



## Schools of Our Future Concept Proposal

Prepared for: RSU #13 Board of Directors

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## **Objective:**

In the late summer of 2014, the RSU #13 School Board directed the Superintendent of Schools to investigate and gather information on the structure and functioning of the school system with the intent being to create a proposal and plan for “The Schools of Our Future”; that is a new look at the schools in the region from the premise that curriculum, instruction and good learning environments are key to the educational success of students. Due to declining enrollments, the impending withdrawal of a member town, St. George, and decreasing state funding for education, the Board recognized that part of this proposal would involve maximizing efficient use of resources through reorganization of the use of existing facilities and possible closing and/or renovation of some facilities.

Phase I of this work would involve gathering information from staff and community stakeholders through meetings, research, surveys and facilitated conversations centered around community values, beliefs about effective education, and what attributes exemplify a high performing school system.

Phase II of the project would be for the Superintendent and administrative team to make recommendations to the Board of Directors in the Fall of 2015, based on information gathering and research from school year 2014-2015.

Phase III would be an implementation of those recommendations, or some version of them, approved by the Board beginning in school year 2016-2017.

## **Goals:**

- To create a high performing school system and progression of grade levels and instruction which provide for integrated, unified curriculum based on best practices consistent with current research, Proficiency Based Teaching and Learning and the RSU #13 Strategic Plan.
- To provide for efficient use of facilities, consistent with student enrollment trends and recommended school and grade configurations.
- To create safe, comfortable and effective schools and learning environments where students will thrive, which exemplify the professionalism of our

teaching and support staff, and are a vibrant centerpiece of their communities both in terms of function and appearance.

- To maximize resources such that RSU #13 is able to appropriately support programs and opportunities for students, provide training and development for staff, while maintaining proper fiscal management and budgetary considerations sensitive to the economic realities of the member towns of the Region.

### **Solution:**

Our approach to these goals was twofold; first, to research and propose a structure for our schools that would enhance the unification of curriculum and instruction, and provide for increased student achievement and efficacy of teaching and learning; second, to create community centered schools that provide for safe, efficient, comfortable and attractive learning environments.

The following proposals are the results of this work.

### **School Organization, Curriculum and Programming**

1. We propose a grade 9 through 12 high school located in Rockland at the Oceanside East facility. Oceanside East High School will include planning and implementation for a Freshman Academy model to effectively support and transition students as they enter high school, and provide for increased academic success throughout their high school career. This model, the Freshman Academy, has proven to be very successful in schools throughout the United States, and allows for innovative and customized structures within the high school to address student needs with a team-oriented approach. We believe that this concept will be extremely beneficial to our incoming students, and in fact has direct connections to the middle school model of teaming and instruction.

Oceanside East High School will continue to move toward innovative structures that will enhance student engagement and achievement, such as the creation of early college opportunities for students, where they may earn

low cost or no cost college credits while attending high school classes through dual enrollment. This program is already in place at the high school. Additionally, Oceanside East High School is developing the Academic Academy model of instruction, first through the inception of the Fisherman's Academy, a Marine Trades academy designed to allow students who are interested in marine fields to explore and learn in those areas in a very engaging format and in partnership with local businesses and organizations. In development, is a STEM Academy, Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics, and a Liberal Arts Academy, where students may pursue studies and earn a specific endorsement on their diploma. We are also proposing that the high school pursue even more partnerships with local businesses and organizations, such that students may engage in internships and mentorships in fields of interest during their experience in high school.

Lastly, we are recommending that Oceanside East High School work with the Restorative Justice program of the mid-coast to implement a school based program as a framework for school culture and progressive discipline. This program has been proven in many schools to develop a culture of community, responsibility and accountability for both students and staff, and helps schools increase student engagement, reduce discipline referrals and put focus on the concept of school community.

These are just a few examples of the direction in which our high school is moving, and why we believe it will be effective and invigorating to have grades 9 through 12 in the same facility.

