

# Community Research to Inform Facilities Master Planning



**Hudsonville Public Schools**

*A Great Place To Learn!*

## Winter 2015 Focus Groups Report of Findings Parents, Residents, Staff, Business/ Community Leaders, and Students

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## Introduction

As Hudsonville Public Schools considers how to manage enrollment growth, it is essential to communicate with and involve its communities of parents, residents, staff, business leaders, civic/community leaders and students in the planning process. Consequently, Hudsonville Public Schools has conducted community research to gather data to inform facilities master planning.

The value of this community research is threefold:

- Collects each stakeholder group's distinct perceptions of the Hudsonville district's relevant educational needs, issues, culture and performance
- Enables Hudsonville Public Schools to dialogue and strengthen its relationship with its various community members
- Acts to inform students, parents, district residents, and staff about the issues facing Hudsonville Public Schools and to propose alternative solutions

This community research centers around plans to manage enrollment growth and possible options for facilities master planning within Hudsonville Public Schools. Participants are encouraged to explore general thoughts and perceptions of Hudsonville Schools as well as provide specific feedback on 1) enrollment, 2) building capacities, 3) proactive measures, 4) possible election, 5) new elementary school option, and 6) new middle school option.

This report details findings from eleven focus groups conducted January 15th, 2015 through February 4, 2015 with a **total of 149** parents, elementary staff, secondary staff, business leaders, community leaders, and students.

Six groups were conducted with 55 representative Hudsonville district current parents, three groups with 40 elementary and secondary teachers, one group with 41 Hudsonville High School 11th- and 12th-grade students, and one group with 13 Hudsonville business and civic representatives.

Parents with children currently attending Hudsonville Public Schools were randomly selected and emailed invitations approximately two weeks prior to the group sessions by the superintendent's office. Invitations to designated community leaders were extended via mail, email and telephone by the superintendent's office. Hudsonville staff were randomly selected and invited by email from the superintendent's office.

Attendance was outstanding. Approximately 250 randomly selected parents and staff were invited via email with 96 parents and staff members attending, which provided for a response rate of 38.4%. Over 95% of the individuals who RSVP'ed actually attended one of the eleven sessions.

Dates, times and locations of the eleven focus groups include (# of participants):

Student Focus Group (Hudsonville High School):

- \* Monday, January 12 at 7:50 AM (41)

Parent Focus Group (3886 VanBuren Street Hudsonville Administration Building):

- \* Monday, January 19 at 9:00 AM (12)
- \* Monday, January 19 at 4:00 PM (6)
- \* Monday, January 19 at 6:00 PM (10)
- \* Wednesday, January 21 at 12:00 PM (7)
- \* Wednesday, January 21 at 6:00 PM (10)
- \* Wednesday, January 28 at 6:00 PM (10)

Staff Focus Group (3886 VanBuren Street Hudsonville Administration Building):

- \* Monday, January 26 at 3:15 PM (17)
- \* Wednesday, January 28 at 4:15 PM (16)
- \* Wednesday, February 4 at 4:15 PM (7)

Community Leader Group (3886 VanBuren Street Hudsonville Administration Building):

- \* Wednesday, January 28 at 12:00 PM (13)

The student focus group lasted 72 minutes and staff, parent, and community/business leader groups lasted 90 to 100 minutes.

Among the fifty-five (55) parents participating in the six parent sessions, thirteen (13) community leaders participating in one session, and forty-one (41) teaching staff members participating in three staff sessions, the following was a breakdown of number of children attending associated schools:

School Building	Number of Students Represented	Percentage Represented
Early Childhood Center	4	3.4%
Alward Elementary School	5	4.2%
Bauer Elementary School	10	8.4%
Forest Grove Elementary School	8	6.7%
Georgetown Elementary School	6	5.0%
Jamestown Elementary School	6	5.0%
Park Elementary School	12	10.1%
South Elementary School	13	10.9%
Baldwin Street Middle School	15	12.6%
Riley Street Middle School	15	12.6%
Freshman Campus	8	6.7%
Hudsonville High School	17	14.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100%</b>

The research design, facilitation and report was developed Dr. Nicholas E. Ceglarek. The random selection process was procured by Dave Schippers, Director of Technology, generating a report of staff and parents by building and using a random number generator to identify an equal number of participants for each school and service area. While an equal amount of invitations were sent out, actual participation depended upon the respondents' interest.

