

Bolinas-Stinson Union School District History of the Campus Consolidation Issue Since 2004

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explain the history of the campus consolidation and reconfiguration discussions and decisions that have taken place over the past four years. If, after reading this paper you have lingering questions or concerns about these issues, please do not hesitate to contact your board members. Public board meetings are held at least once each month during the school year, typically on the second Tuesday at 4:00 pm. The board meeting schedule and agendas can be found on the school's website, <http://bolinas-stinson.org>, or by calling the school office. Meeting agendas are also posted in the Post Offices in both communities and the school campuses. Approved minutes of the meetings are printed in the Hearsay News.

March 2004 – February 2005

Declining enrollment and the 'Working Group'

In response to rapidly declining enrollment, the Board of Trustees chartered a 'Declining Enrollment Ad Hoc Working Group' (the "Working Group," as it came to be known) in March 2004. The Working Group's charge was to "deliver a series of recommendations to the district Board describing a restructured 'Learning Community' ... designed to serve a student population of 100 students and the community-at-large." At the time the Working Group was formed, student enrollment had dropped from 215 to 122 in a six-year period from 1998 to 2004. Given the size of graduating classes and the number of students enrolled in preschool, it was obvious the trend of declining enrollment would continue for at least a few more years. The Board looked at this rapid decline in enrollment and decided it could best be managed by proactively restructuring the school and its resources for a smaller student body rather simply allowing the existing school structure, which was designed to support over 200 students, to atrophy and decay over time.

The Working Group, which consisted of board members, teachers, classified employees, parents (from both Stinson and Bolinas), the Superintendent/Principal and an outside school consultant who had experience restructuring small school districts, met regularly over the course of eleven months and produced a series of recommendations. These recommendations were presented to community and board at a special meeting on February 1, 2005, then reviewed in detail over the next month by the Board of Trustees and adopted at their March 10, 2005 meeting, following considerable public discussion.

One of the many Working Group recommendations adopted by the Board was to consolidate the Bolinas and Stinson campuses onto the Bolinas campus to improve the educational services provided to all students. Specifically, the Working Group recommendation said:

"In support of establishing effective multi-age classrooms, providing for consistent staff development for all staff, ensuring that all students receive comparable services and have access to all programs, facilities and opportunities, for maximizing opportunities for staff collaboration, teaming and articulation between grade levels, and for enhancing a sense of identity of a small school community, all students will be housed at the Bolinas campus.

It is the consensus of the Working Group that it is desirable to have all students at the Bolinas campus in an integrated K-8 setting as soon as possible. The Working Group stated that this transition should occur as soon as possible, ideally by the start of the 2005-06 school year. The Working group also discussed the need for the community to study and review this

recommendation prior to any action. This makes the transition to a single integrated campus for K-8 students more likely to occur at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year.

Implementation will be contingent on an analysis of space requirements, the need for storage and for the development of detailed plans for a successful move.

The Board will establish a Committee to develop a plan for the ongoing use of the Stinson site. The Committee should include a Board member with business expertise, community representatives and the District Business Officials.

Consideration also needs to be given to hiring a school facilities consultant to assist a District Facilities Committee in identifying long term facility needs and uses.”

March 2005 – March 2006

Facilities Committee Charge, Review and Recommendations

The Board’s response to the Working Group’s consolidation recommendation was to hire an independent school facilities consultant and task the board’s Facilities Committee with developing a detailed recommendation about consolidation onto the Bolinas campus, including evaluation of space requirements and facilities costs. The Facilities Committee, working closely with the facilities consultant, produced a Facilities Report dated March 7, 2006, that was reviewed by the Board at its March 14, 2006 regular meeting. In that report the committee acknowledged the educational advantages of consolidating campuses, but recommended against consolidation until there are few enough students to allow consolidation without requiring new classrooms on the Bolinas campus due to cost considerations. The Facilities Committee report made the following general recommendations pertaining to campus configuration/consolidation:

“The purpose of this report has been to study the impact of maintaining two separate campuses, or consolidate all school functions on the Bolinas campus, and to prioritize facility maintenance needs over the next five years. (Deferred Maintenance). Three Scenarios have been examined: maintain two campuses, consolidate in existing at Bolinas, and consolidate in expanded facilities at Bolinas. Additional work needs to be done to answer questions about the space requirements, functionality, and architectural needs of the campuses.

