

Uniting Lawrence in Support of our Elementary Schools

A Report to the Board of Education of USD497, Lawrence, Kansas

Feb. 20, 2012

Summary

Lawrence elementary schools are the heart of our community and are crucial to children's education. Our schools have unmet needs and the status quo is not acceptable. *We recommend that the Board of Education should close no elementary schools and should lead a community effort to address the unmet capital and staffing needs in these schools.* We have concluded that the cost of closing schools greatly outweighs the small financial benefits. The targeted schools serve the District's most vulnerable students and are anchors to the District's core neighborhoods and historic downtown. As consultants' data on closure scenarios clearly shows, any closure would cause a ripple effect of boundary changes and school overcrowding across the entire district. At-risk students are concentrated in the schools considered for consolidation, and closing any of these schools would pose educational harm to these vulnerable students and to the District's key goal of closing achievement gaps. Equally important, a bond tied to closing schools would draw community opposition and would have less chance of success. Rather than impose these disruptions and harms on Lawrence's elementary students and the Lawrence community, we recommend a positive, community-unifying campaign to upgrade elementary schools across the district and to make critical capital investments in these schools. This proposal minimizes the disruptions and costs to Lawrence children and the community. *A bond based on this recommendation is more likely to gain broad support to address critical needs than any scenario tying a bond to school closings.*

Core recommendation (see p. 3 for full discussion)

We recommend retaining and upgrading Lawrence's fourteen elementary schools. We recommend that the Board of Education develop a bond proposal to finance necessary improvements to all of the District's elementary schools, to address deferred maintenance, enhance educational technologies, and to modestly expand existing facilities to eliminate portable classrooms, bring all schools to at least 2-section size, and make space for full-day kindergarten in the schools that do not yet have it.

Supporting reasons for why upgrading makes more sense than closure

1) The context has changed (see p. 4 for full discussion)

- Elementary enrollment is growing at double the previously expected rate, and the growth is concentrated in and around the schools considered for consolidation (growth in enrollment has increased District revenues by more than \$500,000/year).
- Elementary schools no longer have significant unused capacity (in all elementary facilities there are rooms available for only four more class sections).
- In light of enrollment projections, any closing scenario would require a large-scale building effort to replace closed classrooms and accommodate students from closed

schools, and the cost of this construction would be considerably greater than the cost of upgrades to the existing schools. Every closed classroom must be rebuilt elsewhere.

- Even with the capacity added by new construction, consolidations would cause a ripple effect of boundary changes across the entire District and overcrowding in several schools. While enrollment growth may require boundary changes in any event, the boundary changes and overcrowding would be much greater if schools are closed rather than upgraded.
- The latest financial reports indicate that the District has not needed to spend contingency funds to keep schools open but has instead saved on average an additional \$1 million in unspent operational funds by the end of each of the past two fiscal years.

2) The benefits of closing schools are very limited (see p. 5 for full discussion)

- The financial savings from any closure are very limited and undoubtedly are less than the reported savings of the closing last year.
- While 2- and 3-section schools are more efficient than 1-section schools, 3-section schools are not substantially more efficient than 2-section schools; Lawrence no longer has any 1-section schools and so the efficiency gains of consolidation are now limited.

3) The costs of closing schools greatly outweigh the limited benefits (see p. 7 for full discussion)

- Every closure scenario would cause a ripple of boundary changes across the entire district, including the larger west side schools. Many schools, including the west side, would become seriously overcrowded. Upgrading instead of closing schools would minimize the extent of these disruptions.
- Closing schools increases class sizes in remaining schools. The schools that received Wakarusa Valley students experienced substantial increases in class sizes, and every new consolidation scenario would drive up class sizes in the remaining schools.
- A large proportion of the District's most academically vulnerable students are enrolled in the schools targeted for closure, and closing these schools would put a disproportionate burden on these students.
- Several closure scenarios would disrupt the District's ESL Cluster Sites, and this would cause substantial harm to an effective and proven system of ESL instruction and to at-risk ESL students.
- The remaining East and Central schools are key parts of their neighborhoods and critical to maintaining the health of Lawrence's historic core. Additional school closures beyond those made ten years ago would risk long-term harm to these neighborhoods and Lawrence's historic downtown.

Part I: Our core recommendation

We recommend a united effort to address the needs of Lawrence elementary schools and students. Lawrence elementary schools need additional professional staff, more teachers and better teacher pay, full-day kindergarten in all schools, advanced teaching technologies, smaller class sizes, resolution of deferred maintenance, and expansions to eliminate portables and allow the addition of full-day kindergarten in several facilities. All Lawrence elementary schools need significant investments. These needs are extensive but manageable. *We believe the Lawrence community shares a broad consensus on the importance of addressing these needs. The question is how.*

Last year many thought that the best way to address Lawrence schools' funding problems was to close schools in some neighborhoods and expand schools in others (close-and-build), in effect concentrating new capital investments in a small number of consolidated schools. Even though the savings from closings were expected to be relatively small and the cost in terms of community conflict and capital expenditures relatively great, this option was thought reasonable because of the severity of the budget crisis. It was also based on assumptions that are no longer accurate, as outlined below. The Lawrence community should be given the opportunity to unite behind a comprehensive, positive plan that both upgrades our older schools and meets needs across *all* elementary schools—and at lower cost than the divisive close-and-build option.

There is another option: a community-unifying plan to upgrade our schools. The cost of upgrading existing facilities is considerably less than the cost of the new construction necessary under the close-and-build option, and this would leave more resources available for other capital investments that would more widely serve all Lawrence elementary students. A bond to upgrade existing facilities would unite our community rather than divide it. It would be far more likely to pass than the close-and-build option. In addition, this spring the state legislature will address school financing. While it is difficult to predict what the legislature will decide, state support for school budgets is unlikely to decrease and may increase for the first time in a number of years. The governor has promised no decrease in school funding. This changed funding climate will make a close-and-build option even more controversial.