## Conclusions

Parents think highly of the district. Hudsonville Schools has “*earned its reputation*.” I work at a college on the other side of town and the teachers follow through in showing they really do care about their students. That comes through loud and clear.”

Teachers are held in high regard with parents. The district is “*phenomenal! The teachers specifically make it a good experience. I hear this when people call about moving here.*” Another parent, “we moved to Georgia and promptly moved back for *the schools.*”

High level of trust and appreciation for the approach. “We appreciate the thorough communication...*we greatly appreciate the transparency.* The communication...it takes a community.”

*“It’s a well respected district, when people are looking at houses in Hudsonville and other districts, they choose Hudsonville.”*

General sense of overcrowding, “my Park 5th grader *gets on a bus for gym* at the Early Childhood Center”.

General consensus that the facilities/configuration do not make the school, the staff makes the school. “*The facilities are excellent ~ outstanding.* I’m less concerned about facilities than I am about the teachers in the classrooms. As long as they are safe, clean and secure, it’s important for kids to have what they need and they get that in all Hudsonville Schools.”

*There is strong support for an August election which turns Heritage into an elementary or middle school.* However, there is a significant difference in opposition when asked how individuals would vote during an August election for turning Heritage into an elementary school (4% no with 6% undecided) or a middle school (10% no with 16% undecided).

## Summary of Findings

### General Feedback

1. Parents, residents, business leaders, students and staff alike *acknowledge the “caring teachers” and other staff as what they like best about Hudsonville Public Schools, applauding them especially for their commitment and personal attention ...* “they’re good at what they do, they love what they do, and they love their kids” and “the teachers put their heart in what they do” and “I love the passion they have for their students, and they know who they are and what makes them tick.”
2. Parents have an extremely high opinion of all the schools within Hudsonville. “Having a background in education - no matter what facility we have walked into, the standard is held so high. *No matter where you walk in, the students are first.* We choose to do Schools of Choice here because of that.” Another parent, “my husband and I chose to build in Hudsonville prior to having a family...It was family oriented and family first-focused on academics.”
3. Strong agreement that “change is necessary” in our elementary schools and that everyone is feeling pressure due to increasing enrollment. “Definitely have no room...*my 5th grader gets bussed from Park to the ECC for gym* and our community room (at Park) has been turned into two classrooms...”
4. Significant support from the participants on the purchase of the Heritage building. “Phenomenal deal” and another parent, “How do you communicate to the community *how much money you saved the tax payers by buying Heritage....\$1.5 million compared to over \$11 million is huge.* They should know about that.”
5. General support of the parameters used to narrow the options (Equity, Flexibility, Opportunities for Students, and Fiscal Responsibility). There was one expectation mentioned by a parent participant, “One of the biggest factors missing is the social implication for the child. You can make both work. Right? *But what is best for the child developmentally?*”

6. Support was expressed with the district addressing the current splitting up of Park families (currently, depending on where a Park student lives, they may go to Riley Street Middle School or Baldwin Street Middle School) *“Right now we do schools of choice [in-district] so that we wouldn’t have to move around to ensure he’d have friends by the time my child goes to Riley otherwise he’d have none.”* However, some concern was expressed by some Park families who would prefer BMS versus the new middle school. “I hope that if a 3rd middle school opens it has a name that correlates with a street and is not called Central or City.”

7. There was a general concern voiced by some parents and business leaders about planning more than just five years out, “One of the concerns is that we’re not just looking five years. I’m hearing that we’re going to shift some kids now and some maybe later. I think we need to be careful and plan for longer term.” Several inquired about *“which plan provides the most capacity and better positions us for future growth* because, ‘they’re coming.’”

8. Focus group participants expressed a genuine appreciation of the conservative approach of the district (curriculum, operationally, and facilities). “The hallmark has always been watching the operational costs. You’re doing a great job.” In addition, there was an expression of the transparency of the process, “I wanted to say with the *process you’re going through [getting input for stakeholders], I know you’ll make the right decision* and the decision you made on the high school was the right one. Thanks for your work.”

## Election Feedback

9. Overwhelming support to pursue an August election for a possible bond issue. “I think the voting history would absolutely encourage you to put it on the ballot in August to go for \$20 million versus a potential millage increase in the near future.” With the exception of the student focus group (it was not asked), all but two participants felt it was wise to ask the voters maintain the 7.0 debt mill and to extend the debt for six years. The two felt it would be better to ask for a millage increase to pay for the needed money (less than 2%). *“I can’t see the community having a problem with asking for extending the current millage.* There won’t be a tax hike and I don’t see the community having an issue with that.”

