

**Brookline School Population and Capacity Exploration (B-SPACE) Committee  
FAQ on NEW SCHOOL OPTIONS & IMPLICATIONS 4/2/13**

**Please share your reactions, questions, and ideas at B-SPACE's first Public Hearing: Monday, April 8, in the Selectmen's Hearing Room, 6<sup>th</sup> floor of Town Hall.**

This FAQ about various proposals for expanding capacity in Brookline's public schools is meant to inform the public discussion and debate about whether and how to add a new school in Brookline. Public feedback will help B-SPACE compare different options and start to develop its recommendations. The Committee wants to know: a) what you like or don't like about the different options; b) whether you have other ideas we should consider; and/or c) whether there are important questions to which you need answers before making up your mind about what option or set of options you favor for Brookline.

This FAQ addresses (click on the question to jump to the answer):

1. **What's the Scope of the Problem?**
2. **What's possible or impossible? Why?**
3. **What other considerations are important?**
4. **What new school models/plans meet the requirements and considerations listed?**
  - 8th Grade at OLS then a new 8th-9th School
  - New K-8 Neighborhood Elementary School
  - Two-Building "Super" Elementary School
5. **Are any "innovation" models still being considered, such as a 6th grade campus or concept school?**
6. **Where would Brookline build a new school building?**
7. **I thought Brookline owned lots of land and buildings. What about the field in front of the high school, Larz Anderson, Putterham Golf Course, the libraries, or even Town Hall?**
8. **Why aren't we just building modulars at every school and calling the problem solved?**
9. **What will it cost to build a new school building? Can the Town afford it?**
10. **If the operating budget for the schools is in trouble AND we have to build a new school, does that mean both a Debt Exclusion Override and a Property Tax Operating Override?**
11. **How much of a tax increase would this mean for Brookline homeowners?**
12. **What happens if we decide to build a new school and an override fails to pass?**

The B-SPACE Committee (comprised of Town and Schools representatives, Advisory Committee, Building Commission, Parent and Community members) was convened by the Selectmen at the request of the School Committee to engage the whole town in a conversation about how to address the long-term challenges of exploding school enrollments. B-SPACE will make its recommendations in June/July of 2013. To date, it has explored a number of ideas for reducing enrollments, increasing space, and addressing both capital and operating budget challenges for the schools. If you have general questions about B-SPACE, please see the first [B-SPACE FAQ](#).

To be part of this discussion, **come to a Public Hearing on Monday, April 8, at 6:30 pm** in the Selectmen's Hearing Room (6<sup>th</sup> floor, Town Hall). Have a comment or question but can't come to a meeting? [Send us an email!](#)

**1. Q: What's the Scope of the Problem?**

**A:** The problem has four main components:

- Elementary Schools: After several years of extraordinary enrollment growth (an increase of 30% (1171 students) in the elementary schools since 2006, resulting in an additional 37 sections), the Public Schools of Brookline (PSB) will be, in 2014-2015, at or over its physical capacity across the district. Recently renovated schools were expanded only to meet the known enrollment demands of those schools.
- Brookline High School (BHS): As these large elementary enrollments age, Brookline High School will eventually be affected, with challenged physical capacity beginning as early as 2017-18, and over-capacity enrollments of 2,500 by 2022.
- Operating Budget for Public Schools of Brookline (PSB): Along with higher enrollments has come the need to add teaching and specialist/support staff as the Schools strive to maintain their commitment to lower class sizes, educational equity, and quality special services, resulting in annual operating deficits and reductions in valued programs and/or supports.
- Capital Budget for Town: The need for additional classrooms continues to challenge the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) as we pursue aggressive reconfiguration of our existing school spaces, renovation and expansion of school buildings with the assistance of the Mass. School Building Authority (MSBA), rental space outside the schools for pre-Ks, and selective use of modulars where feasible (if never desirable).

(for detail on the enrollment growth, see [Power Point Presentation to Committee 1/14/13](#))

**2. Q: What's possible or impossible? Why?**

**A:** B-SPACE agrees with the Superintendent of Schools on the following assumption and givens that guide the set of options under consideration for a new school facility:

- The model to be implemented must take pressure off the existing K-8 schools to accommodate the enrollment growth.
  - WHY? Because this is the main reason we are looking at expansion. Adding a school without solving the underlying problem (crowding at ALL current buildings) is not an acceptable option.

