

RECOMMENDATION TO RELIEVE OVERCROWDING AT SUTTON MIDDLE SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

More and more families in the Sutton Middle School attendance zone have chosen to send their children to their neighborhood school. We believe that this is the result of the high quality education that students are receiving and parents' desire to support public schools in their community. Sutton's attendance zone is comprised of Bolton, Brandon, Jackson, Garden Hills, E.Rivers and Smith elementary schools. Sutton and all of the Sutton Middle School feeder elementary sites, as well as the feeder high school, North Atlanta, are implementing the International Baccalaureate curriculum. This group of elementary, middle and high schools is one of only a handful of clusters in the nation that offers the International Baccalaureate curriculum kindergarten through the 12th grade.

Students from the feeder elementary schools are attending Sutton at greater rates than they have in the past. Although this is an exciting development, it has resulted in Sutton's planning capacity of 1040 being exceeded. Sutton's current enrollment is approximately 1052 students. Next year, we anticipate the enrollment growing to approximately 1169 students and to 1340 students in the 2011-2012 school year. The district is proposing both a short-term and a long term solution to this overcrowding problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Long Term:

Purchase land and build a new state of the art high school large enough to have a wide array of classroom and athletic spaces that will serve North Atlanta High School students. The current high school building, located at 2875 Northside Drive, will become a second IB middle school for the northside neighborhood.

Short Term:

Place portable classrooms on the Sutton site until the new high school construction can be completed.

DISCUSSION

A piece of property has been located in the Buckhead community that can accommodate a new, state-of-the-art high school, athletic fields, and parking. So as not to jeopardize the negotiations, the district cannot provide additional details. North Atlanta High School is currently undergoing renovations. The district's investments in these renovations will make the new middle school at that site more attractive and beneficial to students.

FAQ

1. What options did you explore before deciding on the current recommendation?

The district explored many options, including the creation of a sixth grade annex, building additional space on the Sutton campus (either temporary or permanent), creation of a new middle school and rezoning.

- Build a Sutton sixth grade annex: The district retained the services of two real estate brokers to canvass the Sutton attendance zone for properties suitable to either convert or build a sixth grade annex. A minimum of 12-16 acres is needed for the annex depending on the topography. The site would also have to have green space that could be used for athletic fields and be close to the main campus. Approximately 30 potential sites were identified. Many of these sites are currently occupied with either homes, apartments or commercial establishments. Some are vacant land or vacant commercial sites. None of the sites could be utilized as is with the exception of one commercial site that was a former office building. However, that site has no green space for athletics and is on a very busy street. We also looked at churches that have educational buildings, but none were large enough for a middle school program. The district was unable to locate a site that made sense from a financial or location standpoint.
- Add additional space to Sutton: We analyzed Sutton's campus to determine how many additional classroom spaces could be created on the existing site. The school currently is occupying the majority of its usable land. However, we can add eight portable classrooms and cafeteria space to accommodate approximately 208 students on the site of the tennis courts. Additional portables could also be placed in that area if required. If a permanent addition were constructed all available land on the site would have to be utilized and additional land would have to be purchased for field and parking spaces. Based on the anticipated enrollment numbers, this scenario would provide only a short-term solution to the overcrowding problem and is not fiscally responsible.
- Rezoning: The district considered if it could rezone students to another middle school where there is capacity. However, in order to remove a sufficient number of students from Sutton's attendance zone for a long term solution, major rezoning will need to occur. Based on the projections from each feeder school, this would mean that several schools would have to be rezoned. Currently, there is a strong vertical implementation of the IB program between the International Baccalaureate Program (PYP) elementary feeder schools, the International Baccalaureate Program Middle Years Programme (MYP) at Sutton, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme at North Atlanta High School. The Atlanta Public Schools does not have another middle or high school where the International Baccalaureate Program is offered and authorization of an MYP program at another school can take from

three to five years. In addition, we have invested a tremendous amount of financial resources for staff to be trained in the IB curriculum. We have also expended significant resources in paying the annual authorization fees for the IB program. If rezoning were to occur, staff would be redistributed to schools without the IB curriculum, resulting in a loss of the training and authorization investments. Lastly, there is no other middle school in close proximity to the Sutton neighborhood that has capacity to accommodate Sutton students.

2. Why did you wait so long to begin looking for a solution for Sutton?

Over the last several years the district has been working to solve the overcrowding problem in the entire northern part of the district. Our immediate attention and resources had to be directed toward the elementary schools because of the acute overcrowding that was occurring as a result of the success of those schools. In order to address the elementary schools, we purchased land and built an annex for Sarah Smith Elementary School at a cost of \$14 million. We also renovated and expanded the Margaret Mitchell property for an annex for Brandon Elementary School at a cost of \$12.9 million. In addition, we renovated and expanded the Tuxedo property as an annex for Jackson Elementary School for a cost of \$4.3 million.

While looking for property for the Sarah Smith Annex, we also had our brokers look for property to provide relief for Sutton. We also monitored the enrollment data to determine if the rezoning of Brandon and Jackson that recently occurred would allow us to return all of Jackson's students to the main building. This would have allowed the Tuxedo site to become a 6th grade annex for Sutton. More and more students have continued to enroll at Jackson and we do not foresee students at the annex returning to the main Jackson building at any the time in the near future. We have been aggressively looking for property for a Sutton 6th grade annex or another middle school for the last two years, but we were unable to find anything that was both fiscally prudent and in an optimum location for either an annex or a new middle school..

3. Where will the new high school be located?

We have identified a piece of property within Buckhead and are using the services of a broker to help us secure the site.

4. Who will the new high school serve?

The high school will serve students currently in the North Atlanta High School cluster. No additional schools are projected to be added to the high school.

5. How long will it take to build a new high school?

It generally takes approximately 18 months to build a high school. If we are able to secure the property by the end of this calendar year, we anticipate that the school will be ready by the opening of the 2012-2013 school year.

6. What will it cost to build a new high school?

Typically, a new high school costs \$35 to \$45 million. We are reviewing and re-prioritizing our capital priorities to create the funding necessary for the implementation of this plan and exploring additional ways to secure the additional funding that will be required.

7. What factors will be considered when rezoning for the second middle school to be housed at North Atlanta?

We will use the same factors that we use for all rezoning recommendations. Following are the key factors:

- The projected number of students in the area and any changes in the community that may increase or decrease enrollment;
- The presence of major thoroughfares and other boundaries;
- The proximity and distance to the schools included in the rezoning recommendation;
- The extent to which children from the same immediate neighborhood can attend school together.

Just as we have done in the past, our principals are involved in the planning process. We have just retained a company to perform another demographic analysis of the city and will use this data to assist in the determination any rezoning recommendation.

8. What is the timeline for placing portables on Sutton?

Portable classrooms will be placed on the school property in time for the opening of the 2010-2011 school year.

If you have questions or would like to provide feedback, you may do so by emailing suttonfeedback@atlantapublicschools.us.