10. Strong support for the district to dedicate dollars to reconfigure front entrances in efforts to address security. *“Really like the fact that you will be addressing each school’s front entrance from a safety and security perspective”.*

## Elementary Option

11. The major concerns with proceeding with the elementary option include: a) redistricting “Elementary parents are more emotionally vested than Middle School” and *“we have a two year old and we purchased our house based on the school district, but we bought our house knowing what elementary it would be”*, b) creating a new school with a lower than average socio-economic population, “we know that socio-economic status matters when it comes to academic outcomes”, c) how will staffing be handled, “will all elementary staff be affected?” d) some families and students will be leaving a new South school for a renovated, but older, building and e) students being able to be “grandfathered” in.

12. While both options were widely recognized as viable options, both options brought with it substantial concerns. Turning Heritage into an elementary school would require a redistricting of all elementary school boundary lines. “As a parent with a new elementary student and a new house that the elementary was a big decision on why we built, the elementary makes a big difference. Schools all have a different reputation, not necessarily in Hudsonville, but *if you choose a house and then found out your kids would be going somewhere else, I would be very upset as a parent*”.

## Middle School Option

13. The most significant concern of parents and staff if Heritage is turned into a 5-8 middle school is the significant difference in the social and developmental needs of a 5th grader (10 year old) versus an 8th grader (13 year old). “I have a fifth grader - they are still growing, getting up the extra hour early to go to school - that would be tough.” And a different parent, *“I have a 5th grader and I don’t like the idea of her being around 8th graders all the time.* The 5th grade year they are already trying to be older even at the elementary school.”

14. The major concerns with proceeding with the middle school option include: a) differences in developmental needs of a 5th grader (10 year old) and an 8th grader (13 year old), *“I have huge concern about putting 5th graders with 8th graders”*, b) additional operating expenses, “is this option worth an additional \$150,000 to \$200,000 a year? That could be as high as \$1 million over 5 years”, c) 5th grade students being placed on a secondary schedule (approximately one hour difference), “would you offer after school child care at each of the middle schools from 2:30 PM until 6 PM?” and d) being able to really separate 5th/6th graders from 7th/8th graders.

15. Some question the capacity of Baldwin Middle School if three schools “feed into it” and moving Alward, Bauer, and Georgetown 5th graders into the school. “Currently there are 800 students at BMS ~ switching some families to the new middle school and

adding 5th grade, what does that do to BMS capacity?” When hearing that the building *[BMS] would/could hold just over 900, “wow, that seems like a lot.”*

## Summary of Options

16. The students participating in the focus group had a strong leaning toward the three middle school option due to more students *“being able to make the team”*. Additionally, there was a strong sense of pride in their individual elementary school building and “it would be too hard to not be able to have my brothers or sisters go to the same school as I did.”

17. The majority of business/community leaders (5 out of 10\*) and elementary staff (13 out of 23\*) preferred the middle school option. There is concern with socio-economic make up of the new elementary school option. *“I am in support of a Middle School because of equity.* An elementary will impact Park and South the most...I worry it [new elementary school] would, to the community, seem like a dumping ground school. As a middle school, you have all socio-economics, it would be a more level playing field, not as drastic as an elementary.” \*Note: three (3) business/community leaders and one elementary staff member left prior to the vote and did not register a preference.

18. The majority of parents (32 out of 54\*) and secondary staff (11 out of 17) preferred the new elementary school option. “We have been a South family forever. We love South school, and we have have a kindergarten age student, so this is very difficult because we live by the Heritage building and *we would probably be moving schools. And even with that, I believe it is best for the district to go with a new elementary school.*” \*Note: one parent left prior to the vote and did not register a preference.