- If it is anything other than a Brookline K-8 school, the proposed model must bring significant learning advantages to our students and our school system.
  - WHY? Because any new school (even a K-8) will necessarily mean an increase in operating costs for the schools and potentially a need for more capital funds than are currently available, the Brookline community needs to see it as a worthwhile investment that improves the school system as a whole, not just something that fixes a crowding problem or appeals to a small percentage of the community.
- Any plan/model must meet the Public Schools of Brookline commitment to educational equity, meaning its benefits and/or burdens must be shared equitably across the PSB population.
- The plan must take into account the limits of space at Old Lincoln School (estimated to be able to accommodate 500-600 students, depending on type of school, ages of students, and level of capital investment).
  - WHY? Old Lincoln School is our only existing facility that could take up to 525 students right away, but because its capacity is less than our large grade enrollments (in 2017-2018, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade population will be 651 students), it falls short of what is needed for certain models, including single-grade models ([described below](#)), in the long run.
- Any plan/model must have a realistic timeframe for implementation, including capital renovation or new building and staffing, and must be serviceable by the Town (maintenance & upkeep).
  - WHY? Given the constraints of space and financing, only certain models could be put in place for 2014-2015, only some can realistically be financed given the other demands on the Town's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and any building needs maintenance of its systems, roof, windows, etc., which affects other budgets and staff in town. In particular, staffing a new school would require starting this fall (2013) to develop its program and hire some staff in order to be ready to open in September 2014.

### **3. Q: What about Special Education, assignment of teachers, the High School, and future residential developments/growth?**

**A:** These are all considerations against which any plan must be measured:

- Maintaining our commitments to quality special education services is a paramount consideration. These programs and teachers are most efficient and effective when they work across multiple grades in a school, so this consideration is of particular concern and potential cost with a single-grade school model.
- Because teachers are licensed to teach specific grades, grade spans, and/or subjects, and because proper licensing must be maintained by law, different models may be more difficult to staff using current faculty.
- A strong model/plan will include an allowance for anticipated new residential developments as well as the possibility that enrollments may eventually decline.

- WHY? With big questions surrounding potential new private development and Housing Authority units in north Brookline, possible development of Hancock Village in South Brookline, and unknowns about whether the growth of the school-age population in Brookline will continue, models that can respond flexibly to unknown future fluctuations in student population are preferred.
- Given the overall financial implications of having to address immediate elementary overcrowding and eventual overcrowding at the High School, “combined” solutions (elementary and high school) must be strongly considered.
  - WHY? In 2017-2018, the same year that Old Lincoln School will be unable to house a whole grade, Brookline High School’s population will increase from today’s 1,767 to approximately 2,136 students, a number that would severely challenge the present BHS campus. By 2022, BHS will have to accommodate 2,500 students. (A separate Concept Study for BHS is underway to make recommendations for expanding space there.)

#### **4. Q: What new school models/plans meet all of the requirements and considerations listed in this FAQ?**

**A:** It remains to be seen which of many ideas meet all of the requirements because none of them have been fully investigated, all have pros and cons, and all are still subject to community discussion. But three ideas have risen to the top of consideration because they appear to be best matched with the expressed objectives and constraints:

- ❖ 8<sup>th</sup> Grade School at Old Lincoln → Combined 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> School at new facility

The idea: With modest renovations, Old Lincoln School can be ready to take the entire 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the fall of 2014. This would relieve significant space in all the existing K-8s, and would give us three additional years to plan and build a new facility that would become, in 2017-18 (which is the year that OLS will no longer be big enough for the grade) a permanent 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> School for all Brookline students.

Advantages:

- 1) This plan utilizes Old Lincoln well in the short run, accommodates its size limitations, and eventually returns OLS to be used for swing space.
- 2) This plan removes sufficient numbers from both the elementary schools and BHS, so that expensive renovation/expansion of BHS would not be necessary.
- 3) Both the 8<sup>th</sup> grade school and the new 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> school could be sites of innovation in teaching and learning, such as on-going professional collaboration across common curriculum; a school built around the developmental needs of 8th grade students to maximize intellectual and social engagement; teaching or curriculum content teams to create a more personalized school experience; or a schedule built around a longer school day/longer school year with access to BHS Unified Arts facilities, time for interest clubs (math, performing arts, Destination Imagination), or community service/service learning.
- 4) The plan includes all students in Brookline, so is equitable and would not involve any redistricting of attendance areas.

- 5) This plan may free up enough space in existing elementary buildings to return some pre-K classes to those buildings.
- 6) Other elementary schools would be reconfigured as K-7 (or PK-7), but this would allow grades 6 and 7 to be taught in the configuration currently used for grades 7 and 8 (i.e. content-based, rather than age-based classrooms).

**Drawbacks:**

- 1) There has been no site identified for a new school building, and all sites under consideration present some challenges.
- 2) The 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> school would need to house 1300 students, making it a substantial structure and therefore likely very expensive to build, operate, and maintain. For comparison, the renovation of Devotion School (at approximately 810 students) is expected to cost \$90 million.
- 3) It would be extremely difficult to bring a brand new facility from concept through occupancy in 4 ½ years, even if the community embraces the concept and expense.
- 4) Concerns for the 8th grade transition school include the nature of a one-grade school and transitions, particularly for certain of our special education populations.
- 5) The model would require a close examination of the licenses held by current 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers.