2. We propose a Regional Middle School, grades 6 through 8, located in Thomaston at the Oceanside West facility. The Middle School concept is a student centered model and classes offered are based upon student interest and need. We believe that this model offers many advantages over the current configuration, including more direct alignment with Maine and RSU #13 curriculum standards, which are grouped K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. A regional middle school will provide for consistency of instruction and allow for more effective use of teaching teams and collaboration amongst teaching staff to

support teaching and learning for students. The location of the middle school in one facility will promote a sense of community, while facilitating expanded learning opportunities and extracurricular activities for students. Central to the middle school concept, and in addition to the teaming structure, is an approach to teaching and learning that involves experience and inquiry. There are excellent, researched based curricula pertaining to both experiential and inquiry based learning, and our staff is already familiar and versed in this pedagogy, which will add real strength to the offerings we are able to provide at the Oceanside Middle School facility. Again, we are recommending the adoption of Restorative Justice school based programs as a framework for school culture and progressive discipline. Restorative Justice has reached out to us to partner at both the high school and middle school levels in this effort.

3. We propose to provide for elementary instruction utilizing a Pre-K through grade 5 model, generally, in each of our schools. It is our intention to expand our newly created Pre-K program, through the establishment of three more classrooms over the next three years, thus enabling programming throughout the RSU #13 region. In 2014, we received nearly one-million dollars in grant monies through the Maine Department of Education to develop and expand our Pre-K programming. During the 2015-2016 school year we already have three, fully enrolled classrooms in Rockland and Owls Head, and adding this level of programming to our elementary schools will, over the course of the next few years, serve to strengthen student achievement prior to grade three, increase student literacy and math attainment, and to serve and support the social and emotional needs of early learners.

We are proposing to return grade 5 to the elementary schools. Academically, socially and emotionally, fifth graders are more members of the elementary family than middle level. Many of our teaching staff have voiced this same sentiment. In fact, our curriculum standards are grouped at K through 5 achievement levels, therefore further unifying curriculum and instructional practices at the elementary level.

During our quest for information from staff and the public, we clearly heard that they would like to see world language instruction be returned to our elementary schools. We clearly support this concept as we move forward with planning.

We are also recommending that after the pilot year, 2015-2016, that the Responsive Classroom program be adopted by our Pre-K to grade 5 elementary schools. Implemented as a pilot program at South Elementary school this year, Responsive Classroom is a research-based approach to education that is associated with greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate. It has been recognized by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) as one of the most well-designed, evidence-based social and emotional learning programs. (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about-responsive-classroom>) Early reports have been very favorable regarding the efficacy of the Responsive Classroom program, and we look forward to more comprehensive data by the end of this year.

## **Facilities**

Providing safe, healthy, comfortable and efficient learning environments for our students is essential for promoting academic success for the students in our region. Early last year, we began to research ways in which we could improve our school facilities while gaining efficiencies and maximizing utilities. We chose to partner with Siemens Energy to take a detailed look at our facilities. Since the late fall of 2014, Siemens has been conducting extensive analysis of all of our facilities; monitoring energy usage, studying our physical plants, lighting, heating, ventilation, and the buildings themselves, to identify areas where we can make changes and save energy, while improving both the climate and environment inside of our buildings and improving the functionality and appearance of our facilities.

This work has been done in conjunction with our study of the organization, curriculum and programming in our schools and has been informed by our plans, as well as informing us on the best possible scenarios to make efficient

use of our schools and affect changes that will have a positive, lasting impact of their function.

The following proposals outlined in broad strokes, are our recommendations as a result of this work.

1. Renovate Oceanside East High School to receive a grade 9-12 student population with an initial projected enrollment of 510.
2. Renovate Oceanside West to become the Regional Middle School and receive a grade 6-8 student population with an initial projected enrollment of 393.
3. Remodel and expand the Owls Head Central School to receive a Pre-K to grade 5 student population with an initial projected enrollment of 206.
4. Renovate South Elementary School and RDMS to receive a grade Pre-K to 5 student population with an initial projected enrollment of 363 and office space for the Superintendent, Business Office, Special Education and Adult Education.
5. Renovate Cushing Community School to receive a grade K to 5 student population with a projected enrollment of 87.
6. Renovate Thomaston Grammar School to receive a Pre-K through grade 5 student population with a projected enrollment of 210.
7. Facilities recommended for closure: Gilford Butler School, Lura Libby School, McLain Office building.

## **Timeline for Proposal Implementation**

October 15, 2015	Board of Directors Workshop to discuss the proposals
October 19-30, 2015	Community/School Forums
November 5, 2015	Board action on adoption of proposals
November 2015	Formation of school transition teams for planning
Fall 2016	Implementation of school transitions*
Summer and Fall 2017	Implementation of office transitions

\*Dependent upon construction schedule of the Owls Head School