



Community Conversations

Held Jan. 7 – Jan. 17, 2019



February 2019

Summary Report


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Community Conversations



BACKGROUND

Between January 7, 2019 and January 17, 2019, Education Planners, LLC, conducted five Community Conversations for the Paulding County School District (PCSD). The meetings were held at each of the district's high schools: Hiram HS, North Paulding HS, East Paulding HS, Paulding County HS, and South Paulding HS. Education Planners had previously conducted a comprehensive 10-Year Enrollment and Classroom Utilization Study that projected a growing student population, particularly in the northeast quadrant of the county, and had presented that report to the Board of Education on August 28, 2018.

The PCSD Community Conversations were scheduled as a means of sharing this data and gathering public input on the Challenges and Opportunities relating to school facility and capacity needs, as well as Potential Solutions. The stated purposes of the meetings were to:

Join Us For . . .

Community Conversations

The district recently completed a growth study that shows parts of our county appear to be growing rapidly. What does this mean for our schools? As enrollment grows, how will we address the future capacity needs of our facilities? The time to plan is now. The **Paulding County School District** invites you to participate in a series of community conversations, led by outside facilitator Education Planners, regarding the future of our school facilities. As a PCSD stakeholder, you are welcome to attend any or all meetings, and your input will be valued. After all, what could be more important than planning now to provide the best, possible future learning environments for the students of Paulding County? We hope to see you there!

All meetings will begin at 6:00 p.m. in the school cafeteria

January 7	Hiram High School
January 10	North Paulding High School
January 14	East Paulding High School
January 15	Paulding County High School
January 17	South Paulding High School

<https://www.paulding.k12.ga.us/planningforthefuture>

- Engage the School Community in Planning for Future Space Needs of Paulding County School District Facilities;
- Identify Challenges & Opportunities;
- Identify Potential Solutions, and
- Utilize Community Input in Developing Recommendations.



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More than 200+ parents, staff members, community members, and students took part in the five sessions. The meetings were facilitated by Education Planners and featured a PowerPoint presentation followed by a group activity designed to engage participants and solicit feedback.

Data that was shared included past and current enrollment trends, building permits, and growth projections for Paulding County schools that were presented to the Board of Education in a 10-Year Enrollment Forecast last summer. Some of the **data sources** included:

- Paulding County School District past & current **enrollment trends and feeder patterns**
- Paulding County **building permits**, by school zone
- Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) **regional data**
- Georgia Department of Education **enrollment data**
- Governor's Office of Planning & Budget (OPB)
- United States Census Bureau
- Ga. Department of Health Online Analytical Statistical Information System (OASIS) **live birth data**

Documentation, including the Community Conversations Powerpoint presentation, and the August 2018 10-Year Enrollment Forecast Powerpoint presentation, are available online at:

<https://www.paulding.k12.ga.us/planningforthefuture>



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Participants were asked to discuss Challenges and Opportunities presented by enrollment growth. The following is a list of some of the topics and sub-topics that fell under those category headings:

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

- Student Enrollment
- Size and Location of Facilities and Properties
- Transportation Concerns
- Equitable Programs and Athletic Facility Needs
- Land Availability
- Student Stability and Safety
- Available Funding and Debt Service
- Time

Relating to Challenges and Opportunities, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Are there additional Challenges & Opportunities not listed?
2. Which Challenges & Opportunities are most relevant to the enrollment and capacity status of Paulding County schools, and projections for growth?
3. Which Challenges have more flexibility for accommodating enrollment growth? Which do not? Why?



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Participants also were asked to discuss the Potential Solutions available to school systems for addressing enrollment and capacity needs:

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- New school construction
- Construction of additional classrooms at existing schools
- Attendance zone changes (redistricting)
- Other (community input)

Relating to Potential Solutions, participants were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Of the Potential Solutions listed, which is best? Why?
2. What are the potential “side effects” or “unintended consequences” of each potential solution?
3. How might each Potential Solution impact your experience as a parent, student, district employee, or member of the community?

Each group reported on the topics they discussed and the answers they determined to the questions above. To conclude the Community Conversations, each participant was asked to identify the topics and issues most important to him or her.

