

To Our Brandon Community:

Overcrowding at Brandon is currently the primary focus of the School Council

Brandon is already over “planning capacity” and, absent another solution, we will probably require portable classrooms in the 2012-2013 school year. The Brandon community is competing with a number of high-profile issues facing APS:

- Accreditation probation and related APS board/governance issues
- Search for a replacement for Dr. Beverly Hall
- CRCT cheating investigation
- Site selection for the new northern cluster high school
- Configuration of middle school facilities (e.g., a sixth grade “academy” vs. two small middle schools)

Notwithstanding these issues, your School Council has and will continue to work diligently to keep Brandon’s overcapacity concerns in front of APS. Since the Spring of 2010, we have actively and continuously communicated our concerns to APS and have engaged them in discussing possible resolutions. Thus far, APS staff and board members have been engaged and supportive. We have emphasized to the APS staff and board that the overcrowding issues at Brandon need to be addressed in the overall plan and structure of the middle schools and the new high school, and again APS seems to be on board with that assertion.

Our first step was to scrutinize the Brandon enrollment numbers forecast by APS. Although the outside demographers hired by APS projected a growing Brandon enrollment, we were concerned that their numbers were too low. The Council challenged the demographers’ enrollment projections and formally expressed our concern that the numbers were materially understated. APS heard our concerns and after additional due diligence, APS concurs with our general assessment of the Brandon enrollment projections and agrees that Brandon will continue to be over capacity. APS now acknowledges that the growing enrollment poses a problem that must be addressed. Our next step is to engage APS in a detailed review of potential short-term and long-term solutions to this problem. APS has indicated that “all options are on the table.”

Potential Short-term Solutions to Overcrowding

The 2011-2012 school year will be tight, but if we do not exceed our forecasted projections we will be able to accommodate the students by transitioning all of the Main Campus specials teachers to carts from their current dedicated classrooms. Karen and her team used that approach effectively prior to construction of the Primary Center and, while it is a hardship for the teachers, students generally do not notice any difference. For the 2012-2013 school year and until such time that new facilities are available, potential solutions that have been suggested to us by APS and others include:

- Add portable classrooms to accommodate increasing enrollment.
- Redistrict within the northern cluster of elementary schools so that enrollment is more balanced among schools in the cluster. This would alleviate overcrowding at some schools and make use of the capacity available at others.

Potential Long-term Solutions to Overcrowding:

Most of the long-term solutions involve construction at existing facilities. Access to project funding will be a key driver of timing. Potential solutions that have been suggested to us by APS and others include:

- Undertake a 10-classroom addition at the Primary Center Campus and move Second Grade from the Main Campus to the Primary Center.
- Undertake a 10-classroom addition to the Primary Center campus and convert that facility into a new K-5 school. Two K-5 schools would emerge from the current Brandon district. While not yet (to our knowledge) addressed by APS, this option would likely require an addition to the gymnasium at the Primary Center campus (the feasibility of such an addition, to our knowledge, has not been studied).
- If capacity is increased at other schools within the northern cluster, reduce the size of the Brandon district by redistricting to those schools.
- If the middle school configuration involves a Sixth Grade Academy rather than two separate middle schools, make that facility a Fifth/Sixth Grade Academy (there are numerous curriculum issues associated with this option).
- If capacity is not increased at the Primary Center or at other schools within the northern cluster, reduce the size of the Brandon district and send students outside of the existing northern cluster.

APS has suggested that it may propose solutions to the Atlanta Board of Education on or before March 31, 2011. Following the initial proposal to APS, there will be a 30 day period before the Board takes action on the proposed solutions. While there are plans to hold a forum for public feedback during that 30 day period, APS would like to receive feedback and ideas from our community in advance of making their proposal to the Board.

Brandon Community Action

During the first half of February, you will receive a survey via email that solicits your preliminary views on the potential short and long-term solutions to our overcrowding issues. The survey will also request your ideas for additional potential solutions. Please invest the time to give thoughtful consideration to the survey and respond in a timely manner.

As discussed before, our goal as a School Council on this matter is to help ensure that Morris Brandon continues to have facilities that provide a high quality learning environment.

In the coming weeks, the Task Force for Overcrowding Solutions (established by the School Council and formerly known as the Task Force for Capacity Expansion) will focus on:

1. Meeting with the APS facilities team to understand the options for an addition to the Primary Center. As some of you may recall, an addition to the Primary Center was contemplated in the original design.

2. Meeting with the APS finance team to understand potential sources of funding related to the expansion options. This may prove to be the biggest challenge during an era of tightening school budgets and lower tax receipts.
3. Pressing APS to issue a written timeline for key decision-making, community input, etc.
4. Advocating for a long-term solution to the overcrowding with various school board members, APS administration, and state legislators.
5. Meeting with APS in advance of their recommendations to the Board to communicate the feedback and ideas gathered from the Brandon community.

We will keep the community apprised of all material developments. We welcome your input, so in addition to responding to the upcoming survey, feel free to email us at brandonschoolcouncil@gmail.com.

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