

**Madison Public Schools
Board of Education Regular Meeting
April 18, 2017
6:00 PM
Walter C. Polson Library**

MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order / Attendance

The public meeting of the Madison Board of Education was called to order by Chair Jean Fitzgerald at 6:10 p.m. Chairman Fitzgerald led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present: Jessica Bowler; Galen Cawley; John Dean; Jean Fitzgerald; Alison Keating; Matt Keller; Seth Klaskin; Happy Marino; Katie Stein

Also present: Thomas Scarice, Superintendent of Schools; Gail Dahling-Hench, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; students; and community members.

- 2.** Move to include a Fourth Option on the slate of options to be voted upon this evening, which recommends expanding Option #2 to also include in a single referendum a plan to renovate Polson Middle School in addition to rebuilding Ryerson Elementary and renovating Jeffrey Elementary.

MOTION by Klaskin seconded by Stein to include a Fourth Option on the slate of options to be voted upon this evening, which recommends expanding Option #2 to also include in a single referendum a plan to renovate Polson Middle School in addition to rebuilding Ryerson Elementary and renovating Jeffrey Elementary.

AYES: Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Stein

NAYS: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald;
Marino

MOTION REJECTED: 5-4.

- 3.** To dispense Option #1

MOTION: by Klaskin, seconded by Keating, to dispense Option 1.

AYES: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald;
Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Marino; Stein

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN:

MOTION CARRIED: 9-0

4. To amend option #3 by switching the sequence of projects in option #3 so that the grant application would be submitted in 2017 for the purpose of a renovation as new project at Jeffrey School, followed by a second grant application to be submitted in June 2019 for the construction and design of a new Ryerson School.

MOTION: by Stein, seconded by Klaskin to amend option #3 by switching the sequence of projects in option #3 so that the grant application would be submitted in 2017 for the purpose of a renovation as new project at Jeffrey School, followed by a second grant application to be submitted in June 2019 for the construction and design of a new Ryerson School.

AYES: Keller; Klaskin; Stein

NAYS: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald; Keating; Marino

MOTION REJECTED: 6-3

5. Move to approve Option #2 to authorize the Superintendent to submit two grant applications. One grant application will be for the design and construction of a new Ryerson Elementary School to replace the existing Ryerson Elementary School. The second grant application will be for the design and renovation/addition to the existing Jeffrey Elementary school. Both schools will house grades kindergarten through grade three, with eight-year high enrollments of 333 students and a total estimated project cost of \$64.5 million. Following the new construction and renovation process, Island Avenue School will be closed.

MOTION: by Klaskin, seconded by Keating to approve Option #2 to authorize the Superintendent to submit two grant applications. One grant application will be for the design and construction of a new Ryerson Elementary School to replace the existing Ryerson Elementary School. The second grant application will be for the design and renovation/addition to the existing Jeffrey Elementary school. Both schools will house grades kindergarten through grade three, with eight-year high enrollments of 333 students and a total estimated project cost of \$64.5 million.

Following the new construction and renovation process, Island Avenue School will be closed.

AYES: Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Stein

NAYS: Bowler, Cawley, Dean, Fitzgerald, Marino

MOTION REJECTED: 5-4

6. Move to approve Option #3 to authorize the Superintendent to submit a grant application for the design and construction of a new Ryerson Elementary School to replace the existing Ryerson Elementary School in June 2017, and to submit a second grant application in June 2019 that will be for the design and renovation/addition to the existing Jeffrey Elementary School. Both schools will house grades kindergarten through grade three, with eight-year high enrollments of 333 students and a total estimated project cost of \$65.8 million. Following the new construction and renovation process, Island Avenue School will be closed.

MOTION by Bowler, seconded by Marino e to approve Option #3 to authorize the Superintendent to submit a grant application for the design and construction of a new Ryerson Elementary School to replace the exciting Ryerson Elementary School in June 2017, and to submit a second grant application in June 2019 that will be for the design and renovation/addition to the existing Jeffrey Elementary School. Both schools will house grades kindergarten through grade three, with eight-year high enrollments of 333 students and a total estimated project cost of \$65.8 million. Following the new construction and renovation process, Island Avenue School will be closed.
AYES: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald; Marino
NAYS: Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Stein
MOTION CARRIED: 5-4

7. Move to approve the educational specifications for the Ryerson Elementary School dated April 18, 2017.

MOTION: by Bowler, seconded by Cawley to approve the educational specifications for the Ryerson Elementary School dated April 18, 2017.
AYES: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald; Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Marino; Stein
NAYS: None
ABSTAIN:
MOTION CARRIED: 9-0

The following comments were made by Seth Klaskin:

My fellow Board members: It has been an honor to work closely with you over the past two-and-a-half years. One thing that we all learned early in this process is that most of our school facilities require substantial repair or renovation to remain serviceable over the ten-to-twenty year horizon, which is the temporal scope of our facilities study.

