

Questions from Parents with Answers from the Board - from the Meeting Nov. 10, 2009

Q. What is the subsidy for the whole association?

A. Each year we try to set the budget so that it is balanced for each building. However, some expenses cannot be predicted exactly, so sometimes one building or another goes over or under. This is typically a fairly small amount per student (\$20 to \$50). This year the elementary school is receiving a small “subsidy”.

Q. If we add up all the receipts to run the elementary school are we at a loss that is greater than the middle or high school?

A. Yes. All three buildings operate at a “loss” which is made up by donations, but the difference at the elementary school is larger than the other two buildings. Note that our tuition assistance funds are distributed by need (not by building).

Q. How will the transition of students affect the future Middle School and High School?

A. The board believes that the best chance of success for the future of the middle school and high school is if most of the students from CCES go to GCS. This combines the populations of the two schools so that GCS can contain costs and survive. Without combining the two populations, both schools face fixed costs that will make tuition unaffordable for most of our families.

Q. Won't this problem affect the middle and high school too? What is the board's plan for dealing with that problem in five years?

A. We agree the issue of falling enrollment and rising costs also affects the middle school and high school. We all need to be working towards encouraging more families to send their children to our great school and encouraging donors to provide financial support to struggling families. One thing parents made clear is that we should be communicating the need even more urgently than ever.

Q. Have we gone to the churches for support? Did you tell them we might need to close?

A. Yes, many times. Church support has steadily dropped over the years, in large part because our area churches are also struggling financially. Two of our constituent churches have closed their doors in the last few years. We did not tell them we would need to close because the circumstances were bad, but not yet dire, so no one thought we would need to go that far.

Q. How are Grandville and West Side sustaining?

A. Both GCS and West Side have larger enrollments and have enough students to fill classrooms, for now. GCS's enrollment has stabilized over the past couple of years. (see below). Combining CCES with GCS will provide enough students per teacher to make tuition affordable.

Q. Why didn't we communicate this to the association over the past several years?

A. We communicated the information we had, which was enrollment was falling and this was making it very difficult to provide affordable tuition. We made pleas to donors many times to help struggling families. We published the results of a task force report in 2006 that set a threshold of 170 students at the elementary before drastic action would be necessary. We made an all-out effort with the Plan for Success last spring, again noting that we needed to raise enrollment or donations significantly or the remaining choices would be very undesirable. It is true that the board did not note that closing was a possibility at any time during the falling enrollment over the last twenty years. However, the slow decline turned dramatic just in the last two years. The economic downturn was perhaps the last straw.

At the last Association meeting, in the spring of 2009, the Plan for Success was outlined in detail for anyone who attended that meeting and the minutes of that meeting were made available. The intention was to communicate our enrollment and budgeting problems to the whole association to get everyone on board.

Q. Have we looked at multi-age classrooms?

A. Yes, several times. A number of parents do not want their child in a multi-age classroom (particularly if they are in the older half) and would switch schools. This would simply force tuition even higher or even wider combination of grades.

Q. There are schools elsewhere that are half our size. Why can't that work for us?

A. Usually those smaller schools do not have competition right next door. Most parents will not pay nearly \$6,000 in tuition for a one room school house when they can go to another school right down the road for the same amount, but with age-appropriate instruction.

Q. What about getting students from the Millbrook closing?

A. We have made some advertising and contact attempts. However, only a couple families from Millbrook have made inquiries, so it is highly unlikely that a large number would come our way.

Q. Why not cut busing?

A. Too many of our families depend on busing, so reducing busing would simply accelerate the decline even further. Busing is around 9% of our total expense, so even eliminating it would not be enough to save the school.

Q. Have we disclosed our true financial picture with donors? Would they donate more if they knew more?

A. Yes, we constantly work with our donor base, but the economic crisis has reduced the ability of many of our donors to give at this time. We do not know if they would give more if they knew the situation. We are publishing this information to the entire association (which includes current donors), so perhaps that will have an impact.

Q. Have you been tracking why people leave?

A. Yes, we do exit interviews every time a family leaves. The largest single reason (more than all other reasons combined) is cost. Some families are literally losing their homes trying to make tuition payments. A few families choose different lifestyle options (e.g., a bigger house) and decide they can no longer “afford” tuition.

Q. Can we involve the entire association in a fund raising effort?

A. The Plan for Success was published to the entire association last spring. The superintendent, elementary school principal, and our development director all brought

this urgent need to the attention of our biggest donors. Many passionate parent volunteers sought out additional donors as well. This resulted in shifting around \$30,000 in donations from other sources into tuition support for the elementary and new donations of around \$7,000 specifically due to the fund drive. This was not anywhere near what was needed. At this point, the board believes that we cannot feasibly operate the school next year and believes that no new large donation are likely. Any delay waiting for a donation to arrive would prevent us from pursuing our best chance for keeping Christian education available (by sending our elementary students to GCS).

Q. What happens if the association votes no on the recommendation?

A. The recommendation of sending kids to GCS is the option the board believes has the best chance of keeping children in Christian school in this area. If the association votes down the recommendation, there will be dramatic differences in our association to balance the budget, including reduced program and much higher tuition. We believe that this will cut off too many families at the elementary, who we would then lose permanently.

