

# GMUSD ADVISORY RESTRUCTURING REPORT

November 21, 2024

## Background and Context

### Acknowledgment

In seeking a solution to the over-enrollment at Chester Andover Elementary School (CAES) and the under-enrollment at Cavendish Elementary (CTES), the GMUSD Board has faced the challenging task of balancing the needs and emotions of the community. Each proposed solution has stirred strong feelings due to deeply held beliefs and the fear of losing cherished traditions. Addressing the district's enrollment issues while preserving these traditions has proven difficult. The Board deserves recognition for taking a difficult yet necessary step by delegating the search for a solution to an impartial third party, despite the personal significance of the outcome to each member.

To be clear, the final decision on which path to take rests with the Board. The administrative team's recommendations are advisory only. By following this approach, the Board has shown its commitment to the greater good of the students, despite internal conflicts and significant external pressures—a rare quality indeed.

### Chronology

In June of this year, the GMUSD Board established a restructuring subcommittee to address the enrollment issues at both schools. Since then, the topic has been discussed at over ten Board meetings, all open for public comment. Two open forums, led by the superintendent, were held, as well as several listening sessions specifically for GMUSD staff.

The administrative team diligently collected and analyzed district data and considered all feedback from the past five months. It became readily apparent that all potential solutions fell into one of three categories: relocating students, creating additional space, or a combination of the two. This information has been thoroughly reviewed and incorporated into the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Recommendation I: Construction at Chester-Andover**

The foremost recommendation is to expand classroom and office space at Chester Andover Elementary. This solution effectively addresses the issue of overcrowding at

CAES without infringing upon the CTES community's deeply held beliefs, thus avoiding potential controversy and disorder that could negatively impact the district's reputation and orderly operation.

There are many benefits to this recommendation:

- No students would need to be relocated from their current buildings.
- No changes to the existing bus routes would be necessary.
- Seventy-five percent of the construction costs would be reimbursed by FEMA. The reimbursement could be allocated to a reserve fund for future emergency facility needs—an essential consideration given the aged state of the district's buildings. Such a reserve would enable the district to promptly address any failure of aged infrastructure in order to maintain school operations.
- Construction at Chester Andover would minimize disruptions to the existing educational environment, maintaining stability for students and staff.
- Keeping students in their familiar location fosters community, continuity, and stable routines with known adults.
- The new construction would serve as a permanent solution, enhancing the value of the property and providing a stable environment for future generations of students.
- The new classrooms and office spaces would lead to better learning and working conditions, positively contributing to the overall educational experience.

### **Three Possible Ways to Create Additional Space in Priority Order**

*Deploy high-quality modular classroom and office units:*

These pre-built units can be on-site and operational in a remarkably short time frame, ensuring minimal disruption to the school's activities. **The proposed units are designed to be of superior quality, capable of serving as permanent structures.**

- Scalability: If enrollment increases, more units can be added without disrupting the building's continuity and aesthetic design.
- Flexibility: In the event of state-mandated consolidation, these modular units can be repurposed, providing long-term value and adaptability.
- Cost-Effectiveness: This is the most economical solution for creating additional space, delivering significant savings compared to the other construction options.

- Speed of Implementation: The quick deployment of these units addresses urgent space requirements efficiently.
- Sustainability: Modular units often have a lower environmental impact than traditional construction methods.
- Images of the potential units can be viewed here, click on “see gallery: <https://www.boxxmodular.com/classrooms/#> .
- The main drawback of this solution is the initial cost, which is significant but lower than the other more traditional options.

**Total Cost: \$521,830**

The deployment of high-quality modular classroom and office units stands out as an extremely effective and adaptable solution for addressing the district’s urgent space needs. Despite the initial investment, the long-term benefits, including cost savings, flexibility, and sustainability, make it a prudent choice for the district. With a substantial reimbursement covering a significant portion of the costs, this approach not only meets immediate requirements, but also supports future growth while minimizing the burden on taxpayers.