Group Exercise PowerPoint Slides:

Group Exercise – Part 1 & 2

- Break into small groups.
- Please discuss the following questions:

Challenges & Opportunities

1. *Are there additional Challenges & Opportunities not listed?*
2. *Which Challenges & Opportunities are most relevant to the enrollment and capacity status of Paulding schools, and projections for growth?*
3. *Which Challenges are manageable? Which may not be? Why?*

Potential Solutions

1. *Of the Potential Solutions listed, which is best? Why?*
2. *What are the potential “side effects” or “unintended consequences” of each potential solution?*
3. *How might each Potential Solution impact your experience as a parent, student, district employee, or member of the community?*

*** Please write group answers on provided flip charts.**

Group Exercise – Part 3

Wrap Up

- Designate a speaker for each group to briefly share your group’s answers.
- Please place three orange stickers on the issues most important to you.
- You may place all three on one topic or on separate topics.
- Review of comments.



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Community Conversation Participants at work . . .





Community Conversations



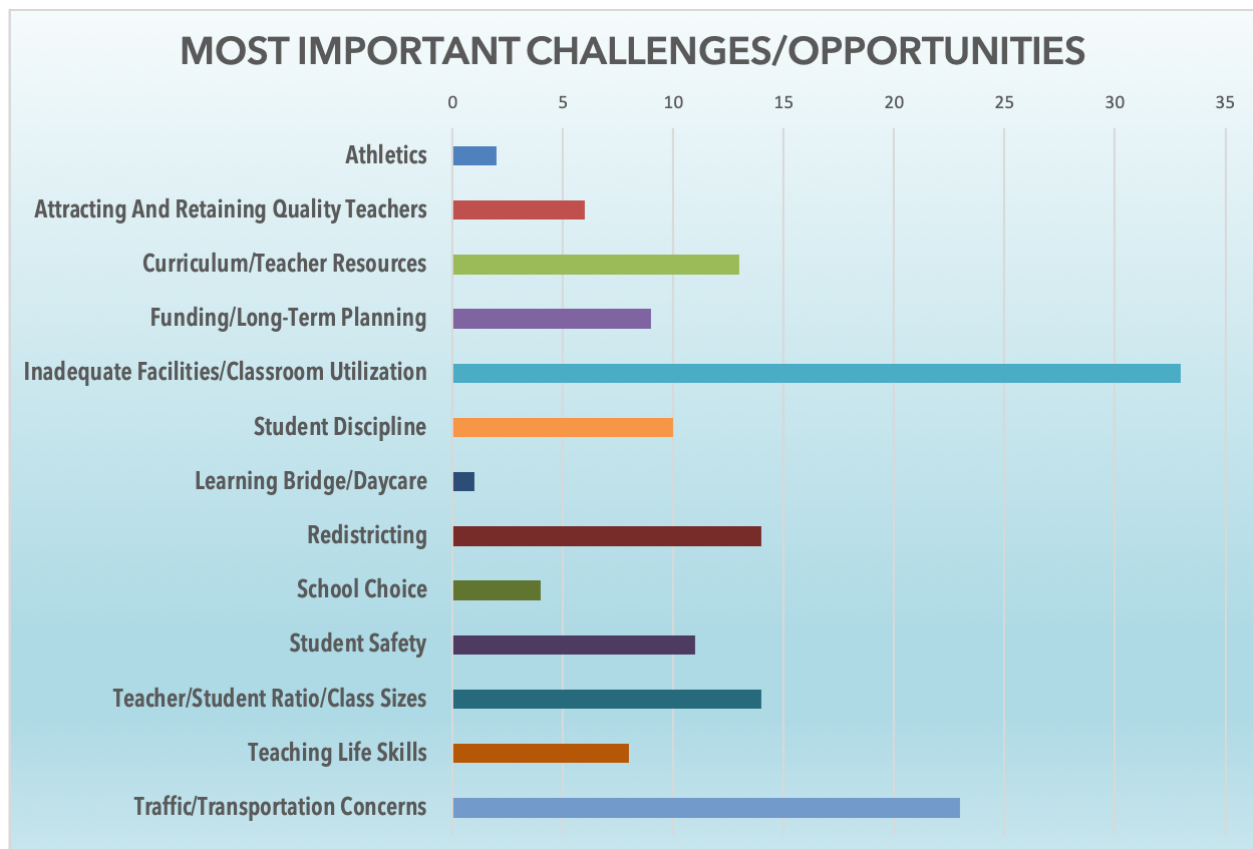


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FINDINGS

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: The Community Conversations featured discussions on a wide range of Challenges and Opportunities associated with enrollment growth. Participants were asked which additional Challenges and Opportunities should be included, and which are most relevant to the enrollment and capacity status of Paulding County Schools and projections for growth. The chart below consolidates all of those responses into categories, and highlights those that were most frequently mentioned and targeted as important by the participants (*all responses are available in [Appendix A](#)*). Each participant was provided three sticker dots and encouraged to place them next to items he/she felt were most important. Those dots are the basis for the tallies below.

