

The following analysis is provided at the request of Mr. Rick Higginbotham, Superintendent of Elbert County Schools, in response to his request for an external opinion regarding whether consolidation of the elementary school population into fewer than the five existing schools would provide greater efficiency in the operation of the school system without creating unacceptable side effects. This is clearly a reasonable and substantive question to raise, because the school system has a large number of unused elementary school classrooms, and the existing school populations are small enough that the cost per student tends to be inordinately high. Several issues need to be considered in the analysis, as outlined in the following questions:

1. Can the elementary population be housed in fewer than five schools, and, if so, how should the smaller number of schools be configured?
2. Can money be saved; and if so, how much?
3. How would bus routes be impacted? What would be the impact on transportation provided by parents?
4. Are there issues not related to cost that would argue against reconfiguring or reducing the number of schools?

Question 1

Analysis of projected enrollments, location of schools, and availability of classrooms makes a strong argument that the most significant cost savings can be achieved by closing as many schools as possible and reconfiguring the organizational pattern to house as many students from each grade as possible in the same school. Four of the five existing schools are located in close enough proximity to make such an organizational pattern feasible. Because Beaverdam, Blackwell, Doves Creek, and Falling Creek all lie within or very near the city limits of Elberton, transporting all students in a given grade to one of these schools would appear to be reasonable. Bowman Elementary School, because it is located at a relatively greater distance from the other four schools, is not a good candidate for inclusion in a new grouping pattern. A count of the available classrooms at the other four schools makes the case for Falling Creek, with the smallest number, as the school to be closed. Further analysis suggests that a promising plan would have all students from Beaverdam, Blackwell, Doves Creek, and Falling Creek housed as follows: Pre-K and kindergarten at Beaverdam; first and second grades at Bl;

The following charts show data for school year 2012-2013 related to the above discussion:

Projected enrollments for school year 2012-2013					
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals
Pre-K	21	42	44	45	152
K	50	55	60	60	225
1	50	63	60	62	235
2	42	54	55	47	198
3	40	44	55	51	190
4	41	41	52	61	195
5	49	44	30	50	173
TOTALS	293	343	356	376	1,368

Numbers of teachers required at indicated class sizes, current organizational pattern

	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals	Class Sizes
Pre-K	1	2	2	3	8	22
K	3	3	3	3	12	20
1	3	3	3	3	12	22
2	2	3	3	3	11	22
3	2	2	3	3	10	22
4	2	2	3	3	10	25
5	2	2	2	2	8	25
TOTALS	14	15	17	17	71	

Numbers of teachers required at indicated class sizes, revised organizational pattern						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek		Totals	Class Sizes
Pre-K	7				7	22
K	12				12	20
1		11			11	22
2		9			9	22
3			9		9	22
4			8		8	25
5			7		7	25
Totals	19	20	24		63	
Total enrollment	377	433	558		1,368	

Numbers of classrooms, existing versus needed, revised organizational pattern						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals	
Existing	27	28	34	24	113	
Needed	19	20	24	0	63	
Unused for PreK-5	8	8	10	24	50	

As shown above, eight (8) fewer teachers would be required next year for the suggested revised organizational pattern than for the current pattern (63 versus 71 for the four schools involved). The data also show that the number of available classrooms at each of Beaverdam, Blackwell, and Doves Creek exceeds the number needed for regular classes. While space will be needed for other uses, such as computer labs and special education classes, the chart shows ample rooms available for such at each of the three schools.

It should be noted that for the current school year (2011-2012) a total of 74 Pre-K through fifth grade teachers are employed in the four schools, with the larger number due primarily to this year's fifth grade being substantially larger than the projected fifth grade for next year. Thus, the actual reduction in the number of teachers needed for next year with the revised pattern would be 11. This also means, of course, that the number of teachers could be reduced by 3 next year even if the current pattern is retained.

Class sizes with numbers of teachers shown above, current organizational pattern
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	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Average	
Pre-K	21.00	21.00	22.00	15.00	19.00	
K	16.67	18.33	20.00	20.00	18.75	
1	16.67	21.00	20.00	20.67	19.58	
2	21.00	18.00	18.33	15.67	18.00	
3	20.00	22.00	18.33	17.00	19.00	
4	20.50	20.50	17.33	20.33	19.50	
5	24.50	22.00	15.00	25.00	21.63	

Class sizes with numbers of teachers shown above, revised organizational pattern						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek		Average	
Pre-K	21.71				21.71	
K	18.75				18.75	
1		21.36			21.36	
2		22.00			22.00	
3			21.11		21.11	
4			24.38		24.38	
5			24.71		24.71	

