

Notes from School Meeting with County Officials, Parents, and Staff
Discussion of Move to Radnor Center
June 24, 2008

Principal Susan MacLaughlin welcomed the community, consisting of nearly all the school staff and teachers and about 50 parents. She introduced Dr. Frank Stetson, Carderock Springs' Community Superintendent, and Mr. James Song, Director of School Construction.

Dr. Stetson welcomed the staff and parents, and explained that input from tonight's meeting would be shared with Superintendent Jerry Weast and Director of Building Services Joe Lavorgna, and a recommendation would be made to the Board of Education. A decision on the proposal to accelerate the move to Radnor to this summer (vs. December, as previously planned) will be made next week.

James Song, Director of School Construction, emphasized that the purpose of the meeting was to share information with the community and gather input relating to the option of an earlier transition to Radnor.

The Board will accept written comments from the community through Friday. Comments should be sent to Principal MacLaughlin (Susan_D_Thompson@mcpsmd.org), who will then pass them along to Dr. Stetson and Mr. Song.

There is a need to make decisions quickly, because an earlier move impacts teachers and staff, and the Maintenance, Building Services, Transportation, and Food Services departments. Representatives of those departments were introduced:

Alan Heard	Supervisor of Transportation
Susie Wood	Food & Nutrition Services
Lanny Taylor	Building Services, and coordinator of move
Brian Buckman	Maintenance
Mike Cady	Computer Networking

Mr. Song explained why the option to move to Radnor ahead of schedule has only recently emerged. Radnor's current tenant, The Avalon School, is a private school. Its lease had been scheduled to end in June, but since Avalon's new school construction is much delayed, Avalon had requested an extension of its lease. Anticipating that the new construction of Carderock would not begin until January, MCPS granted the extension to October. Two weeks ago, Avalon found an alternative holding school location deemed more desirable because it allowed them to move this summer, thereby avoiding a mid-year move. Avalon School is now preparing to vacate Radnor by June 30th.

The Avalon School's recent announcement of a June 30th departure presents an opportunity for Carderock Springs to move into the holding school this summer. For safety and security reasons, MCPS does not want to leave the Radnor Center vacant for six months.

The design for CSES' new school is well underway, and on track for completion in October. The project is on track to begin construction in January, 2009.

Benefits of a Summer Move to Radnor Center:

Mr. Song outlined the following benefits of a summer move to the Radnor Center:

- * Additional time for the move. A mid-year move gives teachers only 2 days to pack and move, and requires students to lose 2 school days (one before and one after winter break).
- * Not disruptive to teaching time to move over the summer
- * Staff can prepare for one grand school opening, not have to spend time and energy away from instruction to plan and carry out two school openings (one in August and one in January).
- * Staff will have more time to make the school and classrooms welcoming for students at Radnor.
- * Staff can focus on continuity of the instructional program right from the first week of school through

June, not losing momentum in January.

- * More predictable weather for a summer move
- * Easier to handle logistical changes like transportation needs for a summer move
- * Tech Mod - CSES is due for a complete technological refreshment this summer, and it doesn't make sense to do that twice - once at CSES and once at Radnor
- * Starting construction in the middle of winter is harder - an earlier move opens the door to an earlier start for certain parts of construction (abatement of hazardous materials and demolition). With a summer move, would begin those activities in the fall, while still bidding out the other parts of the construction project.
- * Modernization is going to take a full 18 months, and a summer move provides more "wiggle room" to ensure full completion on schedule. Cannot commit to opening the school any earlier with a summer move, but MCPS will update the community on progress on a monthly basis, and if work goes faster than scheduled, there is some opportunity for an earlier completion. For now, the county is sticking with an August, 2010 completion date.

Negatives

Mr. Song then summarized the two negatives he has encountered to this proposal:

- * Parents prefer to be at their home school as long as possible
- * Possibly a longer bus ride to Radnor Center. Mrs. MacLaughlin cleared up a possible misconception. Students riding the bus from CSES to River Falls this past school year, are not riding the bus from 3:05 until they arrive home at approximately 4:00 pm. Their delay is due to the fact that their bus did not arrive at school until 3:30 most days, so students were riding the bus from 3:30-4:00 pm (30 minutes), not from 3:05-4:00 pm (55 minutes). The county is optimistic that the new bus schedule for Radnor will allow students to board the buses more promptly at the end of the school day for their ride home, for a shorter overall time between the end of school day and arrival home.

