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For Immediate Release

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REALIGNMENT TO BE SHARED WITH COMMUNITY FOR INPUT**

At its regularly scheduled board of education meeting Tuesday night, the District presented details of an extensive study of enrollment trends and population. Following the presentation, the board unanimously approved the leadership team's request to share the findings and recommendations with the community for input.

Population statistics and concerns, particularly those related to the overcrowding in Area 3, were presented to the community in a series of town hall meetings throughout the county last winter and spring. Following those meetings, district administrators worked with a community representative from each of the five attendance areas (the Enrollment Trends Workgroup) to develop parameters for an external professional demographic study and immediately address overcrowding at Byrd Elementary School.

The Enrollment Trends Workgroup and District leaders temporarily alleviated overcrowding at Byrd with the addition of four mobile classrooms at the elementary school. In addition, the school district contracted Cropper GIS and McKibben Demographics to provide possible boundary modification options based upon a set of three parameters developed by district administrators and the Enrollment Trends Workgroup. Those parameters included:

- Demographic and enrollment balance within defined geographic areas (within area boundaries)
- Demographic and enrollment balance to a limited degree across defined geographic areas
- Comprehensive demographic and enrollment balance across the entire school district

"We've had professionals take a look at our school district with fresh eyes in hopes of gaining additional feedback and information," Mr. King Laurence, the District's Chief Officer of Administration, commented while presenting updates at Tuesday night's meeting. "We have really accomplished a lot in a short period of time."

As a result of the consultant's presentation, several points were concretely established.

- Area 3 is currently over 100% utilization in elementary and high school and additional seats are needed due to current capacity and anticipated growth.
- Area 2 school utilization is high and requires relief for future growth.
- Area 1 middle schools are demographically imbalanced and a clean feeder system does not exist from elementary to high school.

- A large number of students, 3,600 or 15% of total student population, attend schools other than their zoned schools, which has an impact on utilization.

The study revealed a distribution of students in Aiken County that has shifted about three to four miles to the west over the last 20 years.

“Twenty years ago, the City of Aiken was where the population was dense,” Dr. McKibben pointed out. Because the distribution of students changes every 10 to 15 years, districts should look at their attendance lines about every 15 years. The longer a community holds off from doing that, the more radical the response must be because the distribution of seats and students becomes increasingly imbalanced with each passing year.”

In small group workshops last week, board members reviewed the enrollment report and the administration’s feedback. The District Leadership Team’s recommendations presented Tuesday were a hybrid of the three options, reflecting the expertise of Cropper GIS and McKibben Demographics and input from the Enrollment Trends Workgroup as well as school board members. The recommendations will be brought forward to the community in a series of Town Hall meetings beginning in early November.

#### **CURRENT PLANS USING EXISTING FUNDS**

Byrd Elementary School was the primary concern last spring. While the addition of mobile classrooms have been a temporary solution, plans for a more permanent fix to address overcrowding in Area 3 elementary schools using existing funding for capital projects through 8% funds is underway. The school board was updated on those plans Tuesday night, with the announcement that Adult Education would be relocated to the recently acquired former Midland Valley Prep site on Jefferson Davis Highway, allowing for Adult Education’s current site to be reconfigured to its original purpose as an elementary school.

“We’re excited for this new, highly-visible location and strategic position next door to Aiken Technical College for Adult Education,” Dr. Sean Alford, Aiken County superintendent, explained. “We were able to secure the property for much less than projected and we’re looking forward to opening the new location in August 2018.”

Byrd Learning Center, the current location for adult education, will be repurposed as a new elementary school designed to serve at least 400 students. Originally an elementary school, Byrd Learning Center has served as home to Adult Education and as a training site for a number of programs and meetings. New flooring, an HVAC system, roof and other building enhancements were made to the facility in the last several years; the addition will include a cafeteria, among other improvements.

