

OVERVIEW

Prior to the School Committee vote, surveys were conducted that demonstrated strong opposition to grade reconfiguration. Both educators and parents/guardians clearly favored retaining the K-6 grade configuration, the educators obviously supporting a twin K-6 670 student school while the parents/guardians were divided between this option and maintaining 3 K-6 smaller schools. The District did not include the results of these surveys in the Local Actions and Approvals section of the PSR, presumably because they do not support their position.

BACKGROUND

It is important to note that the survey was only conducted after many months of requests from a group of parents concerned that the community's opinions on school consolidation and grade reconfiguration were not being taken into due consideration by the District. This group had been told, on more than one occasion, by members of the superintendent's office and school committee that the public didn't know enough about this issue to offer an informed opinion. However, common sense and the Feasibility Study guidelines indicate that public support is required to successfully navigate the MSBA process. It makes sense to have some sense that the Preferred Solution that would be developed into a schematic design seeking Town Meeting approval and a debt override vote would have a good chance of success, lest the entire process fail late in the 30 months allotted for the Feasibility Study.

SURVEY RESULTS

Attached please find the results of the surveys as reported by the firm that conducted it. Included are the comments written by respondents as part of the survey's final open-ended question. These results can also be found at the following url addresses:

Survey Results:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0By0mz4P0v3bWUGkwa2kzaXdPdnc/view>

Survey Comments (not made available on either the District or OPM's sites):

<https://wildwoodpgo.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/2015jan-schoolsurvey-teachercomments.pdf> <https://wildwoodpgo.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/2015jan-schoolsurvey-parentcomments.pdf>

There were 412 educator respondents, 38% of whom also wrote comments, and 451 parent/guardian respondents, half of whom wrote comments. The survey reports that for the educators, "Option B [Twin K-6 school] is viewed more favorably and is the top choice of a higher percentage of respondents, with broad appeal across schools and job categories". Parents/guardians likewise clearly favored K-6 options over grade reconfiguration, the primary difference from educators being that the preference between the smaller and larger K-6 options were not distinguishable. The tables below summarizes how well K-6 options (A&B) fared compared to reconfiguration options (C&D), particularly the option that the School Committee voted to move forward in the process (C) that was cited as the top choice by the fewest people in both surveys.

EDUCATORS	A (K-6, 360 student)	B (K-6, 670 student)	C (2-6, 750 student in two identical wings)	D (2-6, 750 students in 2-4 and 5-6 wings)
Favorability	28%	61%	31%	37%
Top choice	23%	48%	4%	25%
Openness to consider	31%	66%	37%	37%

PARENTS & GUARDIANS	A (K-6, 360 student)	B (K-6, 670 student)	C (2-6, 750 student in two identical wings)	D (2-6, 750 students in 2-4 and 5-6 wings)
Favorability	47%	50%	26%	30%
Top choice	40%	34%	6%	21%
Openness to consider	51%	55%	29%	31%

These results were briefly presented to a joint meeting of the School Committee and School Building Committee. The District and OPM did not present the findings at the final Community Forum later that day and it clearly did not have any influence on the School Committee who, the very next day, read prepared statements at a special meeting stating their intention to vote for grade reconfiguration even as they acknowledged that in doing so it would be acting in opposition to the clearly stated wishes of the majority. More recently at a Town Finance Committee Meeting, the District and OPM again did not report on the survey results despite being repeatedly asked by some committee members about the degree of opposition that has been evident in local media coverage. They also failed to mention that the survey results were not included in the recently submitted PSR despite other pointed questions about how the MSBA would view the proposal given this opposition.

OMISSION OF SURVEY RESULTS FROM PSR

The reason we are sending you this information is that the District and the OPM have refused to do so. You will note that in the PSR, the existence of the survey is mentioned only within the minutes of the meeting on January 13 but the results themselves are completely absent. On February 2, the day that the School Building Committee voted on the PSR, a statement was made by a member of the public pointing out the omission of the survey results and comments from this document and urging them to include it. Committee meeting rules do not allow non-members to ask questions but one member finally did ask why the survey results were not included and the chair's response was that the survey was about grade configuration and therefore an issue for the School Committee, not the School Building Committee, so it need not be included in the PSR. He added that the survey is a matter of public record and could be accessed by anyone who wanted to read it. Having thus been denied the inclusion of the sole piece of evidence reflecting the opinion of the people of the Town of Amherst, we feel that we have no other recourse than to provide it to you directly.