19. The total count of adults who participated in the ten (10) focus groups show a slight leaning toward the new elementary option: 53 out of 104 or 51% versus the middle school option 38 out of 104 or 37%. However, *when factoring the student input this swings the support in the direction of the Middle School option: 73 out of 145 or 50% versus 59 out of 145 or 41%.*

20. Interestingly there is more passion around the middle school option (both positive and negative). This becomes evident when inquiring whether participants would support an August election for a new elementary school: 92 out of 104 or 88% would support with only 4 participants who indicated they would vote no (4%). However, when the same question was asked for *a new Middle School the support declines by over 15% to 76 out of 104 or 73% with over 10% indicating they would vote no and another 16% undecided.*

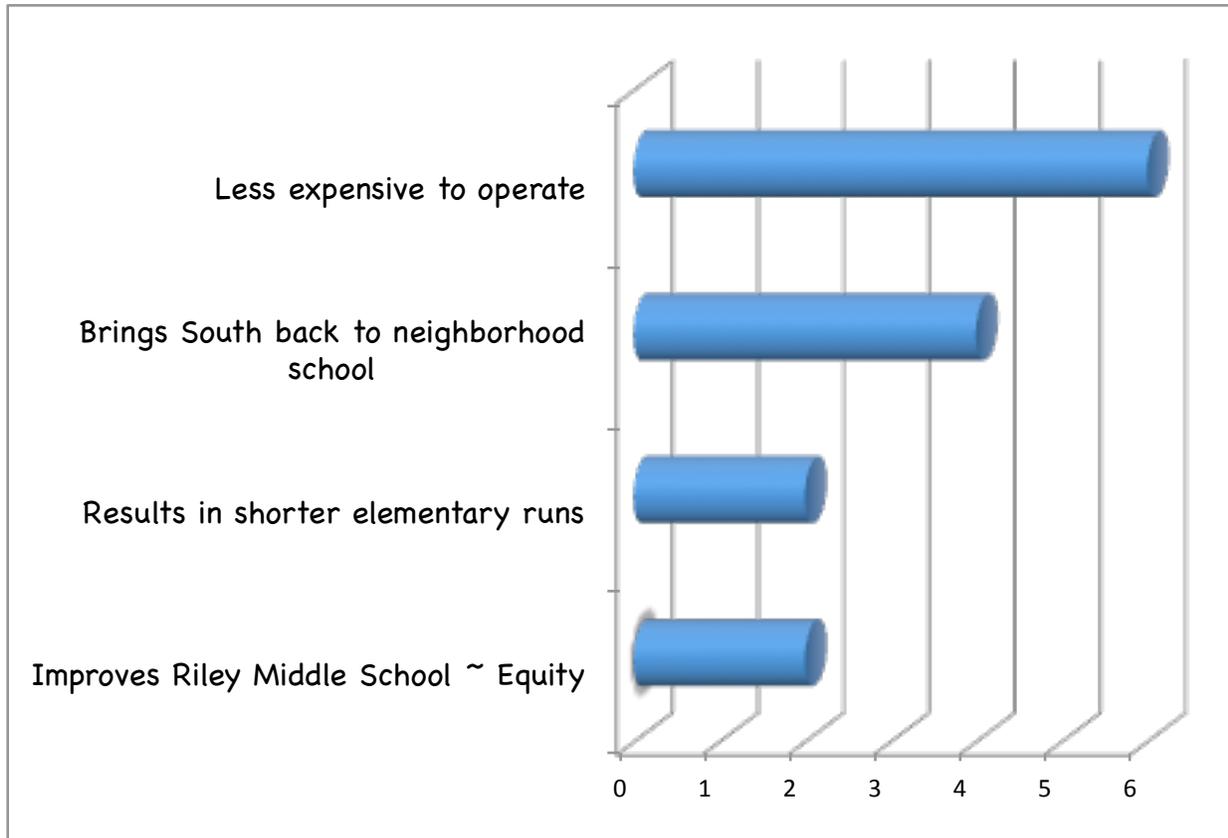
## Pros/Cons of a New Elementary School

PROS	CONS
Maintains our current curriculum and configurations (K-5, 6-8)	Redistricting impacts all elementary schools (considerations for students being grandfathered in)
Maintains a neighborhood feel to elementary buildings	Results in some students moving from a newer building into an older building
Results in some shorter elementary bus runs	Socio-economic makeup of “city” elementary
Improves Riley Middle School, making it more comparable to Baldwin Middle School	Doesn’t address capacity at Baldwin Middle School
Brings some current South students back to a neighborhood school	
Elementary Schools are typically less expensive to operate than middle schools	