“We plan to repurpose what we have to meet our need for a new elementary school using funds currently available in our capital expenditures budget,” Dr. Alford commented. “We’ll open up the façade of the school to Ascauga Lake Road; it will be a school that the community will be proud of,” he continued.

Existing boundaries within Area 3 will be modified to accommodate the new elementary school, relieve overcrowding, and allow for anticipated growth. The new school is projected to open in August 2019. As a side benefit but also worthy of note, with the addition of a new school, all Area 3 elementary schools will house their own Pre-kindergarten classes, allowing 4K students to begin school in their own elementary building.

The board unanimously approved four recommendations to share with the community for input in upcoming town hall meetings. Following the community’s feedback on recommendations, board members will reconvene on the matter in January.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1**

Adjust grade configuration and boundaries to improve utilization, demographic balance and create a direct feeder pattern from elementary through high school.

Modify Area 1 attendance boundaries at the elementary level and realign middle schools.

- Modify elementary boundaries to generate a direct feeder pattern from elementary through high school.
- Collaborate with the community to create a unique learning experience for all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in Area 1 housed at Aiken Middle School.
- Create two 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade middle schools with Schofield feeding Aiken High and Kennedy feeding South Aiken High to create demographically and socio-economically balanced schools and a direct feeder pattern for high school.

Adjust middle school boundaries in Area 3 in anticipation of continued growth at Leavelle McCampbell and to generate a direct feeder pattern from elementary through high school.

- Byrd, Gloverville and the new elementary school in Area 3 would feed into Leavelle McCampbell Middle.
- Jefferson, Warrentonville and Clearwater would feed into LBC Middle.

Move Trolley Run Station from Area 3 to Area 1. Largely due to the close proximity of Area 1 schools to the Trolley Run neighborhood, a number of those students already attend Area 1 schools on special permission. If the boundary were redrawn, Trolley Run students would be zoned for Aiken Elementary, Schofield Middle and Aiken High.

Shift the boundary between Areas 1 and 5 to include the portion of Area 1 along the Savannah River Site and the Barnwell County line to Area 5 in order to increase utilization of Area 5 schools and ease transportation concerns for families residing near Barnwell. A number of students residing along the Barnwell County line submit out of district transfer requests due to the convenience of attending school closer to home. Moving that small portion of the county to Area 5 schools (for middle and high school) decreases transportation cost/time in an effort to encourage students to attend their district's schools. Students along the Savannah River Site and Barnwell County line would attend Oakwood Windsor for elementary school, New Ellenton Middle and Silver Bluff High School.

“This was just one of those lines that made sense to cross,” the superintendent commented.

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

Expand Midland Valley High School to include additional classrooms and additions to the core facility and parking.

Regardless of the enrollment scenario, space is a major issue at Midland Valley High School and there are simply not enough seats for students.

“The problems you have at Midland Valley, with nine mobile units and five teachers floating (without a classroom), will be there for some time,” Dr. McKibben explained. “We just can’t resolve the space issue at Midland Valley without additional seats.”

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

Upgrade and expand 1950's-era elementary facilities for future growth and safety. Specific projects include Belvedere Elementary, Hammond Hill Elementary, and Millbrook Elementary. All three sites are at or over near capacity and present challenging obstacles to ensuring student safety.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Acquire a donated parcel of land, approximately 85 acres, to build an elementary and middle school in Area 2. Utilization or capacity of schools in Area 2 is high and substantial continued growth is expected.

### **TOWN HALL MEETINGS**

The District plans to share the above recommendations for community feedback and input during a series of Town Hall Meetings in November and December, and encourages stakeholders to share their insight about these ideas on one of the following dates:

November 6 6:30 p.m. Leavelle McCampbell Middle

November 7 6:30 p.m. South Aiken High

November 16 6:30 p.m. Aiken High

November 30 6:30 p.m. North Augusta High (following One Cent Community Update Meeting)

December 4 6:30 p.m. Ridge Spring-Monetta Middle High

December 5 6:30 p.m. Silver Bluff High School