Recommended capital improvements

The precise components of a facility-upgrade plan need to be worked out. They should include the following elements:

- Address deferred maintenance in all elementary schools as outlined in the District's capital improvement plan
- Add classrooms where needed to eliminate portable classrooms
- Expand all schools to at least full 2-section size

- Add classrooms where needed to accommodate full-day kindergarten
- Incorporate state-of-the-art educational technology in all elementary facilities
- Add a dedicated wing at Kennedy Elementary for the Early Childhood Program
- Make particular improvements needed by individual schools

Part II: The changed context

Since the Task Force issued its report a year ago, every one of the Task Force's key factual assumptions, while plausible to many at the time, has changed:

- **Enrollment growth.** Elementary enrollments are growing at double the rate expected by the Task Force and will rapidly fill Lawrence's elementary schools (last year, it was expected that enrollment would grow at a rate of .64% per year from 2010-2015; but by 2011 elementary enrollment had reached 4,646, a level the Task Force had not projected to reach until 2014. If growth for the next five years occurs at the rate projected by RSP Consultants, enrollment will have grown by 2015 at twice the rate expected by the Task Force).
- **Additional revenue from enrollment growth.** Growing elementary enrollment has brought more than \$500,000 in additional revenue to the District since 2010.
- **Concentration of enrollment growth in core neighborhoods.** Last year, it was thought that enrollment growth would be concentrated in the newer neighborhoods of West Lawrence; but RSP Consulting now projects that growth will be concentrated in and around the schools slated for consolidation and in Lawrence's south and southwest areas. The projected growth will fill schools in these areas above capacity if schools are closed. Even if schools are expanded to the maximum recommended by the District's architectural consultants, schools will still be above capacity (see pp. 7-8 below).
- **Available capacity.** Last year, it was thought that Lawrence's elementary schools had a large amount of unused capacity and that moving 6th-graders to middle school would leave even more empty space in elementary schools. *Now we know that there is capacity for only four more class sections across the district in our current facilities.* Elementary schools quickly used the space freed by the 6th-grade move for such educational needs as specials classes and expansion of full-day kindergarten that had too little space before the move. Further expansion of full-day kindergarten will take up yet more space.

- **The easing of the budget crisis.** Last year, many thought that the District could keep all elementary schools open only by drawing down its contingency fund (and after three years that fund would be depleted); instead, through careful management and increased enrollments, the District has saved on average \$1 million of unspent operational funds at the end of each of the past two fiscal years.

In sum, last year some thought that the best way to address Lawrence schools' anticipated funding problems was to close schools in some neighborhoods and expand schools in others. Even though this close-and-build proposal would cause significant community conflict, it was thought necessary by some in light of the circumstances at the time. But the context has changed and we now have the opportunity to unite the community behind a comprehensive, positive plan that upgrades our older schools—and at lower cost than the divisive close-and-build option.

Part III: The limited benefits of closing schools

Closing one or two schools is thought to have two possible benefits: cost savings and greater managerial efficiency in managing class sizes (that is, class sizes are thought to vary less widely in 3-section schools than in smaller schools). We have assessed these benefits and have found that they are not substantial. The maximum possible savings from closing any of the current schools will be considerably less than the savings obtained from one closure last year. 3-section schools are no more efficient in terms of class-size management than 2-section schools. The basis for these conclusions is summarized in this section.

While we fully agree with the goal of finding resources to fund additional staffing in our elementary schools, there are better and less-disruptive ways to reach this goal than closing schools. We support the District's current efforts to develop and implement a rubric for allocating resources based on need.

A) Cost-savings are limited

We estimate that the financial savings from closing two schools would be well under \$200,000 in total if the District takes any steps to mitigate increases in class sizes resulting from consolidation and to increase support-staff levels as appropriate for large consolidated schools with a high proportion of at-risk students.¹ This estimate is consistent with analyses accompanying the Cordley group's presentation to the Working Group on December 19, 2011.

¹ It is also important to note that if a school is closed, the resources previously allocated to its students are not actually "saved" (that is, unspent) but are diverted away from some uses and put to other uses. While some children gain from the diversion, others lose.

B) The efficiency gains of consolidating 2-section schools are limited

Consolidation is thought to improve efficiency in two areas: financial costs and class-size variability. While in each of these ways the efficiency gains of consolidating 1-section schools are significant, the efficiency gains of consolidating 2-section schools into 3-sections schools are very limited. As Lawrence no longer has any 1-section schools, further consolidations will not greatly increase the operating efficiency of the District. Here is why:

- *Cost efficiency.* The Task Force reported that 1-section schools are about 35% less cost-efficient than 3-section schools. 2-section schools, however, are nearly as cost-efficient as 3-section schools.
- *Class size variation.* It is sometimes said that class sizes vary less widely in 3-section schools than in 2- or 1-section schools, and that a benefit of consolidating smaller schools into 3-section schools is this reduction in the range of class sizes. We have examined this assumption using District data on class sizes and we conclude that while 1-section schools have a wider range of class sizes than 2- or 3-section schools, 2-section schools are comparable to 3-section schools in how widely their class sizes vary. The range of class sizes is virtually identical for 2-section and 3-section schools (see Tables 1 and 2 below).² In sum, while going from a 1-section to a 2-section school reduces variation in class sizes, going from 2-section to 3-section schools does not reduce variation in class sizes. *Since Lawrence no longer has any 1-section schools, there is no class-size benefit that can be obtained from further consolidation.*

Table 1: class size range by size of school in 2010

	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	Range
1-section	13	29	4.22	16
2-section	13	30	3.17	17
3-section	12	30	3.06	18

Table 2: class size range by size of school in 2011

	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation	Range
1-section	--	--	--	--
2-section	14	29	3.47	15
3-section	15	31	3.69	16

² Two schools, Hillcrest and Prairie Park, have 3 sections at some grade levels and two at others. Categorizing these two schools as 2-section schools versus as 3-section schools produces little difference in the reported results.