Question 2

It is clear from the above that expenditures for salaries and benefits of teachers would be less under the suggested revised organizational plan than under the current plan due to a reduction in the number of teachers needed to maintain desired class sizes. The closing of a school would also reduce by one each the total number of principals, media specialists, and media paraprofessionals needed in the system. The reduction for the full salary and benefits for each of the media specialist and paraprofessional would be realized starting next year and continuing in ensuing years with no accompanying reduction in State QBE funds. QBE funding for media specialist, as for teachers, is calculated on the basis of student FTE counts, without regard to number of schools in the system. There is no State funding for media paraprofessionals. For principals, however, State QBE funds for salaries and benefits of principals are calculated on the basis of a set amount for one position per school, plus training and experience. Thus, the reduction in expenditures for the salary and benefits of the principal would be offset by a reduction in State funding. There would be a net gain for

Depending on what other use, if any, might be made of the building, the system should also realize a reduction in operating cost if it closes one of the schools. The number of custodians should be reduced, with commensurate reduction in salaries and benefits. Expenditures for custodial supplies should also go down. A decrease in expenditures for utilities would be expected, as well. A possible offset to these reductions might come from a need to increase by one the number of elementary school secretaries, due to increased enrollments in the three re-aligned schools.

The chart shown below provides estimates of the savings that would be realized if the system closes one school and adopts the suggested organizational plan.

Item	Number	Rate	Estimated Savings
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Teachers	8	\$65,000	\$520,000
Principal	1	\$30,000	\$30,000
Media Specialist	1	\$80,000	\$80,000
Media Parapro	1	\$15,000	\$15,000
Custodians	3	\$25,000	\$75,000
Secretary	1	(\$25,000)	(\$25,000)
Utilities			\$25,000
TOTAL			\$720,000

(note: applies to 2012-2013 only)

Question 3

A more thorough study than can be made as part of this analysis would be needed to provide precise estimates of the impact of the suggested revision on transportation issues such as number of buses required, miles per route, and associated costs, as well as distance and time to drive to school for parents who provide transportation for their children. The relative proximity of the four elementary schools that would be involved, however, makes a very strong argument that the impact would be minimal. The following chart provides estimates of distances and travel times (source: *MapQuest*).

Distances and Times between pairs of schools			
		miles	minutes
Beaverdam	Blackwell	1.52	3
Beaverdam	Doves Creek	4.75	9
Beaverdam	Falling Creek	4.24	8
Blackwell	Doves Creek	4.25	9
Blackwell	Falling Creek	2.64	5
Doves Creek	Falling Creek	4.50	9

Question 4

It is typically conceded that a K-5 organizational pattern for elementary schools facilitates articulation of the curriculum across grade levels. Accordingly, separating the elementary grades into three schools is an issue that may merit consideration as an argument against reorganization. The relatively small size of the district and the close proximity of the schools, however, are factors that should help to alleviate concerns in this regard. It is also generally accepted that when elementary schools become too large there can be issues related to the ability to attend to the individual needs of students ("becoming numbers rather than people"). While Beaverdam, Blackwell, and Doves Creek would all become larger if Falling Creek were closed, their enrollments would still fall well below the level that most would consider large enough to raise any concerns in this regard.

The foregoing analysis leads to the conclusion that the answer to the question of whether consolidation of the elementary school population into a smaller number of schools would result in more efficiency in the operation of the school system without creating unacceptable side effects is an unequivocal "yes." The most promising plan of reconfiguration that emerges from the analysis calls for the closing of Falling Creek Elementary School and the consolidation of Beaverdam, Blackwell, Falling Creek, and Doves Creek into a single attendance zone, with all Pre-k and kindergarten students attending Beaverdam; all first and second grade students attending Blackwell; and all third, fourth, and fifth grade students attending Doves Creek.

To provide a context in which to consider this analysis, the following charts show data for other possible reconfiguration plans that might be considered.

Close Falling Creek, keep other 3 schools as PreK-5						
Numbers of teachers required at indicated class sizes						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals	Class Sizes
Pre-K	2	3	3	0	8	22
K	4	4	4	0	12	20
1	4	4	4	0	12	22
2	3	4	4	0	11	22
3	3	3	4	0	10	22
4	3	3	3	0	9	25
5	3	3	2	0	8	25
Totals	20	21	21	0	70	

The obvious shortcoming of the above is that 7 more teachers are required, thus eliminating the largest portion of the possible cost reduction. It is the grouping of all students in a given grade at a single location that provides for the reduction in number of teachers needed, not the closing of a school.

Keep all 4 schools open, reconfigure into single attendance zone as shown						
Numbers of teachers required at indicated class sizes						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals	Class Sizes
Pre-K				7	7	22
K			12		12	20
1			11		11	22
2		9			9	22
3		9			9	22
4	8				8	25
5	7				7	25
Totals	15	18	23	7	63	

Numbers of classrooms, existing versus needed, for all 4 schools open						
	Beaverdam	Blackwell	Doves Creek	Falling Creek	Totals	
Existing	27	28	34	24	113	
Needed	15	18	23	7	63	
Unused for PreK-5	12	10	11	17	50	

While the plan suggested above would provide the same reduction in the number of teachers needed as the plan considered to be more promising, the savings that would be realized from the closing of a school would be lost. Again, It is the grouping of all students in a given grade at a single location that provides for the reduction in number of teachers needed.