**Westminster Budget Committee informational sheet***prepared by Dan Axtell, Oct. 14, 2014
(Numbers have been double checked but the School Board has not officially endorsed this document.)*

This sheet summarizes the information gathered by the Budget Subcommittee for presentation to the full Westminster School Board.

Westminster Future Kindergartners (living in town today)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Entering year | Total | With West Address |
| 2015 | 30 | 6 |
| 2016 | 35 | 8 |
| 2017 | 24 | 3 |

Enrollment forecast for Westminster Schools 2015-2017

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | 2014-15 (current) | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 |
| Grade | Center | West | *TOTAL* | Center | West | *TOTAL* | Center | West | *TOTAL* | Center | West | *TOTAL* |
| K | 16 | 0 | *16* | 24 | 6 | *30* | 27 | 8 | *35* | 21 | 3 | *24* |
| First | 14 | 13 | *27* | 15 | 2 | *17* | 24 | 6 | *30* | 27 | 8 | *35* |
| Second | 28 | 8 | *36* | 14 | 13 | *27* | 15 | 2 | *17* | 24 | 6 | *30* |
| Third | 27 | 4 | *31* | 28 | 8 | *36* | 14 | 13 | *27* | 15 | 2 | *17* |
| Fourth | 13 |   | *13* | 31 |   | *31* | 28 |   | *28* | 14 |   | *14* |
| Fifth | 22 |   | *22* | 13 |   | *13* | 31 |   | *31* | 28 |   | *28* |
| Sixth | 26 |   | *26* | 22 |   | *22* | 13 |   | *13* | 31 |   | *31* |
| TOTAL | 146 | 25 | *171* | 147 | 29 | *176* | 152 | 29 | *181* | 160 | 19 | *179* |

Problems with the expected class configurations at the Westminster West School:

* The age splits make it difficult to have workable and equitable class sizes for the next two years;
* The forecasted population in 2017 is too small for any classroom configuration;
* Our educational leaders—principal and superintendent—are flexible, but do not recommend continuation of the current structures for a school system with the forecasted enrollments;
* Splitting our student population into two schools requires one additional teacher during the next 3 years.

These considerations suggest that our town could better serve all students by consolidating into one resource-rich building. The consideration of equitable class sizes is of particular importance to any public school district. The loss of a popular program is a loss to the whole community, but the committee believes that the educationally responsible route is to end the program rather than have the program struggle for years and serve no one very well.

Some problems that would come from closing the Westminster West School:

* Some families may choose alternatives to public school. It’s possible that a new private school could be formed as happened in the 1970s. The loss of students would eliminate any near-term savings on the tax rate.
* Residents on the north part of the Westminster West Road will be 10 miles from their local school—and only 3 miles from the Saxtons River School. There may be a sense that the Board is unfairly ignoring that population. We also recognize that some of these families already choose the Center School for their children.
* Some West School families value environmental education through a non-school program. There is no equivalent program currently at the Center School.

For these reasons, the Board needs to be responsive to the desires of the affected families and address their expectations within the public school system. The Westminster Center School has become a relatively small school and is in a good position to welcome families who value small schools. Even with the transitioning of the children who currently attend the West School, class size remains small (16 to 1 ratio average) for the foreseeable future.

Some advantages to the students travelling the extra 7 miles to the Center School:

* No transition in the first seven years of public school;
* Dedicated space for arts, music, guidance, library, P.E., and nurse. Along with these better resources comes more opportunity for one-on-one time with the teacher specialist;
* More resources for students with special education needs;
* Broader social interaction;
* Better technology and distance learning resources;
* Having all students together would make it practical to run a real foreign language program. With Vermont’s new proficiency-based graduation requirements, students may be able to start high school with one credit after studying a language in K through eighth grade;
* We may be able to build an environmental program that provides the science experiences the current families value.
* Expansion of the theater arts program is another possibility.

These are some of the considerations that went into the Westminster Budget Subcommittee’s recommendation to not operate the Westminster West School starting in fall 2015.

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