#### *Construct a Separate Brick-and-Mortar Building*

This solution addresses the district's needs, but is less flexible and more costly. It too offers several unique benefits:

- Enhanced Customization: The ability to tailor the design and layout to meet specific educational needs and preferences.
- Community Engagement: The construction process can involve local labor and materials, supporting the community and fostering a sense of ownership and pride.
- Energy Efficiency: Modern brick buildings can be designed with energy-efficient technologies, reducing long-term operational costs and environmental impact.
- Safety and Security: Brick buildings offer enhanced safety features and can be fortified to provide a more secure environment for students and staff.
- Long-Term Solution: A permanent brick building offers a stable and enduring solution to classroom overcrowding, providing a lasting investment for the school's infrastructure.

- **Durability:** Brick structures are known for their strength and longevity, ensuring the building remains in excellent condition for many years.
- **Aesthetic Appeal:** Brick buildings can be designed to match the existing architecture, maintaining the visual harmony of the school's campus.

This solution also has several unique disadvantages:

- **High Cost:** Constructing a permanent brick building is significantly more expensive compared to modular units, requiring a larger upfront investment.
- **Longer Construction Time:** Building a brick-and-mortar structure takes more time, delaying solutions and reducing educational benefits in the interim.
- **Lack of Flexibility:** Once built, a brick building cannot be easily modified or repurposed, limiting its adaptability to future needs or changes in enrollment.
- **Potential Disruptions:** The construction process may interfere with day-to-day school operations, impacting students, staff, and the overall learning environment.

**Total Cost: \$1,048,325**

While a separate brick building provides numerous advantages such as energy efficiency, enhanced safety, and long-term durability, it comes with significant drawbacks including high cost, extended building time, and potential disruptions to school operations during construction.

#### *Building an Addition to the Existing Building*

Another viable option for addressing Chester-Andover's overcrowding dilemma is to build an addition to the existing school structure. This approach would enhance the current facilities while maintaining the cohesion and unity of the school community.

Below are the benefits and disadvantages associated with this solution:

#### **Benefits:**

- **Unified Space:** An addition to the existing building ensures that all students remain together within the same campus, fostering a stronger sense of community and continuity.

- **Permanent Solution:** Constructing an addition provides a long-term, stable solution to overcrowding, enhancing the school's infrastructure and potentially increasing the property's value.
- **Seamless Integration:** An addition can be designed to integrate seamlessly with the existing architecture, maintaining the aesthetic appeal and functional layout of the school.
- **Improved Facilities:** The new space can be tailored to meet specific needs, such as state-of-the-art classrooms, specialized labs, or the addition of specialty areas.

**Disadvantages:**

- **High Cost:** Building an addition involves significant financial investment, potentially straining the school's budget and requiring additional funding.
- **Construction Disruption:** The construction process would disrupt daily school operations, causing noise, dust, and temporary relocation of classes and activities.
- **Extended Timeline:** Completing an addition takes time, potentially extending over several months or even years, which may delay the resolution of overcrowding issues.
- **Limited Flexibility:** Once built, the addition cannot be easily modified or repurposed, potentially limiting its adaptability to future changes in enrollment or educational needs.
- **Logistical Challenges:** Coordinating construction within an operational school environment poses logistical challenges, requiring careful planning and management.

While building an addition to the existing structure offers some advantages, such as creating a unified space, providing a permanent solution, and improving facilities, it also presents challenges related to high costs, construction disruptions, and logistical complexities.

**Total Cost: \$1,850,000**

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## **Recommendation II: Create on a GMUSD Pre-School Program at CTES**

Early childhood education is a crucial foundation for lifelong learning and development. A full-day preschool program for four-year-olds and a partial-day program for three-year-olds can significantly enhance later academic achievement while providing important educational benefits.

### **Full Day Learning for Four-Year-Olds**

#### *Comprehensive Learning Experiences*

A full-day preschool program offers an extended and enriched learning environment that allows for a comprehensive exploration of early educational content. Teachers can delve deeper into subjects, facilitating a greater understanding and retention of concepts. A full-day format, implemented five days a week, enables the incorporation of diverse activities that foster cognitive, social, and emotional development.

