

# One Unified Bloomfield Hills High School-- Fall 2013

## Background and Overview

The Bloomfield Hills School District *will unify its two high schools effective September of 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 (verified by Plante Moran enrollment projections.) Our current schools are each in the 850-975 student range and declining. Operating comprehensive high schools of this size is costly and inefficient.
2. **Declining state funding** - Educational funding continues to decline with no relief in sight. We must adapt to our new reality and explore every avenue (high school unification being one) to reduce costs and operate more efficiently. Unifying on one campus with a fully renewed and expanded building will allow us to capture \$2.5M in annual operating savings (as verified by Plante Moran.)
3. **Preservation of comprehensive education** - Our community has a clearly expressed preference for comprehensive education as expressed through our Strategic Plan and our mission. 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—especially two facilities around 50 years old needing at least \$15M each (\$30M total) just to address most pressing needs. It makes sense to properly upgrade and expand one facility that will better serve our students for the next 30-40 years.
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.

While the decision to unify in the fall of 2013 has been made by the district in response to the above compelling realities, a decision about *what the unification will look like will ultimately be made by the community*.

The district took to heart criticism by a number of citizens that it had not maintained sufficient openness in the past—and responded by engaging the community on the high school unification issue in many ways since November 2010, including:

- Focus groups
- Task forces and committee meetings
- Open community meetings

- Community Partnership Committees and visits to other school districts
- Superintendent dialogues, coffees and fireside chats
- Board meetings and study sessions

The district has provided the following deliverables as a result of our extensive dialogue with the community:

- ✓ **Clarity** - A complete schematic plan that the community can review, understand and fully evaluate
- ✓ **Compromise** - A plan that weaves the many opinions of a diverse community into a proposal that we believe can gain the support of the majority of the community
- ✓ **Choice** - A plan that gives the community the ability to choose a Bonded plan at the ballot box with a viable backup plan to be implemented should the bond fail.

After more than a year of listening and relationship building, a plan meeting the criteria above has emerged. It's now time to share that plan involving a bond proposal with the community so that a decision can be made and our community can put this ongoing issue to rest:

- **Pass a bond** to create a unified BHHS on ONE CAMPUS: Requires passing a bond (amount TBD by 2-16-12) and possibly combining it with using some funds on hand (amount TBD by 2-16-12) to create a unified BHHS (grades 9-12) on the Andover site by renovating, partially demolishing and enlarging the capacity of the current building per the schematic plan developed by Fielding Nair International (FNI) with community input.
- **If the bond fails**, we will create a unified BHHS on TWO CAMPUSES; grades 10-12 on the Andover campus, with 9<sup>th</sup> graders on either the Hickory Grove or Lahser site (TBD by February 3, pending analysis); no bond required. We will use funds on hand (a minimal amount to do basic mechanical renovations where necessary on the buildings). This is not the preferred solution and will not solve facility issues but will allow us to organize what we have a little more efficiently.

After a great deal of study and community dialogue, it is the professional opinion of the BHS administration that passing a bond to update and expand on one campus is recommended as the best course of action for the following reasons:

- Provides significantly more operational efficiency (about \$2.5M) than unifying on two campuses (about \$500-750K)
- Allows all 9-12 students to be together, while still allowing the ability to create smaller learning communities (e.g. 'Freshmen Academy,' etc.) within one building if desired
- Puts high school physical plant into great shape for the next 30-40 years instead of leaving millions of dollars' worth of maintenance issues unresolved and straining our budget

- Provides greatly improved physical environment to improve the learning environment and make us more attractive when parents shop for schools.

We are committed to maintaining our standing as a world-class school district and have a plan to move this mission forward with the level of resources the community chooses to provide. We stand at the threshold of having this controversial issue resolved once and for all; this is a pivotal moment of decision. Perceptions of school quality are vital in keeping our community a destination for new families, meeting the needs of current families and contributing to the quality of life for those community members who have no children in our schools -- *What kind of community do we want to be?* The BHS administration firmly believes that unifying on one campus best positions our school district and thus our community for our future.

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