A school that requires significant repair and is headed for increased usage is Polson Middle School, which under any plan is going to take on Grade 6 in addition to Grades 7 and 8, in order to utilize the building's square footage to the state's required standard. One of the early options we considered was to build a new Upper Middle School to replace that building. We ultimately rejected that option because we knew it would be too costly, and we focused our attention on building a new elementary school, instead, which is much less costly to construct.

Somewhere in that focus on how to address our elementary school facilities, we developed and advanced three options that keep their focus on elementary school and leave Polson to find alternate funding sources for incremental upkeep.

Because Polson will be expanding its service load, because Polson clearly requires substantial attention and because now would be the best time to borrow money at low rates and receive

maximum state reimbursement for renovating all or part of Polson, we should reasonably be discussing and voting on options that include Polson this evening.

If our decision tonight were occurring in a vacuum or under more favorable fiscal circumstances, with certainty as to future state funding, I believe this Board **WOULD BE** voting on an option to include Polson in our Facilities Plan.

I know that it is not realistic or achievable to include Polson in a singular, up-front plan, but it would be the right thing to do if money were no object, and so it is important to hold a discussion on the record to capture the Board's recognition of the importance and the imminence of maintaining Polson to educational standards. The Board should not forego this opportunity to inform and direct our sister town boards as to the Board of Education's intention that Polson be addressed continuously, regardless of which option issues from the Board of Education this evening. I assume there will be insufficient votes to carry a motion to add such a fourth option to our slate of options tonight, so we will proceed to a vote on the three remaining options once this brief discussion and a vote on the motion conclude.

Ms. Keating made the following comments:

Tonight we are faced with one of the most important decisions we will make in our tenure on the Board of Education. I have worked hard for two and half years to prepare for this decision. I take this very seriously. I know that I have listed to my constituents, the experts we have hired to guide us through this process, and fellow Board members to get to the decision that I will make tonight.

As the Chair of the Finance Committee, I believe that bundling is the most fiscally responsible decision we can make right now. We have an opportunity to capitalize on current state reimbursement rates and ensure all of the projects that we as a Board deemed most important are done in a timely manner.

I feel strongly about equity and the financial impact this decision will have on our town. I will be supporting option 2 tonight. Although it does not address the big issue of Polson directly, I believe it is the most fiscally responsible choice and will help bring our District to a new level faster and with certainty for phase two of the project.

Mr. Cawley made the following comments:

Statement at the April 18, 2017 BOE Meeting regarding the School Facilities Vote
First, I would like to thank everyone for the process; I think everyone has dealt in good faith. The number of options we've looked at has been both exhaustive and exhausting, and it's a testimony to the board and leadership's ability to come up with creative options and compromises under changing circumstances.

We've learned a number of things as a result. For example, I agree with Seth that Polson needs to be taken care of first – but repaired, not renovated -- because otherwise it would not be fair to an entire cohort of kids to spend three or four years under construction at their elementary school only to face three more years of it at Polson. So Polson has to be fixed first. Second, we've learned that it's more expensive to renovate Ryerson than it is to rebuild it.

I agree with Happy, who made an excellent point that ultimately we're all working towards the same goal; that is, both option 2 and 3 represent the same thing, just separated by two years. And we all agree that the status quo of our buildings is untenable.

This board has applied the criteria of parity, school size, and mill rate (cost) to the different options. Since the school sizes are equivalent, I am going to focus on cost for the moment. I

ranked all the alternatives in terms of the net present value of their cash flows. When you do it that way, Option 3 is less expensive. Therefore, I disagree that it costs \$5mm more than Option 2.

I also unfortunately disagree with some of my colleagues that we should disregard the likely results of a referendum, that is, fail to consider the feasibility of passing each option when recommending a plan.

So my question is, how is it more “fiscally prudent” to spend more money on an option that is less likely to pass? In reality, Option 2 is lose-lose: if it is voted in, we may face a 10 year cash crunch, meaning less money for other programs, but if it’s voted down, then everybody is equal in winding up with nothing. That’s not the kind of parity we want.