❖ **New K-8 Neighborhood Elementary School**

The Idea: Brookline would build a new school building to house a 9<sup>th</sup> neighborhood K-8 elementary school. Because a new building cannot be ready in time (i.e. 2014-15), students assigned to that school would temporarily be housed at Old Lincoln School until the new school is built. To implement this plan, the site for the school would have to be established and its neighborhood district boundaries drawn, enabling the PSB to identify which students would then be temporarily housed at OLS. With one new district established, all other neighborhood districts would also have to be redrawn and the new district definitions implemented simultaneously to accomplish the relief of space pressure in the other 8 elementary schools.

**Advantages:**

- 1) Extends the existing model for Brookline elementary schools rather than challenging that model with a new “concept” or structure.
- 2) Temporary use of Old Lincoln returns it to use either as swing space or potentially as extra space that extends the BHS campus and relieves crowding there.
- 3) Is equitable: offers the same structure to students/families and burdens equitably through town-wide redistricting.

**Drawbacks:**

- 1) This plan would require building a new school building.
- 2) As with the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> plan, there is no site currently identified for building a new facility, but one would have to be identified in order to draw the new district boundaries.
- 3) Redistricting every school enrollment area would be difficult and painful for many families who would be required to change schools (school transitions have been identified in education research as disruptive to learning).

### ❖ “Super-Elementary” School

The Idea: In the crowded corridor of northeast Brookline (Devotion, Driscoll, Lincoln, Lawrence, Pierce), a “super elementary” school would be created out of one of the existing schools adjacent to Old Lincoln (Lincoln, Pierce, Lawrence), using the existing elementary as a lower-grades school and a renovated Old Lincoln as the site for the upper grades. District boundaries for the northeast schools would be redrawn in order for this “super elementary” to draw away from those other schools and relieve the pressure in them by effectively doubling the capacity of the new two-building school.

#### Advantages:

- 1) Relieves pressure in our most space-challenged buildings.
- 2) Does not require finding a site for or building a new school.
- 3) Provides some opportunity to innovate with a new split-school model.
- 4) Retains the identity of a K-8 school for students who attend, if not the co-location.
- 5) Places older students at Old Lincoln, as has been deemed appropriate for that site given limited outdoor space and the location on Rt. 9.

#### Drawbacks:

- 1) Redistricting would be required, although more limited given only 4 of 8 schools affected.
- 2) The impact of the plan would be felt by only half the schools/families, rather than shared equitably.
- 3) Other schools would not get relief from their overcrowding, potentially requiring other adjustments (such as modulars) at those locations.
- 4) The new “super school” would not feel like the other K-8 elementaries because of the physical split – a model used years ago when Lincoln was based at two different sites.
- 5) Permanently uses Old Lincoln, removing it as swing space or as possible help to relieve overcrowding at BHS.
- 6) Does nothing to address crowding at BHS or potential residential growth elsewhere in town.

### **5. Q: Are any “innovation” models still being considered, such as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade campus or concept school?**

**A:** No options are off the table, but the three discussed above have risen to the top because of the range of advantages they offer. Other ideas, such as a 6<sup>th</sup> grade campus, would be more complicated to initiate at Old Lincoln School because the current 4<sup>th</sup> grade (which will be in 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 2014-15) is already 575 students, straining the capacity of Old Lincoln School. However, if the idea of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade campus receives public support as a model that would give Brookline exciting new options for curricular innovation, the B-SPACE Committee would explore it further. The same is true for “concept” schools such as a language immersion, performing arts, and IB school, or a STEM school.

### **6. Q: Where would Brookline build a new school building?**

**A:** Brookline has limited site options for a new school building, given current land holdings, [Article 97 protection](#) of open space, existing structures, and the cost of purchasing any new land or existing buildings.

The two main locations discussed by B-SPACE include:

**Baldwin School:** Currently the most likely site for any new building, the Baldwin School is located on Heath Street, adjacent to the Soule Recreation Center. It currently houses the Brookline Staff Day-Care Program and BHS's Winthrop House program. Putting aside the question of where those programs could be re-located, the building would have to be substantially rebuilt and expanded to serve as a new school, regardless of what kind of school goes there. Baldwin School is located in the Chestnut Hill National Register Historic District and is listed on the State Register of Historic Properties, but the majority of the property is not subject to Article 97.

