

This update from the School Building Committee (SBC) contains information on the improvements made to the Pompo and Center schools this past summer. The article will also attempt to set the record straight regarding some misunderstandings regarding the SBC.

Voters at the Annual Town Meetings in 2003 and 2004 approved a total of \$695,000 for various projects at the two schools. Of that sum, \$595,000 was for the purpose of addressing certain health and safety concerns. The remaining appropriation was for removing the stairs (risers) from the so-called “amphitheaters” at Pompo.

Here is a summary of the main upgrades and construction work:

- Added new drains and upgraded existing drains on Center roof; installed larger drain pipes
- Installed new backup generator at Center
- Installed new intercom at Center
- Upgraded fire alarm system at Center
- Added electrical outlets at Center
- Overhauled heating/ventilation systems at Center and Pompo
- Replaced defective plumbing fixtures/faucets at Center
- Patched driveway at Center
- Removed risers from amphitheaters at Pompo
- Completed electrical upgrades at Pompo
- Added walkway and replaced gym door at Center for disabled access

As a result of these projects, both schools are safer, air quality is better, and the heating/ventilation systems are more efficient. Also, the amphitheaters at Pompo can now serve as traditional classrooms. We want to stress, however, that we did this work only to make sure the two buildings can be used during the time it will take to complete the renovation/construction required to meet the town’s long-term needs.

The SBC is working hard to inform voters about the committee’s work and to listen to their comments and suggestions. For the past several months, we have conducted an outreach program involving meetings with most town boards and committees, the Concerned Citizens of Stow, and parents. During the course of these meetings, it became clear that some residents had incorrect information or perceptions. The SBC hopes that the following responses will be helpful:

Perception: The enrollment projections prepared by the SBC are incorrect.

Reality: These projections are based upon actual historical enrollments and reasonable assumptions about changes over the next ten years. Copies of our analysis and rationale are available upon request. (A summary appeared in an earlier newspaper article.)

Perception: Why can’t the preK children go to regular daycare facilities?

Reality: The school district is obligated to provide preK services for special education children. The model for preK in our district matches each special education student with

a regular education student. Also, the preK program provided by the district is more structured than traditional daycare.

Perception: Why do we need classrooms for preK and full-day K?

Reality: The SBC is simply responding to current and projected needs defined by the School Committee. Questions about preK and full-day K space requirements should be directed to the School Committee.

Perception: Why do we have to build a “Taj Mahal”?

Reality: We do not need an extravagant building, and there are no plans to construct one.

Perception: The SBC seems “stuck” on building a new school rather than renovating our existing buildings.

Reality: During the deliberations leading up to the Feasibility Study that was completed Nov. 27, 2002, the SBC considered both renovations of the existing schools and new construction. At that time, the most cost-effective option involved construction of a new school on the Center site and razing the existing building. On Jan. 6, 2003, the SBC met with two members of the Capital Planning Committee who urged that the SBC look for a new site. They expressed concerns that the Center site was not large enough and that it would not support the required water and septic systems. The SBC listened carefully and concluded that we should try to find other land. As a result, the SBC did consider construction of a new school on a new site.

Perception: We can add the classrooms we need without doing new construction, and we can do so for \$7.5 million or less.

Reality: The SBC is trying to address two problems: insufficient classroom space for the future and sub-standard support spaces now. Recognizing that it is more efficient to operate one building rather than two, the SBC has requested a plan for a preK-5 school based upon expansion of the Center school. This plan will include a cost projection that will be used as part of our application for state building assistance. (The state program restarts on July 1, 2007.) Until we receive the plan, we will not know the cost of the project.

Perception: The cost of the new school will be \$35 million.

Reality: The SBC has reviewed several options for renovation/addition and new construction. None of the costs has even approached \$35 million. All of our detailed cost data are available for public review, and the SBC respectfully requests that interested citizens check the facts.

Perception: There is a general lack of confidence in the SBC and the consultant they have hired.

Reality: The members of the SBC believe they have analyzed various options for our elementary schools with objectivity and integrity. We are trying to let the facts guide our recommendations, and we did not undertake this task with a foregone conclusion in mind. The consultant is Design Partnership of Cambridge (DPC)—the same consultant that worked on the Hale renovation project. Speaking from personal experience, the SBC

Chairman can state that DPC has worked hard to control costs and provide plans based upon specifications from the SBC. We remind voters that we serve at the pleasure of the Selectmen and the Stow School Committee representatives, and they are in a position to change the membership of the SBC.

Perception: We have wasted enough money on consultants and studies. Instead, we should spend the money to renovate the schools.

Reality: School renovation and construction projects require input from professionals who understand the issues well enough to prepare realistic plans and budgets. The consultant is typically an architect with experience in school building work. Consultants provide a valuable and necessary service.

Perception: The SBC should explore renovation of both Pompo and Center.

Reality: Renovations and additions at both schools were considered in the Feasibility Study. Land around Pompo is very wet, and this fact will limit expansion of that building. Pompo lacks a traditional classroom layout, and it will likely cost more to build rooms and add a second story to that building than at Center. Pompo has potential for other municipal uses (as a fire station and senior center, for example). Center is located near Hale and it would be advantageous to site both of Stow's schools on a single "campus". For these reasons, the SBC wants to determine whether Center school can be expanded to accommodate the projected preK-5 enrollment over the next decade.

The SBC will be happy to answer any questions regarding our activities and plans. We usually meet at 7 p.m. on the first and third Monday each month at Town Building. You may also contact me at 978-897-5803 or s.dungan@att.net.

Steve Dungan
Chairman, Stow School Building Committee

To the editor:

I am writing to apologize to the daycare professionals in the area who were offended by a comment I made in a recent guest column on the activities of the Stow School Building Committee.

In an attempt to explain why the school district has to provide a preK program, I made the following statement: "...the preK program provided by the district is more structured than traditional daycare." The point here is that the district's preK program is designed primarily to support special needs children, and it must therefore adhere to the applicable requirements. I never intended to suggest that daycare programs provided outside the school district are inferior. Furthermore, the district has no plans to provide a program for all preK children. In fact, the preK enrollment in the district is determined solely by the number of special needs children in that age group. As I also stated in the guest column, "The model for preK in our district matches each special education student with

a regular education student.” The objective is a one-to-one ratio of special needs children to regular education children.

The guest column should have included a more complete explanation of the school district’s preK service. In hindsight, I can see how my brief comment came across. Again, I apologize.

Sincerely,

Steve Dungan
Chair, Stow School Building Committee