

KEENE SCHOOL DISTRICT
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL RENOVATION PLAN

Background:

Following several years of study and discussions, the Keene Board of Education decided in 2013 to reduce the number of elementary schools in the district from five to four. Marinace Architects were engaged to evaluate the existing school buildings and to design a plan for renovations. The evaluation identified requirements for meeting state life safety codes and for improvements to obsolete HVAC systems, among other issues. A plan was developed to close one school and to renovate the remaining four schools while reducing the number of operational elementary classrooms from 72 to 66. The plan also included repurposing the Jonathan Daniels building to house our pre-school and Community Education. In March 2014 the board proposed a warrant article for a bond of \$12.8 million to complete the renovations. The voters of the district voted 1299 in favor and 975 opposed to the bond. Although the majority of voters were in favor, bonds require a super-majority vote of 60% to pass (1365 votes), so the bond failed by 66 votes, or about 3%.

Following the vote, the board reconsidered options to accomplish the necessary renovation work. Elementary enrollments were re-examined, including an enrollment projection by the New England School Development Council (NESDEC). The board determined that 60 classrooms were sufficient to meet current and future needs. That corresponded with the number of available classrooms in the four remaining schools, once the pre-school was moved to a new location. There was no need to construct additional classrooms, as had been included in the previous plan. A chart of elementary enrollment (K-5) over the past few years is shown below.

Year	Kindergarten Enrollment	K-5 Enrollment	Number of Classrooms	Average Class Size
2008-2009	227	1187	72	16.5
2009-2010	198	1170	72	16.3
2010-2011	187	1189	72	16.5
2011-2012	204	1172	72	16.3
2012-2013	214	1201	72	16.7
2013-2014	233	1243	72	17.3
2014-2015	211	1231	72	17.1
2015-2016	182	1170	66	17.7
2016-2017	173	1143	60	19.1

Notes:

1. The state average class size for the last ten years has been in the 19-20 range
2. The 2015 NESDEC projections for K-5 enrollment was 1228 in 2015-2016 dropping steadily to 1123 by 2024-2025 so we are already lower than expected.

3. Kindergarten numbers, the best indicator of the future, have also been significantly lower than projected by NESDEC for the last two years.

The SAU 29 administration estimated that staffing costs would be reduced by approximately \$1.7 million per year from the closure of the Jonathan Daniels Elementary School. The board determined that those funds could be used to complete the renovation work over a period of several years without borrowing money and paying the resulting interest. The “pay as you go approach” seemed to be a better choice for the taxpayers than a bond. The board also considered options for the location of the pre-school and for the disposition of the Jonathan Daniels building. After several months of discussion, the board decided to move the pre-school and Community Education into the Jonathan Daniels building as previously planned. The board also decided to phase the closure of the Jonathan Daniels Elementary School over two years rather than one.

The board developed a renovation plan to address life-safety issues, primarily fire suppression systems (sprinklers), fire alarms, and egress, as well as HVAC improvements, primarily new boilers, conversion from steam to hot water heat, and increased ventilation. It was hoped that energy efficiency improvements would cover much of the construction cost, but that proved to be unlikely because so much needed to be done. Based on cost and available funds, the board expected that two years would be needed to complete the work in each building. The plan sequenced the work based on “worst first.” In other words, the worst existing life-safety and HVAC situations would be done first and then the worst remaining situations would be addressed in subsequent years. Budgets have been developed according to this plan for the last three years and are expected to continue this work for the next several years.

Work completed to date:

The renovation work began in the summer of 2015 with life safety improvements at Jonathan Daniels and a new HVAC system at Fuller. Classrooms were renovated for the pre-school at Jonathan Daniels. The pre-school relocated to their new space for the 2015-2016 school year, while approximately half of the Jonathan Daniels population moved to other schools. This mainly consisted of shifting Surry students to Wheelock.

Symonds School was next in line for both life-safety and HVAC needs. Also, after seeing the great improvements to the pre-school classrooms, the board decided to include classroom upgrades (flooring, lighting, cabinetry, paint etc.) as part of the project. Approximately half of the Symonds building was renovated in the summer of 2016 with the remaining portion being done in the summer of 2017. The need for a third phase at Symonds to improve the offices and main entrance areas has been identified and included in the plan, to be done after life-safety and HVAC improvements have been completed at the remaining schools. The remaining elementary population from Jonathan Daniels began attending other schools in the 2016-2017 school year with most of them going to Fuller and Symonds. Renovations were also completed in 2016 at Jonathan Daniels for Community Education, which moved from rented space on West Street to their new location in September 2016.

The board feels that the renovation plan has been a great success to date. As expected, elementary class sizes have increased on average, but have remained within acceptable maximum levels. The improvements to the renovated buildings have been significant. The SAU 29 administration has done a great job in managing the work to get the greatest value for our money. We have been able to do more than we expected. We feel that the failed bond vote in 2014 has actually led us to a better plan that makes more effective use of resources, while maintaining the high quality of education for which the Keene School District is known. In the 2017-2018 budget we were able to reduce the lines for heating fuel and electricity due to efficiency improvements and we saved the money previously spent to rent space for Community Education. We have also received more than \$100,000 in rebates from Eversource for various energy efficiency aspects of the renovations. The current board is fully committed to seeing the renovation project through to completion.

Remaining work:

At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, we are not quite half-way through the renovation project. Franklin and Wheelock need all the work and Fuller still needs the life-safety and classroom upgrades. Additionally, the third phase at Symonds remains to be done. Franklin is next in line. Wheelock was in the best overall condition when we started, so it will be the last to be renovated. The anticipated timeline for the remaining work over the next five or six summers is as follows:

2018 – Franklin Phase 1

2019 – Franklin Phase 2

2020 – Fuller Phase 2

2021 – Wheelock Phase 1

2022 – Wheelock Phase 2 (if needed)

2023 – Symonds Phase 3

Long-term expectations:

When the board initially developed this plan, we anticipated that these renovations would allow our existing buildings to remain in service for another 25 to 30 years. We expected after that amount of time we would need to replace all four buildings, probably with two new schools, one on the east side of the city and one on the Jonathan Daniels property. As the architects began the review of Franklin School, we asked them to look at space utilization within the building to see if a more sensible layout of activities could be established. They produced two alternatives, one with some minor improvements and one that would solve many issues, but would require a substantial expansion of the building. When

these alternatives were presented to the board's facilities committee, the committee members were unanimously opposed to spending the amount of money necessary for the second option on the existing building and the existing site. The committee feels that a new building will ultimately be a much better solution than trying to make the existing situation perfect. The committee is therefore recommending that the district begin planning for a new east side school within the next 10 to 12 years, rather than 25, and begin the necessary actions to make that happen. Every indicator that we have now suggests that elementary enrollment will continue to decline, but that could change and our plan will need to change accordingly. Subject to enrollment and demographics at the time of construction and our ability to find a suitable location, we expect that one new school will replace both Franklin and Wheelock with a total enrollment of 400 to 500 students in grades K-5. We anticipate the savings in operating costs as we transition from two old buildings to one new building will go a long way toward payment of the cost to build the new school. In the meantime, the currently planned life-safety and HVAC improvements at Franklin will be completed in the next two years.

Our long range plan continues to anticipate construction of a second new school to replace Symonds and Fuller around the year 2045. While we expect that will be built on the current location of Jonathan Daniels, the number of schools, size and final location(s) will depend on what happens to the population of Keene between now and then.