

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding The Potential Closing of Elmhurst School 4-12-10**

**Note:** This FAQ sheet is intended to supplement (as opposed to repeat) the information presented to the Portsmouth School Committee's Finance Subcommittee on April 7, 2010. The materials presented that evening are all publicly available on the Portsmouth School Department website at [www.portsmouthschoolsri.org](http://www.portsmouthschoolsri.org). The materials on the website include a PowerPoint presentation, a color-coded floor plan of Portsmouth Middle School (PMS) showing where each grade level would be housed, and spreadsheets on the financials. These materials address the following frequent questions:

- Why are we having this discussion?
- Would the students fit?
- What would the grade configuration be?
- What would the savings be?
- How would we move forward?

### **Additional Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **1) Why consider closing Elmhurst now when we only moved the 5<sup>th</sup> graders back to the elementary schools a few years ago?**

We moved the 5<sup>th</sup> graders to the elementary schools for the 2007-2008 school year (3 years ago) because doing so saved us some staffing costs including a half-time house leader, and a clerical position, and we had already reduced one custodian from the middle school staff. Since this time, however, additional information has been received.

- During the 2007-2008 school year, a performance audit was done of the School Department by Berkshire Advisors, at the behest of the Portsmouth Town Council. Berkshire did a preliminary review of school facilities as a part of its report and raised a number of issues regarding Elmhurst concluding, *"Given the cost of addressing these issues, the department should carefully assess whether any investments in improving the school are prudent"* (p. VII-3).
- During the 2008-2009 school year, the School Committee contracted for a comprehensive examination of School Department facilities done by RGB. RGB estimated the cost of priority #1 and #2 repairs at Elmhurst to be \$5.6 million. The comparable cost estimates for Hathaway and Melville were significantly lower with Hathaway at \$3 million and Melville at \$1.7 million. With regard to Elmhurst the RGB study concluded, *"Given the in-efficient layout and general quality of teaching spaces, spending this capital funding on renovations should be carefully considered prior to undertaking the work"* (Space Needs Analysis Summary, p. 2 of 13).
- We have had some decline in student enrollment since 2007-2008, and our schools currently have excess capacity. In '07-'08, Portsmouth had 717 students in grades 6-8. Next year (2010-11), we are projected to have 607 students, a reduction of 110 students. In addition, there are projected to be 20 fewer students in grades PK-5.

- Our financial picture has deteriorated substantially at the national, state and local level. State aid has been level-funded for multiple years, was reduced for this current year (and will probably be reduced still more), and is projected to be reduced for next year and the year following, as federal stimulus dollars run out.

**2) Would 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders have recess if they were moved to PMS and would there be playground equipment?**

Yes, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders would have recess at PMS. In talking with the elementary principals, the administration has learned that the students in grades 4 and 5 don't use a lot of the playground equipment with the possible exception of the monkey bars. What they do use are balls, basketball hoops and 4-Square courts. There are already basketball hoops, as well as a playing field at PMS. In addition, the budget for the move contains \$5,000 for 4-Square and other playground upgrades.

**3) Would other extracurricular opportunities offered at PMS be available to 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders?**

Yes. This year, PMS is offering the following after school clubs, activities and sports that 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders would be eligible to participate in: Robotics, Mathcounts, Chess, Student Council, Mock Trial, Garden, Green Team, Origami, Art, Drama, Intramural Basketball & Volleyball, Morning Fitness, Yearbook, Best Buddies, Middle Mentoring, and Media. We foresee having similar offerings next year.

**4) What are the proposed school start and end times under this plan?**

This current school year, PMS and one of our elementary schools (Melville) start at 8 AM and end at 2:30 PM. Our other two elementary schools (Elmhurst and Hathaway) begin at 8:40 AM and end at 3:10 PM.

If Elmhurst closes for next year, the start and end times for PMS, which would then house grades 4-8, would remain 8 AM – 2:30 PM. Hathaway and Melville, which would house grades PK-3, would begin at 8:40 AM and end at 3:10 PM.

Portsmouth High School start and end times would be unaffected and would remain 7:25 AM – 1:55 PM.

**5) How would bussing work and would there be bus monitors?**

All busses for Portsmouth Middle School, as well as those for Hathaway and Melville, would have bus monitors. In addition, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders would be assigned to sit in the front of the bus. There would be two drop off points at PMS, the first for 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders, who would be housed on one side of the building, and the second for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who would be housed on the other side (see floor plan on website).

Portsmouth busses would need to be rerouted due to the changes in school and grade configurations. As we do now, the administration would strive to have bus routes take 45-50 minutes. However, as is the case currently, some bus routes may take up to 1 hour.

**6) Would only Elmhurst students and families be impacted by this change?**

No, the fourth and fifth graders from all three elementary schools would be attending the middle school. In addition, if this plan goes forward, a transition advisory committee will be set up to examine bus routing areas to each of the remaining two elementary schools which could mean that some other students, in addition to those attending Elmhurst would be reassigned.