade at a time, 8 for adding both in the same year and one unsure)

6. Do you feel the decision to expand Peacham School to a Pre-K -8 program should be made by the community or by the school board?

- Town meeting proposal by board.
- School board and staff
- Either is fine
- Community after educating them about what they are voting on, current parents, school board, and staff
- Let the community vote, although it is the responsibility of the board to make the final decision.
- School board – then present to town
- School board
- Not sure – if the community can be shown that private schools only siphon off the easy to educate, the privileged, the non-special needs, thus “diluting” the public pool, then community should decide. If they continue to buy the line of bull from the superiorists – school board should decide.
- Don't know – I'd like to think that the community would support the school if the board feels it is the best thing to do. The divisiveness in Peacham has been disheartening, as has the standard response “anything is better than the public school”.
- The community but only if the community chooses to be knowledgeable about the decision and the facts, show up at meetings, and not just listen to their neighbors or to people that have some sort of issue with Peacham School or public schools in general. In reality, I think the school board and current parents should make the decision by a paper ballot vote, sent home with all the info.

- School board and community
- Community – It's a big decision and should be supported by a strong majority of the community.
- School board and current parents of Peacham School students and staff.
- Community
- Community and/or parents that would be affected by this change.
- The community
- The school board should lead the way with a commitment. Whether or not a commitment is provided, the community should be given the opportunity to vote on the issue --- either by a regular, legal ballot or by petition.

7. Other constructive comments? (10 people added comments)

- This is a really good idea.
- Please do this to start 08-09. I really want this to start soon so my family can benefit from this wonderful concept! K-8 in Peacham at Peacham School would be fabulous!
- This makes sense. It's the best idea the school board has come up with. Thanks for asking our opinion.
- We have lots of talent in and out of the school to do this!
- Save on tuition!
- Talk to other small schools. Ask the Stevens School how they do it. Yes, I know that seems brazen, and I'd love to hear/see their response, because I believe that they'd love the public school(s) to fail. One of my children went there, had some learning issues, and they were not addressed. Any school can look good if the student body coming in is wealthy, well-traveled and without any handicaps, etc. It is an elitist, undemocratic system. Public schools are the "great equalizer". This town needs to be taught that. Be strong. Keep the ideals of public schooling alive. People move here for the school. Peacham students excel at schools wherever they go after Peacham. Remind the community of that.
- Thanks to the committee who spent time on creating the report. The school is truly the "heart and soul" of Peacham and should be a source of pride for its residents. Continue in your efforts. You've been "up front" with the community in looking for solutions. Continue to communicate as you have been and take a stand for what is best for the school and children of Peacham. There are many of us who have and will continue to support Peacham Elementary School.
- This is the right choice for our children and our community. This is how we will keep a public school in Peacham and serve ALL students.
- It's time to put this plan into immediate action.
- Thank you for taking the time to research both the positive and negative thoughts.
- Thanks for looking into so many options and all of your hard work.

- In any school district it is more cost effective to bring materials to the learner rather than to transport the learner (on foot, bicycle, private vehicle or school bus) to the materials. Where a town has a public or semi-public library the content should be accessible to all the students and teachers. In single school towns particularly those in rural areas, a significant percentage of students do not have on-site access to library services. It would be appropriate for single school towns to provide children's branches at the local schools.