Likely Timeline for a Summer Move

- * Avalon School moves out 6/30
- * MCPS contractors show up at Radnor to perform improvements from 7/1 - 7/31
- * BSW clean the building - first two weeks in August
- * Teachers are given 2 paid days to come into CSES at any time between 7/1 - 7/21 to pack their things (if unable to come in to pack, the county will handle the packing. County will have staff from Materials Mgmt. on hand during this 3 week period to assist teachers with packing and to provide all materials). Obviously, it is preferable for teachers to pack their own things, but the county will ensure all is packed and packed well. Dr. Stetson vouched for Materials Managements' superior skill in moving schools.
- * Teachers unpack at Radnor on Monday, 8/ 18
- * First professional (non-teaching day) for teachers is 8/19
- * Open House for parents and incoming students on Monday, 8/25; first day of school Tuesday, 8/26

Improvements Planned for Radnor

Overall, MCPS believes Radnor is in good shape; in the best condition of the county's 4 elementary level holding schools. However, it requires a thorough cleaning, and some improvements before CSES moves in. While the county does not intend to modernize Radnor, the goal is to make our stay as comfortable as possible. Planned improvements:

- * New playground equipment
- * Removal of dead trees, clear up underbrush, clear out any poison ivy
- * Basic building cleaning
- * Installation of 2 portables
- * Replace the outdoor electrical equipment shed and metal overhang leading to portables
- * Will repair any crumbling asphalt visible after the portables have moved in
- * Clean up graffiti
- * Upgrade A/C, fire alarm systems
- * Remove some partitions in classrooms.

Mr. Song urged parents to stay out of the building while the contractors are working - this is a fire code violation.

Q&A Session:

Q: Are the 6 weeks sufficient to get all the improvements done for Radnor?

A: Yes. MCPS is aiming to complete the work in 4 weeks.

Q: What percentage of projects the size of the CSES modernization begin and end on time?

A: MCPS is very proud of its track record (there are a few exceptions - BCC, Glenhaven, Somerset). Currently the county has 22 design projects and 18 construction projects underway, and during the summer, completes hundreds of smaller projects at the majority of county schools. He estimates that 99% are completed on schedule.

Q: Is there the possibility of adding another bus route or two to handle the current walkers, and to reduce the travel time and number of stops for all kids?

A: There is some flexibility to add another bus or two if necessary, but it is unlikely to significantly decrease the commute. Carderock is fortunate to have a holding school within its cluster - other schools undergoing modernization have much longer bus rides. The county tries to keep bus routes under an hour, and does not expect CSES' route to be near that maximum.

Q: Is there any chance we might complete the project ahead of schedule if we move in summer? A:

There is some possibility, but that is not our current plan. We will aggressively manage the construction schedule, but can't make any promises. Even when the project is substantially completed, there's always a long punch list of final projects to complete.

Q: Is there a possibility of an after school bus?

A: Schools have after school activity funds that could be used for buses. Mrs. MacLaughlin will check into this.

Q: Have funds actually been approved for the modernization?

A: On May 22, the Board approved the budget for the modernization of CSES; funds will be released on 7/1.

Several teachers and staff (Ms. Ross, Ms. Rule, Mrs. Zeitlin, Mrs. Ver Planck, and Ms. Veihmeyer) expressed their strong preference for the summer move. It would permit them time to pack/unpack their things thoughtfully, plan lessons, and ample time to fully set up the new classrooms so that they feel welcoming to the children. Mrs. Zeitlin emphasized that it was important for the parents and teachers to convey a positive attitude about the transition to the kids - if the adults are positive about the move, the children would be comfortable and adapt quickly to the new setting. Ms. Ver Planck is concerned with building kids' anxiety around a mid-year move - with continual packing during the fall and leading up to the winter break; it seems likely that kids will feel much greater tension with the move than if it simply happened over the summer. Mrs. MacLaughlin shared that every staff member she had spoken with fully supports the summer move. She explained that a summer move allows staff members to open school smoothly and fully focus on continuity of instruction for the entire school year, resulting in a higher quality instructional program for students. Dr. Stetson emphasized that with a mid-year move, it is likely that teachers would be packing slowly but steadily throughout the fall.

Mrs. MacLaughlin announced that she is committed to having closure opportunities in the form of events at the CSES to allow families an opportunity to say goodbye to the old school and orient to the Radnor Center.

Q: Is there the possibility of moving back to the earlier school hours once modernization is complete?

A: Yes.

Q: The much later start time is a real problem for working parents accustomed to dropping their students off at Carderock at 8:20. Is there any possibility of getting a before care program at Radnor?

A: Before and After Care programs are typically run by outside vendors and organized through PTA.

Mrs. MacLaughlin will work with PTA to discuss whether that could be a possibility at Radnor, but it is unlikely, because of space concerns there, as there have been at Carderock. The county does not have any portables available to use for before care.

Q: If the building is essentially completed ahead of schedule - spring, 2010 - could we have year end activities like graduation there?

A: If the building is complete and meets code, then yes, activities could be held there, even if CSES had not moved back into the building.

Both Staff Development Specialist Mary Pat Veihmeyer and incoming PTA President Sara Bhatia commented that they had toured the building, and that it provided sufficient and comfortable space for teachers and students. Although it is an older building, it is similar in design to Carderock, and offers comparable or larger classrooms, each with a full wall of windows. They offered to talk with any parents concerned about the school's appearance.

Because Avalon staff is working hard to depart Radnor by June 30th, and the county acknowledges the need to get in to make improvements and clean the facility, Mrs. MacLaughlin and Mr. Stetson discouraged parents from trying to tour the facility before the contractors begin work.

The meeting concluded at about 9:00 p.m.