Part IV: The substantial harms from closing schools greatly outweigh the benefits

A) The logistical difficulties of every closing scenario

The RSP Consulting analyses of school consolidation scenarios are the first objective analysis of the enrollment impact of different consolidation scenarios in Lawrence. Last year the Task Force stopped short of considering the enrollment impact of different scenarios. The RSP reports demonstrate the practical difficulty of closing schools in Lawrence. We identify these consolidation scenarios by their designation (e.g., "Scenario 1A") in RSP Associates' final report delivered on Feb. 14, 2012. *The bottom line is that closing schools, even if managed as carefully as possible, will impose substantial negative ramifications on most of the remaining elementary schools, including schools on Lawrence's west side.*

Every consolidation scenario includes added capacity at elementary schools up to the level recommended by the District's architectural consultants. Several scenarios represent efforts to revise earlier scenarios by reducing the extent of boundary changes. Even with this added building capacity and these efforts to minimize boundary changes, the RSP scenarios indicate that closing schools will require the following:

- Every consolidation scenario would require boundary changes to almost all remaining elementary schools. While enrollment growth in some areas of Lawrence may require some boundary changes even if schools are not closed, closing schools would require considerably more extensive changes to boundaries than if schools are not closed.
- Every consolidation scenario would leave five or more remaining schools nearly at, or over, their capacity by 2016. Closing two schools (Scenario 2) would push enrollments in many schools over capacity and in two schools to 20% over their building capacity.
- The RSP reports *did not incorporate projected growth in ESL enrollments*. ESL enrollment has grown at roughly 10% per year for the past eight years and is likely to continue growing in the future. *Thus the RSP reports substantially underestimate the enrollments of the ESL Cluster Sites and Neighborhood Sites. In every closure scenario, expected growth in ESL enrollment will drive most of the ESL schools over their building capacities.*
- The RSP reports did not include in any scenario the Early Childhood Program's enrollment, which is currently about 125 but which can be expected to grow considerably if given adequate space. Adding this enrollment to a 450- or 500-student school at the Kennedy site would create substantial difficulties (student drop-off would become unmanageable with total enrollment approaching 700). But if the Early Childhood Program were placed in a separate facility elsewhere, this extra facility would negate the savings gained from 1 closure.

The elements of each closure scenario and the logistical difficulties inherent in each are summarized in following table.

Scenario	Number of schools affected by Boundary Changes	Schools above 90% enrollment capacity (listing % of capacity)*	Does not take into account expected growth in ESL enrollments	Does not provide location for Early Childhood program
1A (close New York and Kennedy, build new school at 15 th and Haskell)	9 of 13 remaining schools	5 of 13 remaining schools: Broken Arrow: 101% Cordley: 98% Schwegler: 93% Sunflower: 97% new facility: 103%	Expected growth in ESL enrollments would put Cordley, Schwegler, Sunflower, and new facility over capacity.	If ECP was housed at new facility, total enrollment would be approximately 700 by 2016.
1B (close New York and divide its enrollment between Pinckney, Cordley, and Kennedy)	10 of 13 remaining schools	6 of 13 remaining schools: Broken Arrow: 101% Cordley: 101% Deerfield: 98% Kennedy: 95% Schwegler: 93% Sunflower: 98%	Expected growth in ESL enrollments would put Cordley, Schwegler, Sunflower, and new facility over capacity.	If ECP was housed at Kennedy, total enrollment would be approximately 700 by 2016.
2 (close New York and Kennedy, build new school at 15 th and Haskell; close Hillcrest and divide its enrollment between 6 schools)	7 of 12 remaining schools	5 of 12 remaining schools: Broken Arrow: 101% Schwegler: 93% Sunflower: 119% Sunset Hill: 106% New facility: 121%	Expected growth in ESL enrollments would put Cordley, Schwegler, Sunflower, Sunset Hill, and new facility over capacity.	If ECP was housed at the new facility, total enrollment would be approximately 700 by 2016.
3 (close Pinckney and divide its enrollment between Hillcrest, Deerfield, and New York)	10 of 13 remaining schools	7 of 13 remaining schools: Broken Arrow: 101% Cordley: 95% Deerfield: 104% Hillcrest: 90% Schwegler: 93% Sunflower: 98%	Expected growth in ESL enrollments would put Cordley, Hillcrest, Schwegler, and Sunflower facility over capacity.	If ECP was housed at Kennedy, total enrollment would be approximately 700 by 2016.

*These projections of overcrowding take into account planned expansion of building capacities to the maximum recommended capacity, as recommended by the District's architectural consultants.

B) School closure increases class sizes

The weight of educational research confirms the educational benefits of smaller class sizes for at-risk students (see Krueger and Whitmore, 2001; Finn, Achilles, and Boyd-Zaharias, 2001; Finn 1998). The Task Force's Research Committee report reflected this research finding and recommended smaller classes for at-risk students (specifically, below 17 for K-3, below 20 for grades 4-5). A key District goal is to reduce class sizes for all elementary students and especially for at-risk students. We affirm the District's goal of reducing class sizes and the Task Force's recommendations to keep class sizes lower for at-risk students.