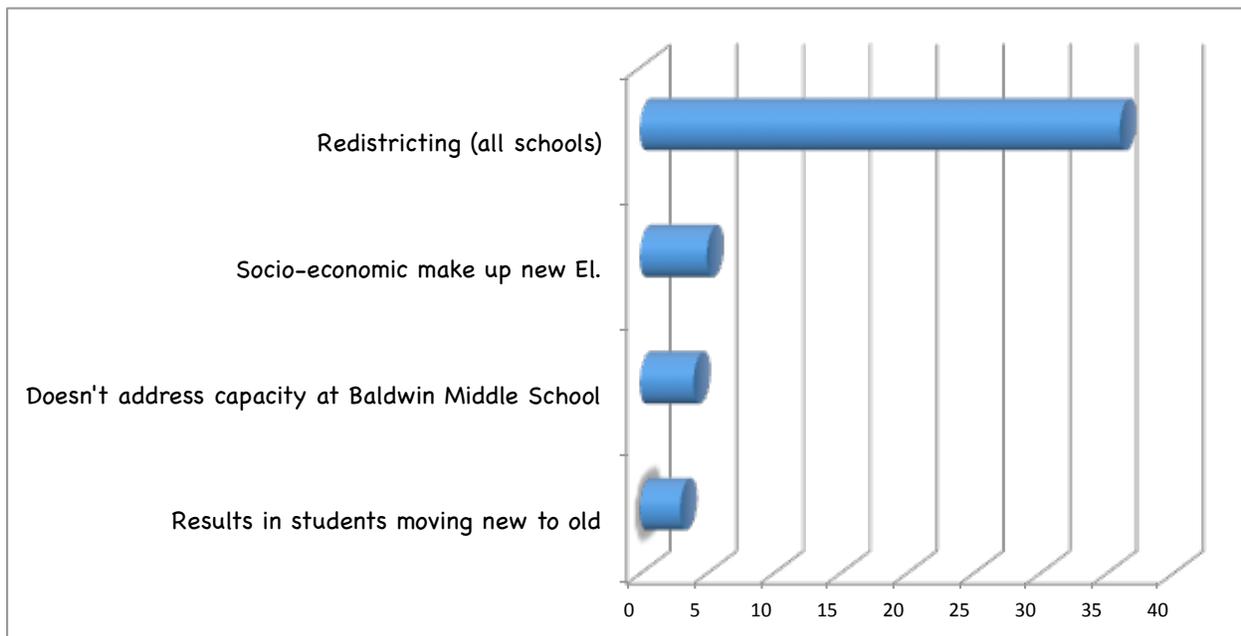
## Pros/Cons of a New Middle School

PROS	CONS
Allows for grouping students based on developmental needs (ie: 5th with 6th, 7th with 8th)	Places fifth grade students on a secondary school and bus schedule
Allows for enhanced differentiation opportunities (intervention and enrichment)	Creates three sports teams feeding into one ninth grade team (for some sports)
Provides increased opportunities for student participation in athletic and other extra-curricular activities	Reduces the number of students to draw from to support extra-curricular activities
Results in a “neighborhood” middle school feel (similar to elementary)	Results in some RMS/BMS students transferring to the new middle school
Keeps middle level students together for four years	Results in a possible need for professional development for staff changing teaching assignments
Results in some shorter middle school bus runs	Middle schools are typically more expensive to operate than elementary schools
Provides enhanced technology for fifth grade students	Fifth grade students with eighth grade students
Desirable location for a middle school/ best position for future growth	Results in fifth grade teachers moving to middle schools
	Age of the Heritage building (not equitable to Baldwin Middle School and Riley Middle Sschool)
	Doesn't address capacity at BMS
	Socioeconomic makeup of a “city” middle school

