



TO: Board of Education

FROM: Neil G. Pedersen
Superintendent

RE: First School Proposal

DATE: February 6, 2006

For the past year we have continued discussions with the University about the possibility of designing and opening a school that incorporated a new model for a "first" elementary experience for students. The school would enroll 3 year-olds and transition students after the second grade to an elementary school with higher grade levels. We have previously provided the Board with presentations and descriptions of how this might work and the advantages it offers.

Recently, our planning has become more specific as both the school system and the University need to make some decisions and commitments soon. Working collaboratively with University representatives, we now have a proposal that warrants discussion at the Board level. If the Board is interested in pursuing the construction of a First School, then there would be a need to do much more airing of this concept with the community.

Tony Waldrop, Vice-Chancellor at UNC-CH, has expressed support from the University for providing an adequate school site from the Carolina North project that would be close or adjacent to Seawell Elementary School. In redistricting for this school, First School and Seawell would share the same attendance zone. Some students would enter First School at age 3 or 4 on a voluntary basis while others would enroll in Kindergarten. Pre-schoolers, presumably, would be drawn primarily from this same attendance zone. The classrooms would be blended, meaning that there would be Head Start and More at Four students, exceptional education students, and tuition paying students. Students would be served through the second grade at First School.

Seawell would serve students in grades 3-5. In total, the model that we have developed shows 538 students enrolled in First School and 438 at Seawell. If this were to under-enroll Seawell, we could consider locating some district classes on that campus. The table on page 2 illustrates a possible enrollment scenario.

Possible Scenario for Incorporating First School into the Organization

Age/ Grade	First School		Seawell		Total Students
	Students	Classes	Students	Classes	
3	36	3			36
4	64	4			64
K	146	7			146
1 st	146	7			146
2 nd	146	7			146
3 rd			146	7	146
4 th			146	6	146
5 th			146	6	146
<i>6th Teachers in grade 6 at Smith would be paired with teachers in grades 4&5 at Seawell</i>					
Total	538	28	438	19	976

As the Board discusses this proposal, there are two questions that need to be answered: Should the district participate in this partnership with the University to develop a new model for elementary schools that could be a springboard for a new paradigm for elementary education; and (2) If so, does the Board want to pursue this to be the next elementary school that we build (Elementary No. 10)? FPG representatives indicate that they probably could not wait for this school to be constructed as Elementary No. 11. The 2010-11 date is too late. Below we have summarized some of the pertinent issues:

Capacity

Under the scenario presented above, First School would provide 21 new K-2 classrooms. Our elementary model calls for 25. There would be 7 pre-school classes that could draw students from other pre-school classrooms in the district, but it's difficult to conclude with certainty at this time whether or not this would free-up classrooms in the district. The advantage of this model is that we would be no more than 4 classrooms short of a full-sized elementary school whereas previously we have thought of this school as having half of the capacity of a traditional elementary school.

Costs

University and school district representatives agree in concept that this decision should be fiscally neutral for both institutions. The University would not expect to contribute funding to construct portions of the facility that the District would be building in a traditional school. The District wouldn't pay for the portion of the building that it would not normally be constructing. Our elementary model provides for one pre-school classroom. Considerable conversation and analysis would need to occur before these costs could be entirely pinned down.

The bottom line is that we would expect the school's portion of this project to be less than the current budget for Elementary No. 10 at Twin Creeks. A major savings would be the cost of bringing utilities to the site. We also do not anticipate having to purchase the property from the University.

Site

The proposed site would be adjacent to Seawell and would most likely be an easier site to develop than at Twin Creeks. There are concerns about traffic flow on

Seawell School Road that would need to be addressed. With the anticipated population growth once Carolina North takes off and the central location of the site, the location is desirable.

Timeline

Parties agree that the opening date for the First School should be August 2009. This is an ambitious, but feasible date. A disadvantage for the First School project is that we could not use one of our elementary school prototypes. We also anticipate that the involvement of another bureaucracy, the University, will slow down the normal design and approval process. On the other hand, there are many complications associated with the School-Park partnership at Twin Creeks that pose similar challenges.