A key cost of consolidation is that closing schools directly increases class sizes. Closing Wakarusa Valley School produced very substantial increases in class sizes in Broken Arrow and Sunflower, the schools that received the majority of Wakarusa Valley's students. See Attachment 1 for documentation of the effect of consolidation on class sizes, using District enrollment data. Every closing scenario would increase class sizes for the most vulnerable students to levels far above those recommended by educational research.

We conclude that upgrading existing schools would better meet the District's goal of maintaining smaller classes, especially for at-risk students.

C) Harms to educational equity

Well over half of the District's at-risk elementary students are enrolled in the six schools considered for consolidation. Closure of any of these schools would place a disproportionate burden on at-risk students. There are three major categories of at-risk students: children from low-SES families, racial minorities, and English-language learners. Many at-risk children are in several of these categories.

- *The weight of educational research confirms the educational benefits of smaller elementary schools for at-risk students. See, e.g., Eberts, Schwartz, and Stone (1990); Kuziemko (2006); Lee and Loeb (2000). The teachers in our Working Group have attested to the value of smaller schools for making it possible for teachers to work together to address the educational needs of at-risk students. In light of this research, the Task Force Research Committee recommended schools of about 300 (that is, 2-section size) for at-risk students. We affirm this recommendation. Every consolidation scenario would increase school sizes far above these recommended levels. Retaining and upgrading existing schools would leave school size within the acceptable range for at-risk students.*

- *The weight of educational research confirms the educational benefits of smaller class sizes for at-risk students, and the teachers in the Working Group consistently emphasized the educational value of smaller class sizes for at-risk students. Here, we simply note and emphasize the previous section's analysis of the direct harm*

consolidation would pose to the educational opportunities of at-risk children by increasing their class sizes.

- *Many at-risk students often need to be able to walk to school because their parents are unable to drive them;* closing schools inevitably places the remaining schools at distances of up to 2 miles from students' residences, making it impossible for young children to walk to school.
- *School closure would disrupt the District's system for education of English-language learners.* English-language learners (ELL) are an academically at-risk population and every effort should be made to enhance their educational opportunities and academic progress. Nationwide, the achievement gap between English-language learners and native speakers is wider than any other achievement gap (Gersten, *et al.*, 2007). English-language learners in the Lawrence school system are making academic progress at significantly higher rates than their peers nationwide and elsewhere in the state of Kansas. This indicates that the Lawrence school system's basic approach to ESL education—the cluster site model in academically high-performing schools accompanied by neighborhood ESL sites where educationally appropriate—is working.

District staff have indicated that the current ESL system will be a part of elementary education for the foreseeable future. It is our understanding that the District's professional staff have carefully selected cluster sites for ESL education in light of these sites' academic performance, central location, and welcoming environment for English-language learners. District personnel have the knowledge, expertise, and experience to determine where and when a neighborhood site or an additional cluster site is educationally appropriate. We recommend that the ESL structure should not be radically modified simply to enable consolidation or closure. Changes to the system should be made carefully, thoughtfully, for educationally-appropriate reasons – to improve educational outcomes for students receiving ESL services. Several considerations support this recommendation:

- ✓ The current cluster model allows the District to pool ESL staff and material resources in two buildings plus a limited number of neighborhood sites, which promotes efficiency. As the RSP analysis and scenarios have illustrated, moving a cluster site requires significant disruption to the receiving school and significant boundary changes to avoid filling the receiving school beyond capacity. Finding the necessary space for a cluster site cannot be accomplished without disrupting educational programming and substantial disruptions for at-risk students, their families, and teachers.
- ✓ It is our understanding that the District professional staff may recommend the addition of one more neighborhood site for ESL instruction. If so, we recommend that staff consider New York school as a possible neighborhood site. It is our understanding that the New York staff are interested in exploring this possibility, the

New York community would welcome the addition of English language learners in their school, and a significant number of teachers in this school have ESL certification.

✓ It is our understanding that a sufficient number of ELL students is necessary to make a cluster site or neighborhood site work well educationally. We recommend that the District continue to plan ESL sites in light of the educationally-appropriate number and percentage of ELL students at particular sites.

D) Lawrence’s east and central schools are appropriate for their older neighborhoods; it is difficult to build consolidated schools in neighborhood-centric locations in our older neighborhoods

Retaining and upgrading the existing schools in the east and central neighborhoods is far preferable to consolidation scenarios that erode neighborhood quality and which place the consolidated schools at great distances from many of their students. The six elementary facilities identified for possible consolidation are key elements of their neighborhoods and the District’s elementary infrastructure for at-risk students.

The fourteen district elementary schools should be evaluated in light of the particular context of each, and not by a uniform metric. Each school is unique in its location, amenities, and the educational needs of the population it serves. In order to place each central and east Lawrence school on an equitable footing and in the most sustainable position for present and future student educational needs, we offer the following appraisal of each school’s existing qualities, and capital, programming, and student catchment needs.

- The existing schools are on smaller lots than west-side schools (typically 3-4 acres versus 12 acres); these smaller lots are appropriate for smaller schools but would be highly inequitable (in comparison to other 3-section schools) if enrollment at these smaller sites is expanded to 450.
- The east and central schools are organically connected to the life of their older neighborhoods, and these areas have already lost schools in previous rounds of closings. It is very difficult to find available space in the heart of these already-developed neighborhoods for larger schools on larger sites, and so most of the proposed consolidation scenarios place the remaining schools far away from the heart of their catchment areas and their neighborhoods.
- Enrollments are projected to grow in Lawrence’s older core neighborhoods and on the south-side neighborhoods of Lawrence (see the enrollment projections by RSP Associates). This is characterized as a “re-greening” of these neighborhoods.