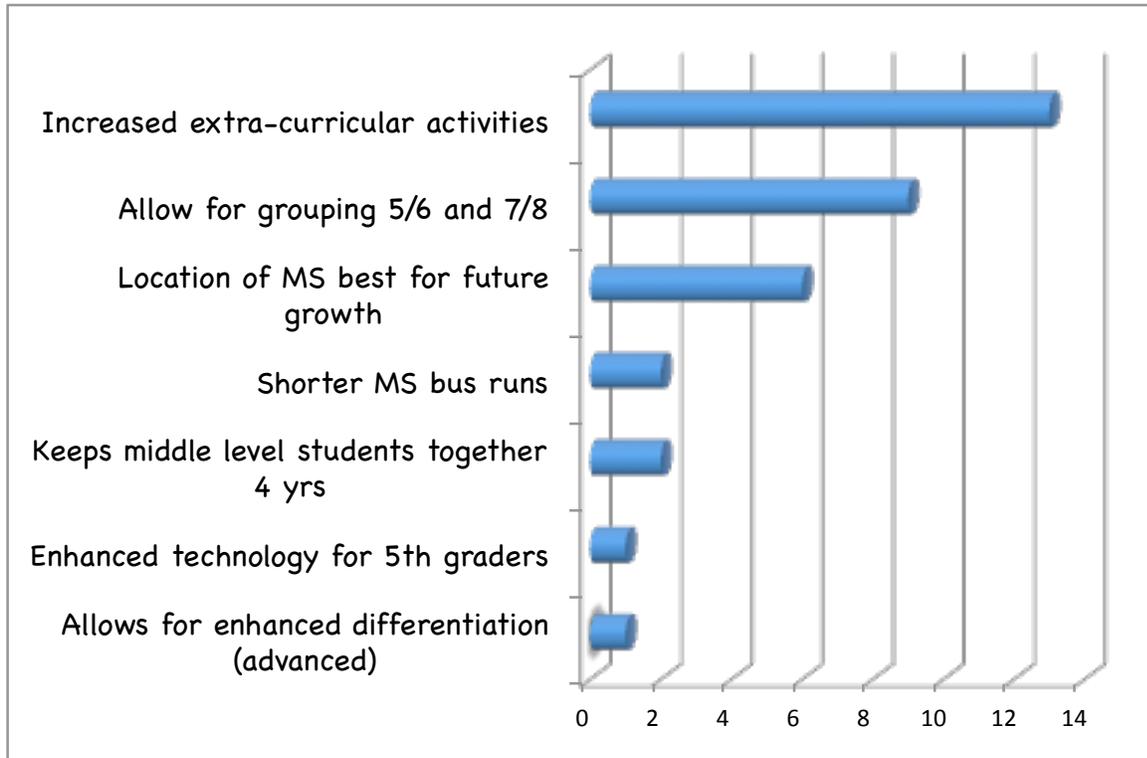
## Frequency of Comments in Support of a New Elementary School:



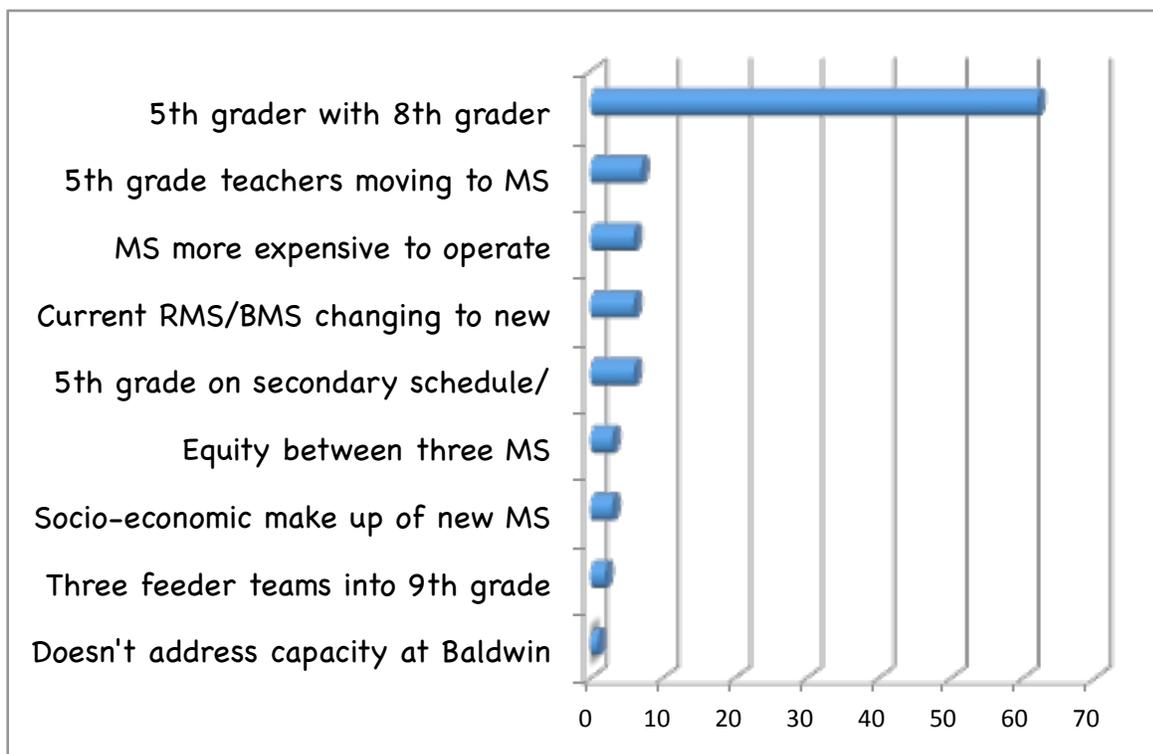
## Frequency of Comments Opposing a New Elementary School:



## Frequency of Comments in Support of a New Middle School:



## Frequency of Comments Opposing a New Middle School:



## Questions Asked by Participants

1. How will staffing the building be addressed with either plan? Understanding that all new staff will not be hired and staff will be distributed, how will the district determine which staff gets placed where?
2. Will parents have the option to choose a different school? Whether it is a new elementary school or a new middle school, will students be allowed to finish out their time at their current building?
3. What will happen if a student has siblings in a current building and a move is required? Will special consideration be granted?
4. If a choice is given, will it require parents to provide transportation, as is the current practice with in-district-schools-of-choice? Will transportation be provided for a period of time?
5. If an August election is successful, will all the renovations be completed by the 2016-17 school year?
6. What will happen if an August election is not successful?
7. Should the option be the new elementary school, how will the boundary lines of the elementary school buildings be determined and communicated? Will parents be involved? How?
8. If the option is the new middle school, how will parents be assured that 5th graders will be separated from 8th graders? Will 5th graders still have recess? Will they travel between classes or remain self-contained (or minimal switches)? Will the specials schedule be the same for 5th grade? Will they get band or music?
9. During the 2015-16 year of planning, how will the district plan or structure activities to ensure a comfort level with the new elementary or middle school building?
10. Which of the options best position our district for future growth? Does either option properly address the growth from the north and south?



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## Facility Research Focus Groups Discussion Guide

Version #3 January 19, 2015

5 - 15 min.

### **(1) Getting acquainted and comfortable**

◇ *{Briefly describe focus group structure and purpose, and scope of entire community research. }*

◇ Let's introduce ourselves to each other. Tell us your name, what neighborhood you live in, something about your work and your family situation, including how many children you have, their ages and where they go to school.

◇ What are your general perceptions of Hudsonville Schools? How about our facilities?

15 - 20 min.

### **(2) Present Information on Enrollment and Options**

◇ Go through Facilities Presentation with specific information on the scope of work that would be covered in each proposal.

◇ What information in the presentation was the most interesting? Do you believe there is a need for additional space? What piece of information demonstrates this the best?

◇ If the district has a successful bond election in August, the district would be able to access these state funds and not have to raise the current 7.0 debt millage rate. This would extend the district's SLRF debt 6 additional years: Instead of our debt being paid off in 2035 our debt would be extended until 2041. The benefit to this is the district would be able to borrow approximately \$20 million dollars from the SLRF without raising the district's 7.0 debt millage rate.

◇ Even though the district has additional needs in the area of transportation and technology: Do you think it is wise for the school to go to the voters in a special election in August and request a \$20 million bond issue?

◇ Do you believe the school district is being responsible with tax payers dollars when considering current and future facilities? Is the school planning for growth appropriately? Why or why not?

25 - 30 min.

**(3) Consideration of Heritage into a New Elementary (Redistricting)**

- ◇ What are positive aspects of making Heritage into a new Elementary?
- ◇ Think about it in terms of students, parents, staff, and community.
  
- ◇ What are the questions or potential hurdles to overcome of this proposal?
- ◇ Think about it in terms of students, parents, staff and community.

25 - 30 min.

**(4) Consideration of Heritage into a New Middle School (3 ~ 5-8 MS)**

- ◇ What are the positive aspects of making Heritage into a new Middle School?
- ◇ Think about it in terms of students, parents, staff and community.
  
- ◇ What are the questions or potential hurdles to overcome of this proposal?
- ◇ Think about it in terms of students, parents, staff and community.

20 min.

**(5) Considering both Options**

- ◇ Now that you have had an opportunity to review the pros and cons of both options and the impact each facility option would have on students, staff, parents and the community, which option do you feel makes the most sense moving forward? Why?

5 - 10 min.

**(6) Support in an August Election**

- ◇ Could you support a \$20 million bond issue in August associated with New Elementary School Redistrict?
- ◇ Could you support a \$20 million bond issue in August associated with New Middle School (3 ~ 5-8 middle schools)?
- ◇ Any closing comments or considerations you think the Facilities Team and Board should consider?