Other Advantages

The following advantages were identified by University and FPG staff and have been excerpted from a memorandum from Dick Clifford:

- *This model offers a new way to think of children starting school that moves away from simply thinking of preschool, Head Start or More at Four as being an "add on" to the existing system, that is not fully integrated into how we think about educating children in our community.*
- *The model has as a major goal of reducing the achievement gap between children with great economic advantage and those with less advantages. About half the achievement gap exists prior to kindergarten entry according to recent studies. By reaching children earlier we have a chance to substantially reduce the gap at this point in their lives. We know that both your More at Four and Head Start programs have this same goal and we see a joint effort in First School as the next logical step in working toward school success for all. A clearly articulated model that cuts across the current age and grade configuration should be a major help in dealing with the achievement gap. We know that the school system has been committed to addressing this issue and believe First School will offer a new set of strategies to accomplish this common goal.*
- *We have stated broadly benefits to the students and families above, but there are additional benefits for teachers and the school system (as well as for the University). A huge issue for us is how teachers are prepared to work with children in the age groupings we propose. We are working very closely with faculty in the School of Education to consider new concepts in teacher education both at the preservice and inservice levels. Dr. Sharon Ritchie has a great deal of experience working with UCLA and the Los Angeles school districts on these issues with marked success. We are optimistic that we can engage in a mutually beneficial effort including all three partners (CHCCS, FPG and SoE) in this effort.*
- *Finally, we are committed to developing positive relationships between researchers and practitioners. A key element of First School is learning how unique teacher practices can be learned and used by others, and ways to reduce barriers that traditionally prevent researchers and teachers from benefiting from one another's expertise. Teachers in First School will have opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways to shaping research questions, participating in research, interpreting data and developing methods they can use to explore their own practice.*

Conclusion

Projections indicate that the district will need to build two elementary schools within approximately the next six years. These very well could be First School and the school at Twin Creeks. We have no other school-sites at this time. The First School option probably would not be available if it were to be the second school constructed. Consequently, it behooves the Board to give serious consideration to this proposal.

A partnership with the University in designing a school that would better educate our youngest students and serve as a model for the nation is exciting. Our pre-school classes currently are "add-ons" to schools and FPG is to be commended for considering a better model. We believe that there would be distinct educational advantages for our students if we pursue First School.

If the Board gives us direction to pursue First School, we immediately need to begin dialogue with the County Commissioners and the general public, particularly the Seawell community.

An earlier version of a description of First School and a capacity impact chart are attached to this report.

The chart below illustrates the impact that First School would have on student capacity within the District. With Elementary #10 opening in 2008 or 2009 with a full 485 capacity, Elementary #11 would be needed in 2012-13. If First School were to open in 2009, Elementary #11 would need to open the next year, 2010.

School Year and Projected Student Enrollment										
CHCCS	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Elem	4879	4989	5152	5250	5303	5416	5471	5525	5581	5636
Cap	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659	4659
LOS	1.05	1.07	1.11	1.13	1.14	1.16	1.17	1.19	1.20	1.21

Elementary #10 Opening in 2008 Elementary #11 Needed in 2012										
CHCCS	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Elem	4879	4989	5152	5250	5303	5416	5471	5525	5581	5636
Cap	4659	4659	4659	5244	5244	5244	5244	5244	5244	5244
LOS	1.05	1.07	1.11	1.00	1.01	1.03	1.04	1.05	1.06	1.07

First School Opening in 2009 Elementary #11 Needed in 2010										
CHCCS	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15
Elem	4879	4989	5152	5250	5303	5416	5471	5525	5581	5636
Cap	4659	4659	4659	4659	5097	5097	5097	5097	5097	5097
LOS	1.05	1.07	1.11	1.13	1.04	1.06	1.07	1.08	1.09	1.11

Planning Proposal
First School
FPG Development Institute
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Summary Statement

America's public schools are being challenged to assure that all children succeed in school. Because research shows that high quality prekindergarten programs can help prepare children for school success, many states are developing early childhood initiatives. However, these initiatives are often limited in focus, not well linked to kindergarten, and of inadequate quality. The FPG Child Development Institute intends to engage in an intensive planning effort to create, study, and share a new model for "First School" beginning at age three. The goal of this effort is to assure a successful school entry experience for all children.

Background

For most children in the United States, school begins at kindergarten. However, a number of studies over the past decade have shown that many children enter kindergarten far behind their peers in development and "academic" knowledge. As a result, achievement gaps appear early, forcing schools to invest resources to remediate these discrepancies.