- Lawrence’s core schools are ideally situated to flexibly manage future growth in light of the projected re-greening of Lawrence’s core neighborhoods. Eliminating any of the existing schools would accelerate the need for building a new school or schools in the near future.
- Removing schools in the older core of Lawrence would reduce the District’s flexibility in managing enrollment growth in the core and in the surrounding areas (see Attachment 2).

Cordley School: Historic Cordley School is a key component of Lawrence’s elementary school structure and a key amenity to the neighborhood it serves. Cordley is an ESL Cluster Site and serves as the District’s site for homeless family education. The catchment area of Cordley includes mixed SES family populations and the neighborhood is threatened by further encroachment of student housing. Loss of Cordley would be severely detrimental to the several distinct neighborhoods it serves. Cordley serves Oread neighborhood, the Barker neighborhood, the Centennial neighborhood, and the University Place neighborhoods. The Cordley catchment area has already been directly affected by the recent closure of Centennial School and closing Cordley would remove the last remaining elementary school from these neighborhoods. The location of Cordley School is important to provide capacity relief to the adjacent southern schools that are experiencing growth. Maintaining the Cordley facility and location helps keep the southern schools from swelling to an unmanageable size. Many Cordley families have close ties to KU and the Cordley location makes it an ideal, walkable, and sustainable site. The multi-story building allows it to occupy its site in a space-efficient manner. Good stewardship of USD 497 resources dictates that installation of an elevator, new boiler, and other deferred maintenance items should be undertaken in the immediate future. Cordley is currently at capacity, and the adjacent schools of New York, Kennedy, Schwegler, and Broken Arrow, lack capacity to take on their populations. Schwegler school does not have sufficient capacity to absorb even the Cordley ESL cluster enrollment.

Hillcrest School: Centrally-located Hillcrest School is the home to a model ESL program, which is a significant educational amenity for the City of Lawrence, the University of Kansas and the neighborhoods surrounding the school. At 5.5 acres, the Hillcrest site is large relative to other core schools and houses an exceptionally nice, fully ADA-accessible playground that is available for community use. The school contributes to the vitality of the neighborhoods which surround it, where younger families with children are steadily buying homes. Currently, more homes are becoming available, as older residents, some original owners, retire and sell their homes in a predictable cycle. RSP has projected that over the next five years, Hillcrest’s enrollment will continue to increase from both neighborhood enrollment and increasing ESL enrollment. Hillcrest is a classic, well-designed school type, located near to but not on major arterial streets, thus allowing for reasonable management of traffic and drop-off to maximize student safety. It is surrounded on three sides by streets that can accommodate traffic and parking. Hillcrest should receive modest building additions to remove existing portable

classrooms and attention to deferred maintenance needs. With building additions and minor changes to the catchment and ESL boundaries Hillcrest can continue to function as a unique, flexible, and sought-after facility.

Kennedy School: Kennedy has the second-largest of all of the central and east Lawrence sites at 6.76 acres and is a critical and irreplaceable component of the mixed and low SES neighborhood it serves. Kennedy currently houses the early childhood program. A significant proportion of the children in the early childhood program reside in the environs of the school and therefore Kennedy is an appropriate location for this program. For the immediate future the Kennedy school population should remain of a small size conducive to close interaction and personal relationships between students, faculty and administration in order to promote a healthy learning environment. A sense of community, stewardship, parent involvement, and teacher satisfaction at Kennedy should be enhanced by significant and unique building design and site improvements as well as completion of long overdue deferred maintenance. The early childhood population at Kennedy, which also enhances parent involvement and is a substantial community asset, should be included in the total number of children present at the school which should be kept to an equitable 450 children (approximately 300 K-5 & 150 Pre-K) . The unique placement of the early childhood program offers opportunities for growth beyond this number if that program grows, and the building and site offers opportunity for expanding the building to accommodate a greater population while still maintaining an advantageously lower population of grade-school children. Closure of this school would disrupt this important asset to the neighborhood, and require sending many of these children to Prairie park some distance away, and the other adjacent schools of Cordley and New York would require substantial capital investment to take on additional students. It is uncertain how the early childhood program could be accommodated if Kennedy is closed.

New York School: Historic New York School is centrally located in a dense and growing pocket of affordable housing and a large number of walkable amenities which provide enrichment for the families and population it serves. Equally importantly, New York School is successful at providing a high quality education to a population at considerable educational risk. The New York site is critical to ongoing urban renewal for the near-downtown neighborhoods, and, RSP enrollment projections indicate that this neighborhood is in the process of “re-greening.” Loss of this school would seriously undermine the downtown core neighborhoods and the urban renewal process. Urban renewal including single family housing and multi-family housing will continue to be an attractive pursuit for entities exploring revitalization and investment in this area so long as that school remains viable. Relocation of the east Lawrence children cannot be done easily without saturating capacity significantly at adjacent schools and beyond. New York is a recommended site for a neighborhood ESL program for children in the New York and Kennedy School environs, and opening a new neighborhood site at this location would relieve enrollment pressures at the ESL Cluster sites. The New York catchment area has already been directly affected by the recent closure of East Heights School. A modest expansion of New York is necessary to eliminate portables and to accommodate the projected growth of 60 children in the catchment within 5 years. USD 497 has recently invested capital funds in upgrades to this historically significant school including a new gymnasium, library and accessibility

improvements. With a neighborhood ESL program, in a 5 year time-frame the enrollment of New York is projected to be 280 children without significant boundary shifts. Capacity at New York should be increased to 320 to allow for flexibility in accommodating projected enrollment growth and the neighborhood ESL site. We recommend re-working of parking and the car and bus drop-off areas to accommodate this increase in enrollment.

