Long Range Advisory Committee Metrics and Recommendations

June 13, 2023

Setting the Stage

Similar to numerous school districts across the country, BVSD is experiencing enrollment decline caused by a variety of factors including escalating housing costs, delayed childbirth and overall declining birth rates among others. Declining enrollment impacts BVSD's finances and our ability to provide high-quality educational experiences for students in all schools.

As enrollment in a school declines it becomes harder and more expensive on a per pupil basis to create a thriving student and educator experience at that school. Specifically at the elementary level, enrollment that falls below two classes per grade at a school starts to create funding inefficiencies in the staffing and operation of the school because fixed costs (e.g. utilities; support and administrative staff; art, music, and physical education teachers) are higher per student. In addition, fewer resources can make it more difficult for a school to implement strategic plan initiatives (such as MTSS, Data Driven Instruction, collaboration around instructional practices and assessments, coordinating interventions and enrichment) because it is challenging for the school to establish time, personnel, and resources for this work. The efficient use of resources districtwide will maintain the provision of quality educational programming for all BVSD students.

As enrollment shrinks, BVSD buildings continue to age, with major capital maintenance expenses predicted over the next 10 years and beyond.

BVSD has a responsibility to both provide a high-quality and equitable educational experience to all students and manage district resources and capital assets in a fiscally responsible manner. It should be noted that charter schools are managed by independent boards and are not subject to the proposals described in this document.

At this time, the discussion of how to respond to enrollment decline is focused at the elementary level because the impacts are being seen and felt more dramatically at that level. In the coming years, BVSD will also need to consider how enrollment decline is impacting the student experience at the middle and high school levels.

Guiding principles included in this document provide guardrails for these conversations.

Metrics

To assist the Board of Education with future decision-making in light of the challenges posed by declining enrollment, the Long Range Advisory Committee proposes the following:

ANNUAL TREND REPORT

Beginning in February 2024, staff will provide an annual enrollment trend report to the Board of Education regarding school utilization which also includes number of classes per grade level and five-year enrollment projections by school.

ENROLLMENT ADVISORY PHASE

If an elementary school has two or fewer classes per grade level on average and enrollment is 60% of capacity or below, the Board and community should be aware:

- Resource allocation will adhere to the established staffing funding formula to the greatest extent possible
- Multi-grade classrooms may be necessary to meet the funding formula
- Library, counseling, and specials may be limited

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PHASE

If an elementary school has 1.5 or fewer classes per grade level on average and is at 50% of capacity or below, with a projected trend to continue for at least 5 years:

The Board will engage staff to lead a community-based process to develop possible solutions to be considered by the Board to provide a thriving, well-resourced educational environment for students and staff. The community may vary depending on the school, circumstances, and proposed actions. It will need to be clarified when an engagement process is initiated, and potentially adjusted, in light of possible responsive actions. People who may be affected by a significant change at a school would be considered part of the community and could include families of the school(s), neighbors or a neighborhood, and families that might have an interest or need for new or different programming. Decision-making should be in the context of looking at geographic areas or multiple schools at the same time if appropriate. Timeline will be established by the Board.

The outcome of this process may result in one or more of the following recommendations that could include but are not limited to:

- Continuing to operate at the established staffing funding formula
- Focus or specialized programming
- Reallocate grade levels with neighboring school
- Closure/Consolidation

Particular options will be evaluated by staff as possible responsive actions when schools are in the Community Engagement Process. Implemented changes may need to be re-evaluated if enrollment does not stabilize or increase.

This process and proposed solutions will be evaluated by the following guiding principles proposed by the LRAC:

Guiding Principles

- Equity and access should be at the heart of every recommendation or decision in the enrollment context. Consideration should be given regarding impacts to historically underserved populations. In BVSD, equity includes but is not limited to: removing institutional barriers, embracing and respecting diversity, enhancing inclusion, intentional support for students, staff, family and community, culturally responsive teaching, learning, and leading.
- Data should play a significant role in the decision-making process.
- Due to their unique geographic circumstances, mountain schools require differentiated decisions.
- Decisions should aim to maximize efficient use of resources for all students.
- It should be understood that change is hard, and communities will need to be supported through any transition.
- Municipalities should be included in conversations about closing or consolidating schools.
- The facility condition and the cost to modernize an existing school to meet educational specifications should be taken into consideration.
- District-wide responses and optimization of resources should also be explored when appropriate.

Recommended Board Actions

- Evaluate Open Enrollment Policy JECC & JECC-R
- Study current attendance boundaries (Policy JC) to identify possible changes that could rebalance numbers of resident students within an attendance area
- Conduct community surveys to identify desired or unmet needs, priorities, and preferences of the community

Important Considerations

As the District and the community move toward considering specific actions to take in response to enrollment changes there are a number of factors and ancillary outcomes that need to be considered.

TRANSPORTATION

Actions such as consolidating schools or placing a new program at a school will create different student transportation needs. Students may need to travel farther, which may make them eligible for school bus transportation or require a car trip rather than traveling by foot or bike. Additional vehicles on the road may create more emissions and congestion. Additionally, student commute time may increase. The ongoing bus driver shortage may be a limiting factor.

FUTURE CAPITAL CONSTRUCTION/MAINTENANCE COSTS

School buildings will continue to age and will require major, high cost major maintenance at regular intervals. These costs should be a consideration when evaluating continuing to operate a building. Additionally, the costs associated with renovating a building for additional enrollment or a change of program should also be considered.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

BVSD has made an organizational commitment to sustainability. Proposed actions should be evaluated in terms of impact to sustainability. Factors such as the cost and consumption of resources to operate and maintain underutilized buildings should be considered. Conversely, some proposed actions may adversely affect sustainability such as increasing vehicular miles traveled.