



# NORTH CALDWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## **Why is the Board of Education considering a possible expansion to the schools?**

The Board has been evaluating the potential need for school expansion for several years. This is being driven by the following factors:

- *Current Space*: Currently, spaces that are not designed for instructional space (i.e., closets) are being utilized for instructional space because the District is above capacity. These temporary spaces are not desirable for the long-term. There is still a significant need for small group instruction space at both schools.
- *Safety and Security*: The renovation and expansion will allow the District to address safety needs that have been identified through a formal security audit. This includes physically connecting the Gould buildings, adding “man-trap” doorways, and sectioning off the gymnasiums when used after hours.
- *Facility Improvement*: The District has assessed its long-term facility needs for the next 10-20 years and ranked its priorities. Roof and boiler replacements are necessary in both schools, and temporary air conditioning solutions need to be more formally addressed.
- *Population Growth*: School expansion would address anticipated population growth in the Borough over the next five years. This population growth is specifically driven by new construction, including state requirements to significantly increase affordable housing thresholds for the Borough.

## **Why is small class size important?**

For decades, all of the feedback the Board has received indicates that small class size is the top priority for the North Caldwell community. Small class sizes allow for more effective instruction, particularly in the lower grades. Thus, the District targets a class size of approximately 18 students per class. Class sizes can currently reach 20 or 21 students. Without capital expansion, potential population increases could significantly impact class sizes.

### **How do we know that there will be population growth?**

The District retained an expert demographer to study population growth in North Caldwell. By the 2021-22 school year, it is anticipated that there will be 50 additional students in Grandview and 47 additional students in Gould. This is the result of increased home sales, new housing developments, and Borough requirements to implement affordable housing.

### **What new housing was taken into account in the demographic study?**

There are 50 affordable housing units (10 one-bedroom, 28 two-bedroom and 12 three-bedroom) and 62 single-family homes that have been approved for construction on the Hilltop over the next two years. In addition, there are 10 single-family homes under construction on Mountain Avenue and Grandview Avenue. These were all included in the demographic study. Other development could also occur over the next several years. This includes the anticipated five single-family homes expected at Walker's Pond, an additional home being built on Mountain Avenue, as well as some other proposed projects.

### **Is Greenbrook Country Club going to be developed?**

As we understand it, there are negotiations to sell Greenbrook Country Club. However, we have heard that, at least for the next eight years, the intention is to continue its operation as a country club. After that period, the property could theoretically be used for other purposes, including housing development. To our knowledge, no deal has been finalized, so it is possible that the terms will differ.

### **If you didn't take into account some housing and you don't know what will happen with Greenbrook, how can you make expansion decisions now?**

As unsettling as it is, at any time there will always be uncertainties regarding future development and how that development will be populated. For that reason, the expansion plan is using conservative numbers provided by the demographic study. Moreover, the Board has instructed the architects to provide designs that would allow for future expansion if it becomes necessary.

### **Has the Board been in communication with the Borough?**

Yes. The Board has had conversations with the Borough Council, the Mayor's office, the Police Department, and the Fire Department to ensure that we have the benefit of each other's information. For example, the Board and Administration recently met with the Borough to discuss the status of anticipated housing development in the Borough. Quarterly meetings of these groups are planned.

### **Will the public get to vote on the expansion?**

Yes. Once an expansion plan is determined, it will be submitted for state approval. Once the state approves the proposed plan, it will be put up for a decision by the voters – a referendum. Under a referendum, the voters give final approval to raise funds through a sale of bonds to finance the construction and renovation.

### **Will voters know the final cost of the plan before they have to vote on the expansion?**

Yes. Voters will be presented with a final plan and precise cost, along with the precise amount that the state will pay toward the project. By law, spending on the project cannot exceed the amount approved by the voters.

### **When will the referendum take place?**

By law, a referendum can only be held in January, March, September, November, or December. We are targeting a referendum on March 13, 2018. This timing is subject to change as we evaluate the options and gather community input.

### **What are the options under consideration?**

There are three principal options under evaluation.

- OPTION 1: Expansion of both schools, with a new gym added to Gould School.
- OPTION 2: Expansion of both schools, with new gyms in both Grandview and Gould schools.
- OPTION 3: Expansion of only Gould School, including a new gym (although there would still be some facility improvements, such as a new roof and boiler at Grandview School). Under this third option, third graders would be moved from Grandview School to Gould School (which the administration believes would have academic advantages as well).

In each case, there is an option under consideration for central air conditioning in both schools.