**Lynch Center:** Located on Brookline Ave. adjacent to a large playing field, the Lynch Center currently houses several BEEP pre-K programs. The parcel is made up of several gifts to the Town, has numerous complications related to prior use (e.g. environmental issues below ground), and is protected by Article 97, making it all-but-impossible to renovate and/or expand.

**7. Q: I thought Brookline owned lots of land and buildings. What about the field in front of the high school, Larz Anderson, Putterham Golf Course, the libraries, or even Town Hall?**

**A:** All of these have been raised and, for various reasons having to do with current use, cost of purchase, amount of time necessary for conversion, legislative requirements, physical constraints of a site, and/or Article 97, they are not under active consideration. Since every possible site has challenges that have not been fully explored, however, we may have to reconsider other sites as the analysis proceeds.

**8. Q: Why aren't we just building modulars at every school and calling the problem solved?**

**A:** To address immediate overcrowding, the PSB is installing modulars at the Lawrence School and continues to consider modulars at other schools as they reach their maximum capacity. According to feasibility studies conducted in 2010 and 2012 of potential modular use in Brookline, very few of our elementary schools have the land capacity to easily absorb any modular classrooms, so their use already implicates covering parking lots or other desirable property. Moreover, modulars are expensive (approximately \$400-\$500K per classroom, depending on location and variable costs of installation), they do not address the overcrowding of common spaces in schools (cafeterias, gyms, performance spaces, libraries), and they can be controversial in the neighborhoods that are asked to absorb them because of their reputation as boxy, unattractive structures.

**9. Q: What will it cost to build a new school building? Can the Town afford it?**

**A:** The cost/affordability of a new school building depends on:

- Whether land and/or an existing structure must be purchased by the Town;
- Whether the site requires extraordinary remediation costs (e.g. environmental clean-up) or for which we must secure a release from Article 97 open space protections;

- The size of what is proposed and the nature of the program it will house. Given the difference in enrollment scenarios of the above options, a “new school” for a K-8 would have to house approximately 600 students, while a building for the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> scenario would have to house 1300 (assuming two full grades of up to 650 students each) and might include programming not currently offered in K-8s or at the high school.
- Whether the Massachusetts School Building Authority works with the Town to finance the new building (as they have with Lawrence, Runkle, Heath, and now Devotion);
- Whether citizens are willing to pay for these additional costs through approving a [Debt Exclusion Override/General Operating Override](#). The principal difference between the two is a Debt Exclusion Override is a *temporary increase* to your property taxes to finance capital (e.g. the Debt Exclusion passed to build the New Lincoln School expires this year), while a General Operating Override is a *permanent increase* in the tax levy to finance specific ongoing operating costs of the Town (e.g. the 2008 override that provided funds for police and fire, sidewalks, extending the school day, and adding universal K-6 world language to the core program in the public schools).

**10. Q: If the operating budget for the schools is in trouble AND we have to build a new school, does that mean we need both a Debt Exclusion Override and a Property Tax Operating Override?**

**A:** In all likelihood, yes, absent any changes to educational policy and/or to employee contracts. The Town Administrator and his staff have suggested that both would be necessary under all the scenarios now contemplated.

**11. Q: How much of a tax increase would this mean for Brookline homeowners?**

**A:** According to the Town Administrator and his staff, based on current (FY13) home values and tax rates, a debt exclusion override would add \$73 for each million dollars of debt service for the median Single Family (SF) home (median= \$1.07M value), \$29 for the median condo (median =\$425K value), both assuming the Residential Exemption, and \$117 for the median commercial property (median =\$1.09M value). So, for example, if we had a debt exclusion override for the Devotion project (\$4.8M estimated debt service in the first year), assuming current assessments and tax rates, the annual additional cost would be approximately \$352 for the median SF home, \$140 for the median condo, and \$577 for the median commercial property.

A general operating override would be separately calculated, based on the amount of revenue sought. That amount will depend substantially on what form of new program/school is decided upon by the community. What we know is that the additional cost of staffing an additional K-8 elementary school (see Draft Budget K-8 #9 School) would likely be more than \$2 million per year and that the schools are currently facing a need for new revenues to build and/or restore other programs such as music, technology, and enrichment/challenge support).

**12. Q: What happens if we decide on a model requiring a new school and an override fails to pass?**

**A:** We would probably have no choice but to use less expensive and less attractive options (such as a plan that only uses OLS, more modulars at some schools, larger class sizes, additional use of leased space and possible off-siting of pre-K and Kindergarten

classrooms, and/or scheduling double sessions at the High School). For this reason, part of B-SPACE's charge is to put forward recommendations that are known to have community support. This ongoing dialogue about options is part of gauging that support and learning what kinds of questions the community has about the various options under consideration.

Still have questions? [Send us an email!](#)