Given the history and projections for enrollment to decline to the existing population of the Bolinas campus over the next 5 to 10 years, we recommend first, waiting until the natural attrition occurs, then consolidating the K-8 program on the Bolinas campus. This approach will not incur costs associated with the addition of space at Bolinas and is supported by the District’s values for continued and improved instructional/enrichment programs to support the curriculum at each campus. These programs require dedicated space to flourish.

While a K-8 community at the Bolinas campus is desirable, one must consider whether the size and facilities of the Bolinas campus site are adequate to house the unified population and continue to deliver the quality of educational and recreational programs that the District currently provides.

If the scenario of immediate consolidation is favored, we recommend leasing classroom buildings temporarily so that they can be removed as enrollment declines and the Bolinas campus can be restored. Maintaining or expanding the size and configuration of the existing turf field is a priority. Consolidating campuses in existing facilities has certain cost advantages, but these must be weighed against the impact to the educational program in terms of enrichment space, and the impact to the Bolinas site in terms of dedicating play space for both older and younger children simultaneously.

... [Paragraph about deed restriction removed, see “Myths and Misinformation” below.]

Second, we recommend establishing eligibility for State Modernization funding immediately. The process for OPSC funding, design, approval, and construction will be a minimum of 12 months. Within that time frame, the Board might consider campus consolidation sooner, rather than after the 5-year projected decline. In this way, the State would augment the

funds necessary to provide ADA upgrades, and the District might begin to realize some income from the alternative use of the Stinson School campus sooner. We are available to assist in the State funding application process should the District wish to pursue this recommendation.”

April 2006

Public discussions and feedback on campus configuration recommendation

Because of intense community interest in this issue, the Board scheduled a public meeting to discuss the Facilities Committee report and recommendations and receive input from the district community. This meeting was held on April 6, 2006, at the Stinson Beach Community Center. At that meeting the Facilities Committee Report was discussed in some detail and the board asked for feedback from those in attendance. During that meeting two things became clear to the board: even after the facilities presentation and discussion there was tremendous lack of clarity about the consolidation issue; and, based at least partially on that lack of clarity, some members of the school community were reacting with distrust and animosity. Clearly, the meeting had not accomplished the intention of laying out the issues and the reasoning behind the recommendations that the board had received.

September 2006 – June 2007

Formation of Consolidation Task Force

The Board held a community forum on September 21, 2006 because of lingering questions and distrust about the campus consolidation issue and then formed an ad hoc Consolidation Task Force on November 14, 2006, and charged this committee with “delivering a report to the Board of Trustees which will include the following:

1. factual information regarding BSUSD student enrollment in the following areas;
 - a. student enrollment trends from 1996-97 school year through present with grade level and longitudinal [cohort] information.
 - b. future projections for student enrollment in BSUSD through 2010.
2. a detailed financial analysis of costs to operate both the Stinson and Bolinas campuses and an analysis of facilities costs if the two campuses are consolidated.
3. a non-financial cost-benefit analysis of consolidating school campuses.
4. identification of factors that might in future years, trigger a decision to consolidate campuses.”

The Consolidation Task Force originally consisted of 4 community members from Stinson Beach, 4 community members from Bolinas, and 4 school staff members, two from each campus. The Task Force met over the course of 6 months and presented their recommendations to the regular board meeting on May 8, 2007. The Task Force recommended not consolidating campuses until all students could fit on the Bolinas campus without adding more classrooms, and that specifically a drop to 70-80 students should trigger consolidation to maintain classroom and campus vitality.

Note that some members of the Task Force from Stinson Beach dropped off the Task Force before their work was completed, apparently in response to a staff recommendation to reconfigure students on both campuses (even though the staff recommendation, which was later accepted by the board, does not consolidate campuses).

Following are the Task Force’s detailed findings/recommendations:

Task 1: Student enrollment history and projections

“On the district level, we believe BSUSD student population is in a holding pattern through 2010, though it is difficult to predict actual enrollment numbers. A census of children under age 5 revealed that between 9 and 13 children per cohort currently reside in the BSUSD district Bolinas and Stinson. Fluctuations in student population are expected, but no large increases are projected.

A review of county and state enrollment data indicates the recent decline experienced by BSUSD reflects both Marin and California as a whole in trend, though not in degree. While California has experienced a less than 3% decline since 2000, BSUSD has experienced a decline of 55%. A slow but steady rise in student population (.3% and 3%) over the next 5 years is predicted for Marin and California. A similar trend would be expected for the BSUSD.”

