

Houston Community Forum  
February 1, 2023  
29 parents, staff, and students in attendance

The following questions, comments, and concerns were shared at the Houston Community Forum regarding declining enrollment. Answers are provided where possible and all comments are included to ensure all participants input is taken into consideration.

### **Transportation**

- Question: If Houston Middle School students will be catching the bus, will they be riding the bus with high school students?
- Answer: This is highly unlikely due to the different starting times for elementary, middle, and high schools.
- Question: Will the elementary and high school students be on the same bus?
- Answer: Same answer as question above.
- Question: Will there be another bus available and will there be drivers due to the shortage?
- Answer: Our bus driver shortage complicates planning transportation routes.
- Question: How will the difference in start times for High, Middle and Elementary Schools be accounted for in the transportation plan?
- Answer: Our transportation department will evaluate start times for all impacted schools and will develop bus routes based on this analysis.

### **Safety**

- Statement: A parent shared concerns about gang activity at Millswood Middle School.
- Statement: A parent had safety concerns about her child attending a school in town. She is scared her daughter will be beat up in the restroom.
- Statement: A parent expressed additional safety concerns about students attending Millswood Middle School. There are students who are threatening to commit suicide at the other Lodi middle schools.

## **Facilities**

Question: With so many students going to Victor, is the district going to be adding portables to the site?

Answer: Should the Board later consider combining Victor and Houston, Business Services would work to address any facility issues for adequate classroom space.

Question: Will the infrastructure meet the needs of our students in 6 months at Victor Elementary?

Answer: The likelihood of any changes for Houston K-6 would not occur until 2024-2025, which is ample time to address space issues.

## **Intra-district Agreements (IDA)**

Question: If our numbers at Houston are dwindling, why is the principal approving IDAs for the student to attend other schools? Principal should be denying IDAs to keep students here.

Answer: IDAs are generally denied when there is no room at the site requested not to maintain enrollment at the home site.

Question: Are we going to approve IDAs for the 2023-24 school year for parents who want their child to attend Houston in 2023-24?

Answer: Staffing is based on projected enrollment. IDAs are only approved on a year to year basis at elementary schools.

Question: With the IDAs submitted to attend Houston next year, are they going to be approved or will they be denied?

Answer: Same answer as question above.

## **Funding**

Statement: It's going to cost a lot of money to revamp Victor. Instead of revamping Victor, let's invest the money in Houston.

Question: How much money would we save by closing Houston School? We want the numbers regarding how much money we have saved.

Answer: It depends. Many of the existing expenditures will be shifted to different Lodi USD sites. There will be overall cost savings.

Question: Where is the money coming from to fund the plan that was presented to expand Victor School as opposed to funding Houston and making a better school life for students?

Answer: The money will come from district Capital Fund 40. What is initially planned is adding a lunch shelter and make some Americans With Disabilities (ADA) improvements. Rather than fix existing bathrooms, we will be adding a restroom portable. We are also adding portable classrooms as needed to accommodate increased enrollment at Victor. There is currently not enough room at Victor to eat lunch. This is the reason we would add the lunch shelter. The restroom portable is required as part of the construction project for lunch shelter. This is an ADA requirement. The Acampo Road site has had several million dollars in modernization projects over the last several years unrelated to potential future changes

### **Staffing / Enrollment**

Statement: Our teachers are amazing. We want to keep our fantastic teachers at Houston Elementary.

Question: Why are students denied placement at their home school Houston?

Answer: Schools are staffed based on projected enrollment. Classrooms are staffed at 24 to 1 K-3, and 30 to 1 4-6. When class sizes exceed staffing ratios, students are overflowed to existing space .

Question: Why is the principal's time split between 2 schools, with most of the principal's time spent at Victor, leaving teachers in charge?

Answer: The principal is split because of the small size of both sites.

Question: Where would our teachers go? What happens to the teachers who have been working so hard at Houston?

Answer: Teachers will be able to participate in the contracted transfer process and may apply for vacant teaching positions which could include Victor School.

Question: How will the numbers of students at Houston increase when the combo classes are full and why can we not add another teacher/class to accommodate students that live within the feeder area?

Answer: Combo classes are only created when enrollment is low.

Question: Why is the first plan/solution to shut down Houston?

Answer: Houston has continued to experience declining enrollment for many years. As a school site becomes smaller, the options become limited for students.

Question: There is a full six grade class at Victor in addition to the 10 at Houston for a total of 42 seventh grade students for next year. Why can't we keep middle school?

Answer: Not all Victor 6th graders attend Houston School. Considering the challenges of staffing middle school with elementary teachers is one that currently exists at Houston School.

### **Afterschool Program**

Question: I have a first grade student enrolled in Bridge. Will she be able to attend the Bridge program at Victor Elementary School?

Answer: Yes

### **General Concerns**

Statement: A parent expressed concerns about closing down the school. She expressed pursuing legal options if Houston School is closed.

Statement: We should be advertising to bring more parents over to Houston School.

Statement: A parent expressed that middle school staff at Houston have developed strong connections with students. Middle School students are a family at Victor.

Statement: A parent expressed concerns about an attendance area student who was overflowed to Woodbridge School. We need to keep our students here.

Statement: Parents expressed concerns that this happened approximately 5 years ago and was presented as a plan prior to getting community input and the community was assured Houston would be maintained.

Statement: Parents express agreement that they would like to remain at Houston.

Statement: Please add early in the Board agenda on February 7.

Statement: Please have the answers to the questions from parents by the next board meeting

Statement: Please note the numbers at the middle school are 65 and not 40 students.

Question: Has the district run the numbers on property values in an area when a school is shut down?

Answer: The district has a fiduciary responsibility, but doesn't weigh in on property value studies.

Question: Have they considered bringing students from Lockeford K-8 School to increase enrollment at the Middle School Level in Houston? There aren't any extra students there, it is also low enrollment.

Answer: No. Enrollment at Lockeford includes 460 students in K-8.

Question: How long has the district really been planning this? Are we ready to transfer middle school students to Millswood Middle School?

Answer: Enrollment is reviewed each year. Adding a small number of students would not have a significant impact on the program at Millswood. Any staffing increases would be provided.

Question: Where is our representative? Where is our elected representative who we elected to the School Board?

Answer: Principal Alberto Velarde, Area 2 Director Peter Lambert, and Director of Education Rafael Ceja attended meeting to share plans regarding declining enrollment and collect input from Houston School community. The Board of Education will be provided this information.

Question: Where are the alternative plans to keep Houston open?

Answer: The ongoing declining enrollment trends would not make keeping Houston School is cost prohibitive.

Question: Why were parents not given earlier notice? A parent expressed concerns about the short notice for tonight's meeting. As a working parent, we would appreciate more time to adjust our schedules.

Answer: We appreciate your input and will make every effort to provide future notices one week in advance.

Question: What time is the Board meeting on February 7?

Answer: Staff shared the Board Meeting starts at 7:00 pm on Tuesday, February 7, 2023.

Question: How will the new housing developments affect the enrollment

Answer: New housing near Walmart and Costco in Lodi is yielding very few students.