#### *Structured Routine and Consistency*

Consistency and routine are essential for young children. A full-day schedule provides a structured environment that helps establish a strong sense of security and predictability, promoting better behavior and engagement in learning activities; traits that will benefit children into kindergarten and beyond. Further, consistent exposure to early educational content throughout each day and week aids in the development of the essential skills that serve as a foundation for later learning.

#### *Enhanced Socialization Opportunities*

Spending full days in preschool allows children to interact more frequently with peers and adults, enhancing their social skills and emotional intelligence. These interactions are vital for developing cooperation, empathy, and communication skills. The extended duration of the program would also provide ample opportunities for collaborative play and group activities, fostering a deep sense of community, belonging and self-identity.

#### *Preparation for Kindergarten*

A full-day preschool program serves as an effective bridge to kindergarten. Children who attend full-day preschool are better prepared for the academic and social demands of kindergarten. They are more likely to have developed crucial pre-literacy and

numeracy skills, as well as the ability to follow instructions, work independently, and manage transitions. This preparation ultimately leads to a smoother transition and greater success in their subsequent educational journey.

## **Partial Day Preschool for Three-Year-Olds**

### *Introduction to Structured Learning*

A partial-day preschool program introduces three-year-olds to the concept of structured learning in a gentle and age-appropriate manner. This early exposure helps them acclimate to a school environment, easing the transition to a more formal education setting in the future. The shorter duration is ideal for younger children, preventing fatigue while still providing valuable learning experiences.

### *A Focus on Developmental Milestones*

By the age of three, children are rapidly developing critical motor, language, and cognitive skills. A partial-day program can concentrate on activities that support these developmental milestones. Through play-based learning, children can enhance their fine and gross motor skills, develop language and communication abilities, and begin to understand basic concepts like numbers, letters, colors and shapes.

### *Strengthening Parent-Child Relationships*

A partial-day preschool program allows for a balanced approach to early education, providing children with structured learning while still maintaining significant time at home with their families. This balance helps strengthen parent-child relationships, as parents remain actively involved in their child's early learning experiences. Parents can reinforce and extend the activities that take place in preschool, creating a cohesive and supportive educational environment that creates a strong foundation for future learning.

## **Positive Impact on Later Academic Achievement**

### *Early Literacy and Numeracy Skills*

Both full-day and partial-day preschool programs play a crucial role in developing early literacy and numeracy skills. Exposure to books, storytelling, phonics, and basic math concepts lays the groundwork for future academic success. Research has shown

that children who attend preschool programs demonstrate higher levels of early literacy and numeracy skills, which are strong predictors of later academic achievement.

### *Improved Cognitive Abilities*

Engaging in a variety of educational activities stimulates cognitive development in young children. Preschool programs offer opportunities for problem-solving, critical thinking, and creative expression. These cognitive abilities are essential for mastering more complex subjects as children progress through their education.

### *Long-Term Academic Success*

The benefits of early childhood education extend far beyond preschool years. Children who attend high-quality preschool programs are more likely to excel academically throughout their schooling. They exhibit better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and increased likelihood of pursuing higher education. The foundation built during early childhood sets the stage for lifelong learning and achievement.

### *Early Intervention*

A robust preschool program provides the district with the invaluable opportunity to identify and address learning difficulties at an early stage. By catching these issues promptly, educators can implement targeted interventions to remediate them before they become significant obstacles to a child's education. This proactive approach not only supports the child's immediate learning needs, but also prevents the accumulation of learning gaps that would otherwise require substantial resources to address in later years. Early intervention ensures that all students have a strong foundation upon which to build their future academic success.

In a district where more than 30% of students have education plans, this initiative is a crucial step towards enhancing their academic futures while reducing the need for ongoing intensive services. By identifying and addressing learning difficulties early, we ensure that all students receive the necessary support to overcome challenges and develop the skills needed to thrive academically without the requirement for extensive accommodations and support. Being successful and independent are fundamental goals for every student, and this initiative provides a means to achieve this.