Task 2: Financial analysis

- “Financial consequences of consolidation of the Stinson and Bolinas Campuses include 1) costs, stemming from additional accommodations necessary to house all students on the Bolinas Campus, and 2) savings, stemming from reduced operating and staffing expenditures.
- An analysis of the 05/06 and 06/07 budget showed a 5% surplus/year for two years. This analysis indicates the school is currently in no danger of financial crisis, and it is concluded that consolidation is not supportable for financial reasons alone.
- The financial sub-committee considered 3 scenarios for consolidating:
 - consolidating with no new buildings (least expensive)
 - consolidating with one or two portables
 - consolidating by building one or two new buildings (350 - 900 K)

The sub-committee recommends consolidating when all students fit on the Bolinas Campus without having to expand into new buildings or portable.
- Other costs of consolidation, which were not investigated include:
 - costs of adding playground and other needs for K-2
 - costs associated with making the small school available as other type of facility
- The estimated savings from consolidation are about \$60,000 per year (Table 3)
- The cost of building one classroom is \$300,000 to \$500,000 (facilities report).”

Task 3: Non-financial analysis

“The task force addressed each comment in the Scenario 2 Consolidation Table in the Facility Report. Each comment is either Supported, Supported if concerns are addressed, or Not supported. Further advantages and disadvantages, and concerns regarding consolidation, not addressed in the Facility Report Table, are listed below.

Scenario 2 Comments:

- Supported: Commute time saved by specialist staff can be used to increase student services
- Supported: increased hours for academics for the early grades (**note:** this advantage is potentially addressed under a two-campus scenario by altering school schedule)
- Supported: Classrooms will need to be shuffled to accommodate all classes
- Supported: Class size needs to be balanced to contain more grade levels in single classrooms
- Concern: Storage and support space will be lost
- Concern: Specialized instructional space for science and other special programs will be lost
- Concern: Dedicated play yards need to be separated for upper and lower grades
- Concern: Need to address location of Kindergarten classroom for ease of pick-up and drop-off
- Supported: More efficient use of principal, food service and specialist staff
- Supported: Sense of ‘whole’ community with all students together (**note:** with effort and scheduling this can be achieved under a two-campus scenario)

Add: Advantages to consolidation

- Increased vibrancy – increases with student density (addressed in Task 4)
- Opens up many options for use of the Stinson Campus by the greater Stinson community
- Academic advantages - increased opportunity for flexible learning and teaching

- Increased potential for collegiality among K-2 and 3-6 teachers

Add: Disadvantages to consolidation (need to be addressed)

- perceived loss of a connection with Stinson Beach community
- perceived loss of an idyllic setting for young children
- less opportunity for diverse social hierarchies to develop. Ex.: 2nd graders have the opportunity to be social leaders on the Stinson Campus
- Less opportunity for single-grade classes
- Move disrupts current program”

Task 4: Factors that may trigger a consolidation decision

“A survey of the literature on effective class size allowed the task force to identify a minimum effective class size. This minimum class size is used to determine effective campus size, given the number of available classrooms. The suggested minimum effective class size exceeds the average grade size in Bolinas, means that combined grades are a necessity for the school. As such, a brief summary of the benefits of combined grade classes is also included.

The task force would like to make mention that density estimates using children per acre as mentioned in the Facility Report does not seem to be meaningful in the context of Campus Vitality.

Campus vitality

- A general agreement among task force committee members is that between 15 and 20 students compromise an effective class size (see literature below). As such, between 75 and 100 students can be housed comfortably in the 5 rooms currently open for academic classes on the Bolinas Campus, given combined grades for every year except Kindergarten.
- Consolidation might occur for a variety of academic or other considerations; however, there is a minimum enrollment below which consolidation regardless of any academic discussion should be seriously considered. A drop to between 70 and 80 students K through 8 should trigger consolidation to maintain campus vitality. By campus, a drop to fewer than 20 K12 students on the Stinson Campus (10 per class, including combined grades); or 60 kids on the Bolinas Campus (12 kids per class) should also trigger serious consideration of consolidation.”