For many children, remedial programs during the early elementary grades are not sufficient to maximize later school success. Much research, ranging from studies of brain development to studies of preschool programs, points to the importance of early childhood experiences in providing the foundation for later school success.

As a result many state and national efforts to enhance early development have focused on improving childcare. Others, such as Head Start, have established separate programs of services for children who meet specific eligibility criteria. In recent years, public schools have increasingly become involved in early childhood education. Recent reports indicate that as many as 25% of all 4-year-olds in the U.S. are in a preschool classroom operated under the auspices of public schools. Many state prekindergarten programs also include at least some 3-year-olds.

The trend toward public school involvement in services for young children is likely to grow in the coming decade. A viable scenario is that in the next 10-20 years, schools could become the primary agency for meeting the childcare and learning needs of 3- and 4-year-olds.

Problem

Many benefits to children and families could be realized through a comprehensive public school prekindergarten program. However, recent studies indicate several limitations of these programs:

- Prekindergarten programs are usually provided for children at risk for school failure (mostly low-income children) or children with disabilities. Universal access to public school prekindergarten programs is available in only a few locations
- Prekindergarten programs may only be part-day, not meeting the needs of many families for full-time childcare
- Prekindergarten programs are rarely linked with kindergarten and early elementary programs in an integrated fashion, with little alignment of curriculum
- The transition from preschool to kindergarten typically involves minimal communication between programs and little is done to help ease the transition for children and families
- The quality of many prekindergarten programs is disappointingly low

If prekindergarten programs are to achieve their desired benefits, these challenges must be resolved.

Goal

To address these issues, the FPG Child Development Institute proposes to engage in an extensive planning process over the next four years. We intend to lay the groundwork and secure the funding necessary to create a new model for what "First School" might be like for children in America in the next 10-20 years. We envision that First School would have the following features:

- Begin at age 3
- Extend through second or third grade
- Be available to all children
- Provide seamless transitions for children
- Integrate and align curriculum across grades
- Provide developmentally appropriate facilities and activities
- Focus on academic skills, social-emotional development, and health
- Build strong family and community partnerships
- Prevent problems and provide positive support for children and families
- Provide full-day options

A Proposed University – School System Partnership

Our hope is that the First School model would be a partnership between the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, with each having responsibilities with regard to this proposal. Although we are still in the very early stages of planning, here are some likely questions that will need to be discussed:

Who will be responsible for planning this effort? UNC-CH, through FPG, would take the lead in planning. We would assume responsibility for securing all financial support necessary for planning and pilot-testing components of the school. We anticipate a coordinating committee structure with multiple task forces addressing key issues (e.g., designing the physical facility, determining curricula, financial support, etc.). We would expect representation from CHCCS faculty and administrative staff on the coordinating committee and each task force.

Where will the school be located? We have had preliminary discussions with University officials about locating the school at Carolina North. We have received a positive response to this request and believe that this can be worked out. This would be in addition to the land already allocated to the school system.

Who will pay for the building? The university will assume primary responsibility for fundraising, and the building would be a university facility. We are currently seeking donors to help with the construction costs. One possible scenario is that the school system would contribute to the cost of a portion of the building through a fixed-term lease arrangement.

What will be the administrative relationship between the university, the school, and the school system, and who would be responsible for operational costs? This is a complicated question and will require much discussion over the next few years. Many scenarios are possible, each with associated costs and benefits. One option is for the school to operate as a formal part of the school district. In this case, the Board could pay for operations much like it does for an individual school. FPG and UNC would provide support for program development and perhaps for some of the preschool services not currently available through the school system. For the 3- and 4-year-old children a blended funding approach would be anticipated much like the current preschool classes are funded in the district. In fact, some of the current classes of preschoolers may well be moved to this new facility under the plan. A second option would be to organize the program as a charter school. Under this option, the district would be asked to provide operational costs comparable to what is provide to current charter schools. Finally, the plan could call for the site to be operated jointly by the district and the University with some staff employed by the district and assigned to the new site and others hired by the University with other costs to be split on a formula basis.

Many other issues will need to be addressed, such as curriculum alignment, assignment of children to the school, where children would go after completing First School, etc. All of these issues and many others will need to be addressed during an extended period of focused planning.