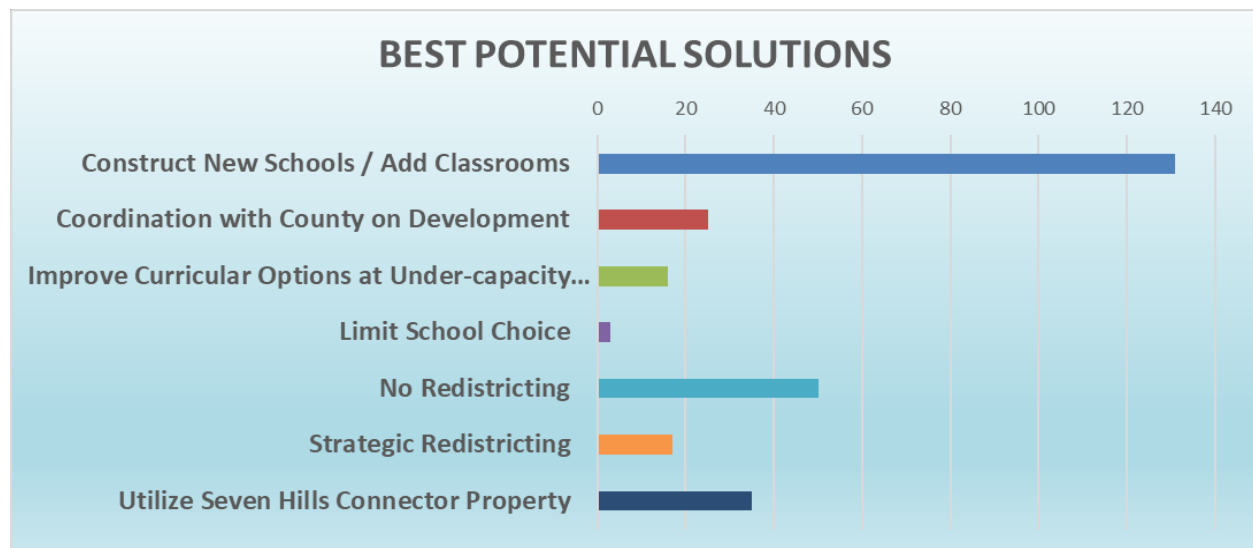




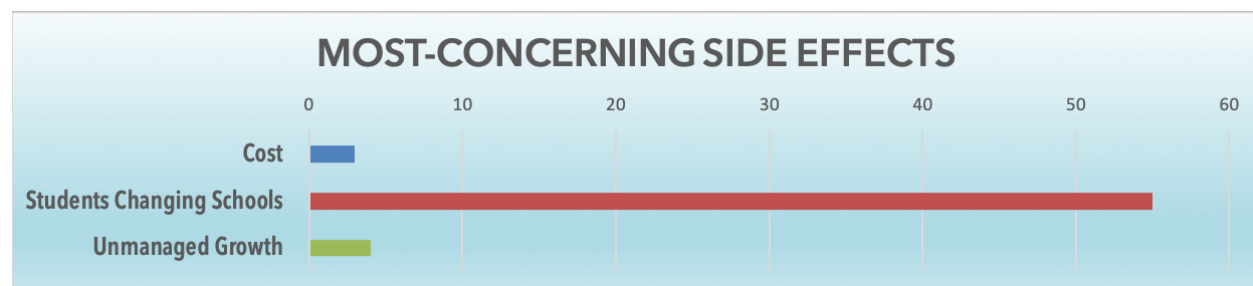
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POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: The chart below summarizes the Potential Solutions available to address enrollment and capacity issues. The bar lines indicate which issues participants rated as most important to them, again based on their sticker dots. In order to capture all participant responses, they are summarized into categories.