Pinckney School: The historic Pinckney School is also a critical amenity to the neighborhood it serves. The catchment area of Pinckney includes mixed SES family populations and serves the entirety of the historic Old West Lawrence neighborhood, as well as the neighborhood north of 6th street from the river to the West turnpike exit area. Closing Pinckney School would harm these distinct neighborhoods, would require significant expansions at neighboring schools to accommodate enrollments received from the Pinckney School, and would require students to travel considerable distances to school. The location of Pinckney School is important to provide capacity relief to the north, where some Deerfield students are closer to Pinckney. Further development to the North could be accommodated by Pinckney if Deerfield reaches capacity. Many students live near the school in Pinckney's catchment, and its location makes it an ideal, walk-able, and sustainable site. The multi-story building occupies its site in a space-efficient manner, and it is benefitted by its abutment to city park space. Pinckney working group members report that "during the past 10 years the district has made a significant investment into Pinckney," specifically large, two-story addition provided two additional classrooms, reception area, administration offices, clinic, storage, janitorial space, ADA accessible restrooms on both floors, a new elevator, and roof replacement on the existing school and gymnasium. Improvements also included new mechanical and lighting systems throughout the building, and renovations that expanded the school library and added a computer lab. If enrollments grow significantly, this building could be expanded to accommodate an enrollment of 320.

Sunset Hill School: Sunset Hill School has 7.7 acres of land, with large playgrounds, and is located near a middle school, allowing for convenient use of those facilities and cooperation between the schools. Sunset Hill has one of only two "Growing Food, Growing Health" elementary school gardens. It has historically been used to address overcrowding and capacity considerations for adjacent schools of Quail Run and Deerfield, through boundary changes. It serves a neighborhood of single-family homes with relatively few university-student rentals. A loss of this building would therefore compromise its attractiveness to families, as closure would potentially send more families to Quail Run, Deerfield, and Hillcrest; two of these schools are not near to the student populations of that neighborhood. Quail Run will be at capacity if Sunflower boundaries are moved to accommodate their capacity overage, thus eliminating sufficient capacity at adjacent schools to accommodate Sunset Hills' population, requiring a significant boundary change and capital outlay to expand other buildings. This school could be modestly enhanced to remove portable classrooms and increase the capacity of the building to approximately 300-320. This slightly excess capacity to meet projected needs will ensure it remains a viable safety valve for potential increases in population to the south and west, as many Sunflower children will need to be moved to Quail Run to accommodate Sunflower's overcrowding.

Part VIII: Conclusion

A plan to upgrade existing schools and make capital improvements to all Lawrence elementary schools is right for the Lawrence community. The current fourteen elementary facilities, including the six central and eastern Lawrence elementary facilities, represent the most economical, flexible, and, sustainable model of elementary education in Lawrence for the present and the foreseeable future. Modest investments and adjustments are sufficient to maintain these facilities for the long term. Investing in all elementary facilities would promote educational equity, help the District to better address achievement gaps, and would enhance the quality of education for all Lawrence elementary students. Such a plan would also contribute to the stability of core neighborhoods and Lawrence's historic downtown, promote student health through walkability, enhance tax revenues through stable property values, and promote well-planned urban density. Maintenance and improvement of existing facilities is also a more cost-effective option than consolidation and new construction, and many in the Lawrence community support maintaining historic buildings rather than replacing them with new construction.

A bond to carry out these recommendations would draw the community together, not divide it. It would contribute to a positive community agenda in support of public education rather than a divisive agenda that fuels cynicism about public education. In a public vote on a bond, it would draw active grassroots support from committed, organized community members rather than risk the opposite. It is more likely to pass. It would strengthen our elementary schools. It is the right thing to do.

References

- Eberts, Randall W., Ellen Kehoe Schwartz, and Joe A. Stone. 1990. "School Reform, School Size, and Student Achievement," *Economic Review* 26(2): 2-15.
- Finn, Jeremy, Susan Gerber, Charles M. Achilles, and Jayne Boyd-Zaharias. 2001. "The Enduring Effects of Small Classes," *Teachers College Record* 103(2): 145-183.
- Finn, Jeremy D. 1998. "Class Size and Students At-Risk: What Is Known? What is Next?" Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.
- Gersten, Russell, Scott K. Baker, Timothy Shanahan, Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Penny Collins, and Robin Scarcella. 2007. *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades: A Practice Guide (NCEE 2007-4011)*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, p. 1. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee>.
- Krueger, Alan B. and Diane M. Whitmore. 2001. "Would Smaller Classes Help Close the Black-White Achievement Gap?" Princeton University Industrial Relations Section Working Paper #451.
- Kuziemko, Ilyana. 2006. "Using Shocks to School Enrollment to Estimate the Effect of School Size on Student Achievement," *Economics of Education Review* 25: 63-75.
- Lee, V. & Loeb, S. (2000). "School size in Chicago elementary schools: Effects on Teacher attitudes and Students Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 3-31.
- Leithwood, Kenneth, and Doris Jantzi. 2009. "A Review of Empirical Evidence about School Size Effects: A Policy Perspective." *Review of Educational Research* 79: 464-90.
- Wang, M. C., & Gordon, E. W. (Eds.). 1994. *Educational resilience in inner-city America: Challenges and prospects*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Attachment 1

How Consolidation Increases Class Sizes and Why it Matters

- “While all students did better in small classes, the gains... for minorities were approximately twice the gains of whites, reducing the achievement gap.” Finn and Krueger (Project STAR)
- “The weight of evidence... clearly favors smaller schools. Students who traditionally struggle at school and students from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds are the major benefactors of smaller schools. Elementary schools with large proportions of such students should be limited in size to not more than about 300 students....” Leithwood and Jantzi

Consolidation will significantly increase class sizes unless corrective steps are

taken. Here is why. If four 19-student classes from 2 schools are put together in one school, they total 76 students. If the District splits these 76 students when class sizes rise above the 26-student threshold, which is district policy for K-3 in some of these schools, there will now be 3 sections instead of the 4 previous sections. *The new sections have 25, 25 and 26 students, where before they had 19 each.* This happens in all consolidation scenarios: pulling students into a larger pool allows class sizes to rise even if split at the District's current caps on class size.