March 2007 – June 2007

Trustees approve recommendation to “swap” K-1-2 with 7-8

The Superintendent/Principal, after discussions with staff regarding campus configurations, made a recommendation to the Board to improve the educational environment and more effectively implement proposed changes in instructional programs for students by housing the K-6 on the Bolinas campus and housing the 7-8 students on the Stinson campus during morning session. All students, K-8, would be on the Bolinas campus for lunch and afternoon session. The recommendation was to implement the change for the beginning of the 2008-09 school year. This recommendation was initially presented in a community forum/special Board meeting on March 29, 2007 and discussed in greater detail at the April 8, 2007 regular Board meeting. The recommendation for the reconfiguration was approved after additional discussion, subject to receipt of a more detailed implementation plan, at the May 15, 2007 board meeting by a vote of 3-2, with Trustee Tom Williard voting no because he thought the recommendation should be implemented immediately for 2007-08. The reasoning behind this configuration change is detailed in information contained in the companion paper titled, “2008-09 Campus Configuration Explained.”

Some Myths and Misinformation about campus configuration/consolidation

Below we state and explain some of the myths and misinformation that has surrounded the campus consolidation issue.

- **The K-2 & 7-8 campus swap is a precursor to a non-disclosed long-term plan to create an alternative middle and/or high school,** perhaps in cooperation with the Shoreline School District. This is not true. The Board has never considered this or anything like it and it did not play a part in the Board's decision concerning 2008-09 classroom configuration.
- **The board is considering consolidating/reconfiguring the campuses to save money.** There are financial considerations to reconfiguration or consolidation but these are not driving issues. At this time the district does not need to make changes in order to save money.
- **The board is considering consolidating/reconfiguring the campuses because of declining enrollment.** While declining enrollment *allows* the district to consider reconfiguring or consolidating campuses, the *reasons* for making these decisions are based on improving the education we provide for the students.
- **The board wants to sell the Stinson campus.** Over at least the past eight years the board has never considered selling the Stinson campus. The Stinson campus is an extremely valuable community property, if sold it would be virtually impossible to repurchase or find something equivalent. Further, we don't know what enrollment trends will be in the future, but we do anticipate that enrollment will someday begin to climb significantly, making the Stinson campus indispensable for housing classrooms. Discussion of selling the property would only occur if the school got into a difficult position financially, but we are currently financially sound and do not anticipate that happening.
- **The board wants to "close" the Stinson campus.** Again, in at least the past eight years, the board has never expressed a desire to "close" the Stinson campus. The board's foremost responsibility is to ensure that the school offers the best education possible to all students. Campus consolidation and configuration decisions are driven by a desire to improve the educational experience of the students. Further, configuration and consolidation recommendations are not sourced by the board, but come from the professional educators and community we represent. In the event that all classrooms are consolidated on the Bolinas campus, the board would consider uses of the Stinson campus that would support both the Stinson and Bolinas communities. Future Stinson campus availability is a high priority.
- **If the board "closes" the Stinson Campus or uses it for anything other than public educational purposes it must be returned to the heirs of the owner that donated the land.** The Stinson campus was formed from three separate land parcels, two of which were purchased by the district and one of which was given to the district. The myth above comes from a deed restriction that was placed on the parcel that was given to the district. However, deed restrictions such as this were struck down as unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court in a 1982 ruling, so there is no legal basis for this claim. (Note that if the deed restriction was legally binding, the district would be in violation of the restriction by allowing the Stinson Beach Preschool to use one of the classrooms for the past three years.)

Some have suggested that the district has an ethical obligation to honor the intent of those who donated the parcel. We believe that the intent of the donors was to improve the educational opportunities afforded the students of the district. If the best educational use of district facilities is to house all students on the Bolinas campus and

rent space at the Stinson campus to the Stinson Beach Preschool and/or other community oriented organizations, we feel that the donor's overall intent would be met.

- **If the board “closes” the Stinson Campus it will be taken over by the Park Service.** This is simply untrue. The local Park Service is the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) which includes the Point Reyes National Seashore and which borders (and may include) the Stinson Beach campus. The GGNRA was created by the U.S. Congress and its activities and uses are described in U.S. Code Title 16, Chapter 1, Subchapter LXXXVI. Section 460bb-2, Acquisition policy for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, specifically states that the GGNRA has no right of condemnation – they can't acquire lands except through purchase, or in the case of State of California land, by donation. Since our public school is part of the State of California, this means that the Stinson Campus could only be acquired by GGNRA if the school district gave it to the park.