

Background for Decision to Unify Andover and Lahser High Schools in Fall 2013

The Bloomfield Hills Schools Board of Education and administration made the decision in June 2010 to *unify the district's two high schools effective September 2013* in response to five compelling realities:

1. **Declining enrollment** - Our grades 9-12 population at each school has been steadily dropping due to demographic trends. We fully expect to level off at about 1,600 students as verified independently each year by Plante Moran. Our current high school populations are each in the 850-975 student range and declining. Operating comprehensive high schools of this size is costly and inefficient because they require a critical mass of students to fill classes at an efficient size of 20-30 students. As the Hanover Benchmarking Study indicates, smaller student bodies result in lower numbers of available elective choices, including Advanced Placement courses, World Languages and other specialized programs. BHS remains committed to preserving small class sizes.
2. **Declining state funding** - School funding from the state continues to decline with no relief in sight. Not only have revenues been flat or declining since 2008, but state revenues to BHS have increased just 19.04% since 1994, while the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by 49% over that same period (a 30% net revenue reduction as verified by Yeo & Yeo). At the same time, we have experienced sharp increases in costs which are difficult to control, for example, the state now charges BHS about 27% of every employee's wages for retirement—a rate which was 12.99% in 2003. We must adapt to our new reality and explore every avenue (high school unification being one) to reduce costs and operate more efficiently. Unification is projected to save BHS \$2.5M annually as verified by Plante Moran.
3. **Preservation of comprehensive education** - Through extensive public participation in our Strategic Plan, our community has a clearly expressed preference for comprehensive education as expressed in our mission. The Strategic Plan also called upon the district to close facilities in an effort to right-size operations for maximum efficiency, the goal being to maximize funds available for preservation of comprehensive education. It is therefore our duty to maintain broad elective choices that help personalize learning and ignite student passion.
4. **Two aging facilities** - It costs more to maintain and operate two facilities than one; this is especially true if comparing one *new/fully refurbished* facility to two *aging* buildings. Regardless of building condition, numerous efficiencies can be captured by operating on one campus to leverage staffing and eliminate redundancies. Our two high schools are

about 50 years old, needing at least \$15M *each* (\$30M total) just to address most pressing needs (verified by SHW Group architects). Fully updating and refurbishing each of them would cost about \$57M (as verified by SHW Group). Compare this to the estimated \$66M to fully refurbish one campus to house all HS students and capture maximum efficiencies. It makes sense to properly upgrade and expand *one* facility that will serve our students for 30-40 years rather than to minimally patch two buildings that will continue to drain resources and forfeit staffing efficiencies into the future.

5. **Changing environment** - We're preparing today's learners for careers that don't yet exist in a global economy that demands flexibility and teamwork. Our buildings should support the needs and instructional methods of the future. Providing spaces to promote a rich educational experience is part of our responsibility if we want to continue 'leading the way' as a world-class school district.

The above factors led the administration to study many issues relating to high school unification in great detail. The following documents, posted on the BHS website, highlight some of the more pertinent information and comparisons:

- http://www.bloomfield.org/files/strategic_planning/one_vs_two_high_schools.pdf
- http://www.bloomfield.org/files/strategic_planning/one_vs_two_high_schools.pdf
- http://www.bloomfield.org/files/downloads/presentation_bhs_traffic.pdf
- http://www.bloomfield.org/files/downloads/presentation_hs_study.pdf

In addition to the factors above, the administration researched the size of Oakland County schools and found that a school of 1,650 students is medium-sized within the county. Also, BHS total school millage rates are the third lowest of the 28 districts in Oakland County. Given that our current debt is set to expire in 2014, the new millage required to fund the Fielding Nair International (FNI) single campus plan at about \$66M would be comparable to the expiring millage rate. This means that there would be very little change to the millage rate citizens are currently paying.

With an eye toward maintaining our great educational programs in challenging economic times, all indicators pointed the administration toward recommending unification on one high school campus. Seeing the logic in the data, the Board accepted the administration's recommendation in June 2010 to unify on one campus no sooner than 2012.

-Respectfully submitted by Rob Glass, Superintendent, Bloomfield Hills Schools, 12/15/11

View posting on <http://www.bloomfield.org/bhs-unified-high-school> for hyperlinks