- **Consolidation will increase the *average* class size in every scenario (see Tables 1 & 2)**

- Kennedy's average class size jumps by 3 if merged with New York and 5 if merged with Cordley
- Pinckney's average class size jumps by 5 if merged with Hillcrest

- **Consolidation will increase the sizes of the *largest* classes in every scenario (Tables 1 & 2)**

- Kennedy's largest class jumps from 24 to 28 if merged with Cordley
- Pinckney's largest class jumps from 22 to 31 if merged with Hillcrest (both have a cap of 31 in grades 4-5)

What happens if we close a school and distribute its students among several schools (rather than merging two schools)?

- **The students have to go somewhere.** Wherever they go they will increase class sizes.
- **Closing Wakarusa Valley resulted in higher class sizes in the receiving schools** (Broken Arrow, Schwegler, and Sunflower). **See Table 3:**
 - Broken Arrow's average class jumped by 3 and its largest class went from 22 to 29
 - Sunflower's average class increased by 1 and its largest class went from 25 to 29

Are these increases a problem? Yes.

- Lawrence’s low-income, minority, and bilingual students are concentrated in the 6 targeted schools. 57% of the children in these schools receive free or reduced-price lunch, and this rises to 79% in Kennedy
- The leading *Project Star* study recommended *class sizes of 17 or below for at-risk elementary students*
 - consolidated schools would be 4.5 to 7.6 students above this recommended level
 - some consolidated classes would be 14 students above this recommended level
- The resulting class sizes are even *above* class sizes in the District’s 3-section schools (Deerfield, Langston Hughes, Quail Run, Schwegler, and Sunflower), schools with much lower percentages of at-risk students (see **Table 4**), *even if District policies on caps in class sizes are followed*

Table 1. Class sizes on the east side, before and after consolidation*

	Average class size	Largest class	Smallest class	Median	Mode	Percent at-risk	School size
Before consolidation							
Cordley	22.6	26	18	23	26	42.5%	294
Kennedy	18.6	24	16	17	18	79.0%	224
New York	18.1	24	14	18	19	73.0%	185
Pinckney	19.3	22	16	19	20	57.6%	229
Average	19.9	24	16	20	18	63.0%	233
After consolidation							
Cordley/Kennedy	23.5	28	20	23	24	58.3%	518
Cordley/New York	21.8	27	19	20	21	54.3%	479
Kennedy/New York	21.5	26	19	21	20	76.3%	409
Average	22.8	27	19.8	22	21	63.0%	455

*All data are from the official USD497 enrollment report (Sept. 20, 2011).

Table 2. Class sizes in the central area, before and after consolidation*

	Average class size	Largest class	Smallest class	Median	Mode	Percent at-risk	School size
Before consolidation							
Pinckney	19.3	22	16	19	20	57.6%	229
Hillcrest	23.7	31	18	24	21	57.9%	356
Sunset Hill	21.7	25	16	21	25	43.4%	258
Average	21.7	28	17	21	20, 21, 25	53.0%	307
After consolidation							
Hillcrest/Sunset Hill	24.6	27	24	26	27	51.8%	614
Hillcrest/Pinckney	24.3	31	22	24	24	57.6%	585
Average	24.4	29	23	24	24	54.7%	600

Table 3. What if students are distributed among several schools? Class sizes before and after closing Wakarusa Valley**

	Average class size	Largest class	Smallest class	Median class size	Mode
Before closure					
Broken Arrow	19.1	22	15	18.5	18, 22
Schwegler	24.3	28	21	24	24
Sunflower	22.7	25	16	24	24
After closure					
Broken Arrow	22.4	29	15	22	16, 21, 22, 29
Schwegler	20.5	25	18	20	20
Sunflower	23.5	29	16	26	21, 26, 29

**This table Focuses on grades 1-5 because full-day kindergarten was added to Broken Arrow and Sunflower in 2011, which affects the averages. Focusing on grades 1-5 holds constant everything but the increase in students from Wakarusa Valley.

Table 4. Comparing class sizes in consolidated schools and other Lawrence schools*

	Average class size	Largest class	Smallest class	Median	Mode	Percent at-risk	School size
Central consolidation	24.4	31	22	24	24	54.7%	600
East-side consolidation	22.8	28	19	22	20	63%	455
3-section schools	22.5	29	15	22	20	28.3%	447
Example: Quail Run	21.9	26	18	21	21	15.3%	417
District as whole	21.5	31	14	21	20	41.9%	355

*All data are from the official USD497 enrollment report (Sept. 20, 2011).