I value the fiscal flexibility provided by having two referenda. It’s a more prudent approach. Therefore, I am voting for Option 3.

[Earlier, in Q&A: I asked Collier’s exactly what accounted for the \$5.5 mm difference between Option 2 and 3. He stated that it was due to (1) rising escalation (inflation) and (2) likely lower reimbursement rates. Pessimistically, \$5.5mm is the largest possible difference.] [Later, in follow ups, I praised Seth and other Option 2 proponents and acknowledged the very real risks of Option 3 (inflation, reimbursement rates, etc.) but felt that the risk of getting nothing passed was bigger. I used various inputs to create a model and ran a number of simulations, then did a sensitivity analysis. (Ran through factors.) Surprisingly, the interest and reimbursement rates didn’t have that big of an effect on output costs. So, it’s a question of which risks you emphasize, and the value placed on them.]

Ms. Stein made the following comments:

First, I would like to acknowledge the countless months of time, meetings and innumerable conversations that have gone into getting us to this point of a very important process. I joined the board just over a year ago- and the process was already well underway. The process, which began out of a need to address declining enrollment, the condition of our facilities and support the instructional vision of our district, taught us some very important things: 1. Every consultant and expert from DRA to Colliers, has confirmed that ALL of our schools are in serious need of maintenance and updates. 2. We also learned, thanks to the instability and unpredictability of state funding, that there will be no guarantee of reimbursement or low bond rates after this year. It was my understanding that our board entered into the study phase of this plan after our retreat in October, in an effort to learn more about the two elementary school properties and see if there was a reason large enough to head back to the drawing board. (For example: if geotechnical studies/ hazmat or wetland studies showed the land designated at the Ryerson campus was somehow unbuildable) Gratefully the results did not indicate any reason why we should alter course now. In fact, the information presented at our last meeting only confirmed to me that we should stay the course so that in addition to addressing the original 3 drivers of this study we can also benefit from state reimbursements and low bond rates which could save taxpayers 17-24% and meet the goals we set for Madison students. And while we have been told we won’t lose all access to state reimbursements going forward, it seems clear if you’re reading the “tea leaves” that significantly less money will be offered to districts like Madison in the future. In addition to the cost savings I just mentioned, Option 2 also addresses an issue of parity between our Elementary schools which, as a board, we agreed was of utmost importance. In option 3 our district would close a beloved elementary school in the southern district of town and move students to an unfamiliar school which all experts agree is also in need of repair. All of this happens with no guarantee of having a second referendum pass while at the same time potentially losing the benefits of state reimbursements. This seems, to me, a recipe for disparity that I cannot support. Finally, I feel that our job as members of the Board of Education is to pick the best plan that will address the needs of the kids and not based on a

forecast of what we think the electorate may or may not accept. Because of all of these reasons- I will be voting for Option 2.

Ms. Marino made the following comments:

This past Tuesday, April 18, the Madison Board of Education voted on a School Facility Plan. The Republican-majority Board split down party lines and voted to send a most unfair, unjust, and fiscally irresponsible plan to the Board of Selectmen and, ultimately, to the voters for a referendum.

Two elementary schools are in great need of renovation, Ryerson and Jeffrey. Putting partisan politics above students' best interest, the Board of Education chose to build a new Ryerson first and to send a Jeffrey renovation to referendum two years later. Essentially, Ryerson students get a new school first, while two-thirds of the town's students will remain at an ageing Jeffrey, subject to a future referendum. While there is never a guarantee that any referendum will pass, the Republicans chose to gamble with Jeffrey's future by kicking that can down the road.

The Board's consultant showed data that splitting the school projects this way would actually cost the town more, resulting in a higher tax impact. Doing both schools together would result in a lower cost and be fair and equitable to all students. Yet, some Republicans insisted on alternative facts, continuing to state that the split option was cheaper, despite data showing the opposite.

We therefore request that the Madison Board of Selectmen REJECT the split option, and send the process back to the Board of Education for further review. Our town deserves a fiscally responsible plan that is fair and equitable to all of our students.

8. Meetings / Dates of Importance (see attached) May Calendar

9. Adjournment

MOTION: by Dean seconded by Bowler to adjourn the meeting at 7:42 p.m.

AYES: Bowler; Cawley; Dean; Fitzgerald; Keating; Keller; Klaskin; Marino; Stein

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN:

MOTION CARRIED: 9-0

Approved at the May 23, 2017 Board of Education Meeting
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