### *Benefit to District and CTES*

Creating the GMUSD pre-school at CTES would accomplish two notable goals: increasing enrollment at CTES, thereby reversing its downward trend, while not exacerbating the over-enrollment at CAES. This strategic initiative, in conjunction with the third recommendation below, will help to ensure a balanced distribution of student populations across the district. By bolstering the CTES enrollment numbers, we can optimize the use of existing resources, enhance teacher-student ratios, and enhance a vibrant, engaged learning community. Simultaneously, this approach alleviates pressures at CAES, preventing future overcrowding and ensuring that all students receive the attention and support they deserve. In essence, the establishment of the GMUSD pre-school at CTES represents a holistic solution that benefits the entire district, promoting educational equity and excellence.

### **Ensuring Pre-School Access for All Eligible Students**

#### *Supporting Parents*

In Vermont, finding childcare is an extraordinary challenge for many families. As a result, parents often look for preschools to serve a dual purpose: providing foundational early education and ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for their children during the workday. Given this, the district can take deliberate steps to ensure that all eligible students participate in a preschool program that caters to both educational and childcare needs by collaborating with local professionals to offer extended childcare services during school vacations and over summer breaks. The CTES preschool space could be utilized for this purpose so that students can attend a consistent and familiar setting. This partnership would create a seamless support system for parents, ensuring that their children benefit from continuous educational engagement and care throughout the year while increasing the likelihood of participation in the preschool program.

#### *In Summary*

Implementing a full-day preschool program for four-year-olds and a partial-day program for three-year-olds offers significant educational benefits. These programs provide comprehensive learning experiences, promote socialization, prepare children for future academic endeavors, and support overall cognitive development.

Additionally, by collaborating with local professionals to offer extended childcare services during school vacations and over the summer break, the district can ensure continuous educational engagement and care. This partnership supports parents by providing a consistent and familiar setting for their children, ultimately ensuring that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed for long-term academic success and personal growth.

*Program Expenses*

- Staff Costs: \$162,150 (one Early Education Teacher and One Paraprofessional).
- Classroom Set-Up and Equipment Purchases (one-time): \$40,000
- Tuition Savings: -\$83,280

**Total Cost: \$118,870**

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**Recommendation III: Future Baltimore and Preschool Students**

Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, all new students residing in Baltimore will attend Cavendish Elementary School. Students already attending CAES or another elementary school will be grandfathered in, along with any future siblings.

By implementing this change, the district will ensure a balanced distribution of students across all schools, allowing TRSU resources to be utilized to their fullest capacity. In doing so, the district can provide a more equitable educational experience, where facilities are neither overburdened nor underutilized.

Moreover, this transition will enable the district to optimize teacher-student ratios, enhance classroom environments, and improve overall educational outcomes. By strategically managing enrollment, Cavendish Elementary School will be better positioned to offer a comprehensive curriculum that meets the diverse needs of its student body.

In the same spirit, students attending the GMUSD preschool will be afforded **the option** of continuing their education at Cavendish Elementary School from kindergarten through grade six. This seamless transition aims to provide a consistent and stable

learning environment, ensuring that children can build upon their early educational foundations without disruption. By enabling preschoolers to move directly into Cavendish Elementary, the district fosters a continuity of curriculum and pedagogy that supports sustained academic growth and emotional well-being. Additionally, this policy allows families to form lasting connections with the school community, enhancing the overall educational experience for both students and their families.

**Total Cost: \$0**

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### **Communication**

If approved by the Board, the district will embark on an extensive communication and outreach plan to ensure that all families are well-informed about the upcoming changes. Information sessions, open houses, and personalized support will be provided to assist families in navigating this transition smoothly and confidently.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The recommendations outlined in this report are proposed measures for consideration, formulated after thorough analysis and evaluation of data and community feedback. The GMUSD Board may decide to adopt some, all, or none of these recommendations. Regardless of the final decision, it is crucial that meeting the needs of all our students is prioritized.

Once a decision is made in this spirit, it is essential that the community sets aside any differences and divisions for the greater good of the students we serve. Unity and collective support will be paramount in ensuring that the chosen solutions are effectively implemented so that our students benefit fully from the positive outcomes they can provide.