Data for above tables

Official USD497 enrollment thresholds above which classes are divided into two

	K-3	4-5
Cordley	27	32
Kennedy	25	30
New York	26	31
Hillcrest	26	31
Pinckney	26	31
Sunset Hill	27	32

Current number of students and sections, by school and grade (in parentheses: number of sections)

Grade	Cordley	Kennedy	NY	Hillcrest	Pinckney	SH
KG	44 (2)	51 (2)	36 (2)	59 (3)	39 (2)	38 (2)
1	50 (2)	32 (2)	29 (2)	71 (3)	42 (2)	33 (2)
2	48 (2)	45 (2)	32 (2)	58 (3)	39 (2)	43 (2)
3	57 (3)	34 (2)	25 (1)	49 (2)	41 (2)	48 (2)
4	52 (2)	21 (1)	24 (1)	57 (2)	38 (2)	50 (2)
5	43 (2)	40 (2)	37 (2)	62 (2)	32 (2)	46 (2)

Projected number of students & sections in consolidated schools

Projections are based on summing current enrollments (in parentheses: number of sections)

	Cordley/ Kennedy	Kennedy/ NY	Cordley/ NY	Hillcrest/ Sunset Hill	Hillcrest/ Pinckney	New York/ Pinckney
enrollment	518	409	479	614	587	414
% at-risk	58.3%	76.3%	54.3%	51.8%	57.6%	64.5%
Grade						
KG	95 (4-5)	87 (4)	80 (4)	97 (5)	98 (4-5)	75 (3-4)
1	82 (4)	61 (3)	79 (4)	104 (4-5)	113 (5)	71 (3)
2	93 (4)	77 (4)	80 (4)	101 (4)	97 (4-5)	71 (3)
3	91 (4)	59 (3)	82 (4)	97 (4)	88 (4)	64 (3)
4	73 (3)	45 (2)	76 (3)	107 (4)	94 (4)	61 (2-3)
5	83 (3)	77 (3)	80 (3)	108 (4)	93 (3-4)	69 (3)

Attachment 2

The need for “relief valves” in school capacity in the South and Central areas of Lawrence

Enrollment is straining the functional capacity of elementary schools in the South and Central-West areas of Lawrence. The Physical Conditions Committee of the Task Force recommended using 90% utilization of available capacity as the measure of when an elementary school is functionally “full.” When elementary school enrollment is above 90% capacity, flexibility becomes increasingly limited. For example, above this level it may be necessary to add one or more sections for some grade levels, but there may be no available rooms for the extra sections, requiring the addition of portable classrooms. Sunflower Elementary, which is at 103% of its capacity, requires the use of a portable classroom.

The 90% capacity standard has implications for consolidation in South Lawrence and Central/West Lawrence, as we describe below.

The South Area

Schools in the near-south area Lawrence (Broken Arrow, Cordley, and Schwegler) are currently at 89.2% of capacity. By year 2016, enrollment in these three schools is projected to grow by 89 students, reaching 97.3% of their total capacity. The schools in the broader south area of Lawrence as a whole (the above schools plus Sunflower and Prairie Park) are at 87.1% of capacity. By 2016, enrollment in these five schools is projected to grow by 162 students, to 94.9% of their capacity.

If Cordley is closed and other capacity is not added in the area to compensate for this loss of capacity, the remaining schools will immediately be above 90% of capacity, as shown in the tables below. If we look at the near-South schools, closing Cordley would add enrollments to neighboring schools (probably Schwegler), which would fill the remaining schools to their functional capacity. Any natural growth in enrollments would exceed these schools’ capacity. Even if we include all South-area schools (including Prairie Park and Sunflower), closing Cordley would push the overall area far above 90% of capacity.

If Sunflower’s overcrowding is alleviated by shifting some of its students into other West-area schools (Langston Hughes and Quail Run), the first table below shows that enrollment in the near-South schools will still be pushing up against these schools’ functional capacity.

--Tables of enrollment and projections follow on next page--

Near-South Schools: enrollment and capacity

	Enrollment	Capacity	% of Capacity
Broken Arrow	305	312	97.8%
Cordley	294	308	95.5%
Schwegler	382	480	79.6%
Total (current)	981	1100	89.2%
Total (projected 2016)	1070	1100	97.3%
Total if Cordley closed and 100 of its students moved to Schwegler	787	792	99.4%
Total if Cordley closed and 100 of its students moved to Schwegler and South schools grow as projected	876	792	110.6%

All South Schools: enrollment and capacity

	Enrollment	Capacity	% of Capacity
Broken Arrow	305	312	97.8%
Cordley	294	308	95.5%
Prairie Park	344	504	68.3%
Schwegler	382	480	79.6%
Sunflower	485	475	102.1%
Total (current)	1810	2079	87.1%
Total (projected 2016)	1972	2079	94.9%
Total if Cordley closed and 100 of its students moved to Schwegler	1616	1771	91.2%
Total if Cordley closed and 100 of its students moved to Schwegler and South schools grow as projected	1778	1771	100.4%

--continued on next page--

The Central and West Area

West Lawrence schools are at their functional capacity, as illustrated by the table below. Given the crowding in the South area schools, the appropriate solution to the overcrowding and projected growth at Sunflower is to shift some enrollments from Sunflower into other West side schools.

If a Central area school is closed and some enrollments are shifted from Central area schools into West Lawrence schools, two undesirable consequences are immediately likely. First, these receiving schools will be above 90% capacity and portables may be needed to address overcrowding. Second, if, contrary to projections, there is any enrollment growth in the West area, this growth may immediately require construction of a new elementary school. In effect, the District would have traded school capacity in the Central, or core area, of Lawrence for capacity on the periphery. This would contribute to erosion of the urban core, and is contrary to good planning principles.

For these reasons, we recommend making no enrollment shifts from Central area schools to West area schools.

West area schools: enrollment and capacity

	Enrollment	Capacity	% of Capacity
Deerfield	471	544	87%
Langston Hughes	463	512	90%
Quail Run	417	525	79%
Sunflower	491	475	103%
Total (current)	1842	2056	89.6%
Total (projected)	1840	2056	89.5%
Total if 100 students added from Central area	1942	2056	94.5%
Total if 200 students added from Central area	2042	2056	99.3%