MOST-CONCERNING SIDE EFFECTS: Participants were asked what potential side effects or unintended consequences might accompany each of the potential solutions for enrollment growth. Clearly, most participants indicated students changing schools – a side effect of redistricting – as a very important consideration. Participants noted in particular that every effort should be made to keep neighborhoods together by zoning students in those neighborhoods to the same schools, and that should a redistricting occur, students should be “grandfathered”, or allowed to continue at their existing schools through graduation.





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OBSERVATIONS

- The Community Conversation at North Paulding High School saw by far the highest attendance of the five meetings. More than 160 participants were on hand to share their thoughts and provide input. Not surprisingly, the North Paulding High School community is experiencing the most significant impact from enrollment growth, as indicated by the preceding demographic data.
- In general, most participants suggested some combination of constructing new schools or adding new classrooms to existing schools as the best options to address capacity needs.
- One recommendation heard multiple times was that the school district should utilize existing property it owns on the Seven Hills Connector.
- Other suggestions included adding on to existing schools by “going up” — making the existing buildings multi-level — and repurposing vacant shopping/business facilities for classrooms.
- Some participants encouraged the district to bolster under-capacity schools by introducing magnets and other unique curricular offerings. Enhancing these programs, they said, will both retain and attract new families, potentially helping to relieve capacity issues elsewhere.
- As an alternative to building a new high school, some participants recommended constructing a 9th Grade Academy, or high school annex/satellite, as a lower-cost means of addressing high school capacity needs.
- The majority of those who cited redistricting as an issue important to them did so because they oppose redistricting and see it only as a last-resort solution for capacity needs. These participants said that preserving existing feeder patterns and student relationships should be a high priority for the school system.
- While sentiment clearly favored prioritizing new construction over redistricting, some participants suggested that adjusting attendance zones is by far the most cost-effective way to address enrollment growth – by shifting students from over-capacity schools to under-capacity schools – and that limited funding may leave the district little choice but to redraw some attendance lines. Redistricting opponents noted that while redistricting may be cost-effective, it is also the most disruptive solution because of its impact on students, families and neighborhoods, and potentially property values as well.
- Participants also pointed out that constructing a new school(s), as opposed to adding classrooms to existing schools, automatically requires some redistricting in order to populate the new school.
- Some participants also suggested that the district should consider limiting school choice as a way to prevent overcrowding.
- The discussion of Challenges and Opportunities varied from school to school, and it was interesting to hear how the importance of issues changed from one area of the county to the next. In areas



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where growth and overcrowding are not major concerns, the conversation tended to focus more on topics such as the condition of school facilities, retaining quality teachers, as well as the need for curricular resources and special needs programs, among other issues.

CONCLUSION

Paulding County is a growing community that offers its residents exceptional schools and a high quality of life. All indicators suggest that the county and its school system will continue growing for the foreseeable future. The recent Community Conversations provided an opportunity for the school system to share enrollment projections and engage stakeholders in a meaningful discussion about what growth will mean for schools and what should be done about it.

The Community Conversations were not intended to settle what decisions the school system should or should not make to address capacity concerns. Those decisions should be made by the experts in the school system's administration following a detailed analysis of available data and input relevant to the issue. The Community Conversations should serve as one piece of that analysis.

Community Conversation participants were presented with enough data and other information to engage their thinking about enrollment and capacity issues and prompt initial feedback. The result is a baseline of stakeholder thought that tells the school system where public sentiment lies at this moment in time. The school system should use this feedback when it begins to make the key decisions to address growth and capacity needs. When it is ready to take those decisions to the public, administration already will have an idea of the public perspective and will know what needs to be communicated.

While there was some discussion of funding, including the district's bond debt and a likely upcoming referendum this fall to renew SPLOST, more focus on this issue will be needed due to the significant cost of constructing new schools and classrooms, and the fact that funding will be limited. Analysis will be needed to identify affordable options to relieve capacity, and these options should be communicated to the community.

The goal of the Community Conversations was to engage PCSD's stakeholders in the process. PCSD stakeholders now have a better understanding of the facility issues that enrollment growth is bringing to Paulding County schools, and they know the decisions that lie ahead.

Education Planners appreciates the opportunity to conduct these meetings and help gather the input that will play an important role in the decisions to come – decisions that reflect the community's priorities and the district's needs.

– End –