### **What are the estimated costs of the options, and what is the estimated tax impact?**

	With air conditioning		Without air conditioning	
	Total cost	Tax impact for average home	Total cost	Tax impact for average home
<b>Expand both schools (new gym Gould only)</b>	\$31.7 million	\$981/year	\$25.8 million	\$797/year
<b>Expand both</b>	\$34.4 million	\$1,066/year	\$29.4 million	\$914/year

<b>schools (new gym in both)</b>				
<b>Expand Gould only and move 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students to Gould</b>	\$26.8 million	\$880/year	\$20.9 million	\$697/year

*Average home assessment: \$678,814*

Currently proposed plans can be reviewed [here](#).

**What does this estimate take into account and exclude?**

The estimate takes into account the entire cost of the proposed expansion, including the design, approval, and building process. It also contains an assumption for inflation expected to occur between now and the actual time that we break ground for construction.

The estimate does not take into account state aid known as debt service aid. Typically, the state will pay a percentage of the cost of renovation and a different percentage of the cost of expansion. This will reduce the tax impact, but this aid is not currently factored into our estimates because the amounts of aid are not yet known. We expect that debt service aid will be in the neighborhood of 11-18%.

The estimate does not take into account the additional required operational and staff costs associated with the expansion. There will be additional costs, but we cannot estimate them until we settle on a design. If, as we anticipate, these costs cannot be covered by the existing budget, the referendum will include a second request for voter approval of the additional cost. This cost information will be available before any public vote on the project.

**Doesn't the District have outstanding debt?**

Yes, the District has outstanding debt from the school expansion done in 2004. That debt will mature in 2023, and the additional taxes being paid for that debt service will cease.

**Is a gym in Grandview really necessary?**

In all expansion plans, a new gym would be built at Gould School. We want to hear from the community about a new gym at Grandview School. While a gym would certainly have advantages, particularly from a security perspective, the Board is interested in whether the community views this as a priority.

### **Is air conditioning necessary?**

We are soliciting input from the community as to whether air conditioning should be included in our expansion plans. There are a number of important reasons that air conditioning is under consideration, apart from mere comfort. Air conditioning has become necessary in a number of classrooms due to legal requirements for certain special needs and medically fragile students. Additionally, the current air conditioning units are stop-gap measures and not a long-term solution. Moreover, a number of students have serious issues with seasonal allergies that interfere with their ability to learn. If the District is going to consider central air conditioning, ideally, we would do it now, when we are already doing other capital improvements and can receive debt service aid from the state. The additional cost to add air conditioning now is estimated to be \$5-6 million. It will be more costly to do it as a standalone project.

### **Can the Board/Administrative offices be moved to make classrooms?**

No. These offices are not the appropriate size for classrooms. In addition, they are not handicapped accessible.

### **What happens if the referendum fails?**

If the referendum fails, we will be required to make do with our current space allocations. That means significantly larger class sizes, small instruction being done in suboptimal locations, and a delay in, or inability to do, necessary capital improvements. At a minimum, class size targets will increase to a projected 21 (meaning that classes may end up with 24 or 25 students). If space needs to be used for things like small instruction or population growth is higher than expected, class sizes can be expected to increase further. Programs such as art and music will need to be held in the classroom or cafeteria (art on a cart). Media Centers (i.e., technology and library) will need to be recaptured for classroom space.

### **Is the District looking for input from the community?**

The Board views community engagement as an important part of the process because it provides the Board with a better understanding of community needs, concerns, and priorities – a critical data point. Communication and transparency also helps build consensus around the decisions ultimately made, which is important when we are talking about decisions of this magnitude that will affect the District for years to come.

The Board has taken numerous steps to inform the community of our actions. This includes the following:

- Notice of all public forums and NCBOE meetings have been posted on the front page of the NCBOE website

- Information has been provided to all local media outlets (print and online) on public forums and NCBOE meetings
- Bi-weekly e-mail blasts to parents, the Borough Council, and media sources have advised of public forums and Board of Education meetings since September 2016
- Direct communication with *The Progress* to provide information about the expansion discussions
- Direct communication with the Borough Council to ensure they are aware of public forums and meetings
- Request that the Borough include notice of community open forums through the community billboard and Nixle alerts

### **How can I stay informed and provide input into the process?**

There are a number of avenues to stay informed and provide your input.

- *Regular Board Meetings:* We expect to discuss expansion at every meeting. Every regular Board meeting has reserved time for public input where members of the community can address the Board on any relevant issue.
- *Open Forums:* The Board held a Community Open Forum on April 4. Another Forum is planned for May 31 at 7:00 pm. At the May 31 Forum, the Board will update the community on the status of the expansion options and solicit feedback on these options.
- *NCBOE Blasts:* At least every two weeks, the Board publishes a blast that includes information about the District, including the status of our discussions regarding expansion. This blast is distributed to all parents/teachers in the District and all local media outlets.
- *NCBOE Website:* Significant presentation materials are posted on [www.ncboe.org](http://www.ncboe.org) shortly after our Board meetings. You can currently find our demographic study and presentation materials from our April 4 and April 26 meetings on the site.