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[CE SBAC] Support of Option E

1 message

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Mon, May 6, 2024 at 12:10 PM

To: cesbac@capeelizabethschools.org

Dear Members of the SBAC,

The tl;dr version of this message is that I support Option E for the schools. My first choice was to replace both schools, so this support already reflects compromise.

I'm writing this note as an alumna of all three Cape schools (Class of 2000—one of Tim's daughters and a son of Larry were classmates), a mom of two, a school volunteer, a resident of Elizabeth Park, and the co-owner of a 12 year old Subaru (it's our only vehicle).

Having been a child when the '90s renovations were being considered, I don't remember the particulars of the town deciding how and when to renovate. What I do remember is part of the school facilities being closed down for asbestos abatement. I remember walking through a school that looked partially deconstructed and playing Oregon Trail in a portable. I remember some classrooms were overheated and others were freezing.

Did the renovations accomplish anything? Sure! It was certainly preferable to eat in a new cafeteria instead of the basement of the 1930s building with its crumbling ceilings. The classrooms felt fresh, even if much of the construction largely involved pasting veneers over existing walls. Even my eighth grade teachers initially expressed approval over the new wing, even if a pipe did burst during the first month of school.

However, the buildings continued to exist as the school equivalent of suburban sprawl. The interesting thing about this is that you'd think that a sprawling campus would provide more than enough space for a school's needs. So I was shocked on a school tour to find the office that used to be used exclusively for special-education purposes now doubles as the Vice Principal's office. As a volunteer, I'm routinely in parts of the school that have run out of storage. Option E is the only option that will make efficient and productive use of space.

The contradiction of sprawl and space wouldn't have mattered as much in the 90s. It was just how some schools were. I was on the indoor track team—if anything, a sprawling school layout was fantastic when it was winter and you needed to run a few miles without ever going outside. It just wasn't a big deal. Inefficient, sure. Certainly not a security risk. But then, Columbine hadn't happened yet.

Schools are different now; sprawl is a massive liability. Columbine was terrible, but the failure of our

country to prevent Sandy Hook, Uvalde, Parkland and countless other tragedies from happening is far worse. When the culture and laws won't change, it means that our schools have to change how they're built. I'm not alone in wanting my kids and their beloved teachers and staff to feel safe when they're in school. I want to volunteer in the building without staring at an emergency response poster while rolling balls of clay for the art classroom. What exactly is the protocol for dealing with an active shooter situation when you're standing in an open space being used for storage overflow? The poster only tells me that in "lesser" emergencies, teachers are expected to continue with their lessons without interruption. Option E is the only option that truly addresses the safety of our schools.

Financially, how have we not planned for this? How long have we been discussing the need for new schools? My husband and I know that we'll need to buy a second vehicle to supplement or replace our Subaru—we're saving up for it because that's what you do when you know a large expense is looming. The budgeting we do in our family has the added benefit of shielding us from property evaluations and higher tax burdens. These things do not intimidate our family because we've anticipated them. How is it that a town that boasts such academic excellence and a highly-educated population is one that not only refuses to set itself up for success, but habitually ignores the experts we hired to get our town on the right track? Option E is the only option that lets us learn from our mistakes by interrupting the expensive cycle of repair and renovation.

I appreciate all the work you've done, truly. The task facing you is challenging because of our failure as a town to take the long view. That said, I'm deeply concerned by some of the behavior I've seen in this committee. I'm tired of loud voices drowning out the experts and facts; I'm tired of excess time being dedicated to discussion of heat pumps and specious data about birth rates, along with other dog whistles that only serve to distract from the very real, very scary issues driving the need for new schools. "We can do better" indeed.

Sincere regards,

Kathryn Swayze
19 Meadow Way

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