Q. When did you know that you would close the elementary?

A. At the most recent board meeting (in late October). A parent meeting was scheduled soon thereafter (held on Nov. 10, with another on Nov. 30).

Q. Is there tuition assistance available at GCS?

A. Yes, they use a very similar approach. In fact, the two associations have been working for some time toward alignment, including financial aid.

Q. What is the timeline for the closing of CCES?

A. The board is recommending that we close at the end of this school year, in June 2010. Students would start at GCS the following fall.

Q. Will busing be available to GCS?

A. Yes, CCSA will provide busing for all elementary students to GCS for at least the first year. We don't know all the details yet, but we will plan towards transitioning the busses to GCS (or perhaps arranging a leasing plan of some sort). We believe that the health of GCS will depend on drawing students from a larger area that includes both Grandville and Wyoming.

Q. Why did we pay for an expensive Technology Learning Center when the money was needed at the elementary?

A. The Tech Center was built with money specifically donated for this center and in-kind contributions, not tuition money. We cannot legally or ethically redirect contributions aside from the donor's wishes.

Q. The term "consolidation" was used, but this isn't really a merger, is it?

A. That is true, this is not a merger of associations. But it is a merging of student populations. The central issue is cost. Tuition becomes unaffordable if you cannot spread your fixed costs over enough students. We have reached that point. We would rather keep our building open, but our families can no longer afford it. So we hope that most families will choose to go to GCS, which will give them the numbers necessary to sustain them.

Q. The association strategic plan doesn't say anything about saving the elementary. Why not?

A. The strategic plan does have several areas that specifically address the elementary school. In addition, it references the Elementary School Vision, a separate strategic plan that was focused solely on the elementary school with a goal of sustainability. A few examples from the overall strategic plan include the following. Under Focal Point #2 (Community Relations), all of the listed threats were most significant for the elementary. All of the listed opportunities under that point were directed most easily to the elementary school, including a community partnership that we attempted last year (but which did not succeed). The targets listed under that focal point included several that emphasized the elementary, including #4, 5, and 6. Under Focal Point #3 (Educational Program Development) it lists the Elementary School Vision as one of the strengths. A task force the previous year, led by principal Bob VanWieren and strongly supported by the teachers produced an Elementary School vision that was meant to reinvigorate the school and turn enrollment around. Although the superintendent reported strong community

interest in the vision, this never yielded higher enrollment or donations as was fervently hoped. The targets under this focal point included Spanish immersion and a literacy program – both of these were started at the elementary school first with hopes of improving the enrollment. Under Focal Point #4 (Stewardship), the weakness that mentions tuition was rising as a percentage of income was true for the entire association but most significant at the elementary resulting in “declining enrollment”. The threats all applied to the entire association as well, but again, most urgently to the elementary: rising tuition, dimensioned perception of the value of Christian education, and the competition of charter and home schools. The target of establishing an alliance with GCS is listed under this focal point.

Q. What will the board do for the teachers?

A. Our elementary staff is exceptional and we want our kids to continue learning from these fantastic teachers. The best way for that to happen is to give them enough students to teach. If all of our elementary students go to GCS, then their board will need to hire a number of additional teachers. GCS has promised to look to our CCES staff first. We are grateful for their cooperation.

Q. Isn't GCS experiencing the same problem?

A. Grandville's numbers have stabilized over the past several years.

GCS's enrollment

2009-10	343
2008-09	330
2007-08	332
2006-07	336
2005-06	347
2004-05	340
2003-04	350

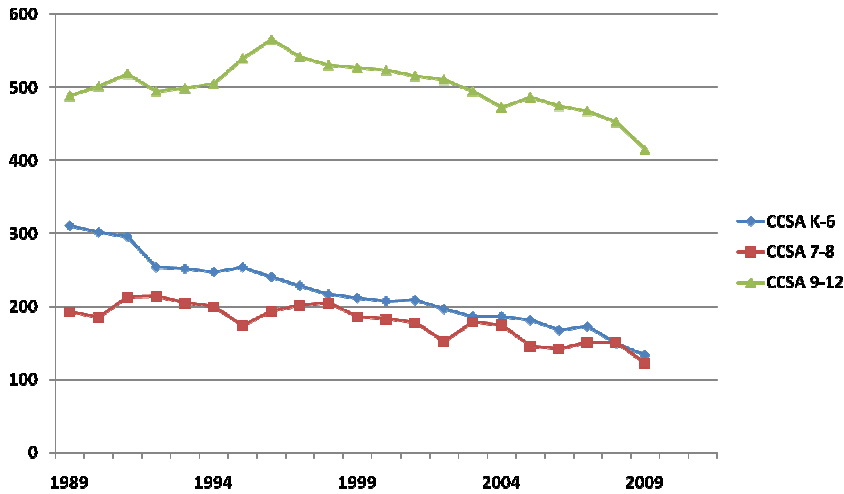
We believe that each school brings some wonderful things to the table. By sharing our vision and our teachers and our students, we hope that this will reinvigorate our constituency and draw new families to the school.

Q. What if I want to communicate with the board further? [Well, actually no one asked this one, but we thought you'd want to know.]

A. Email CCSAboard@gmail.com. The board is monitoring this account regularly.

What are the enrollment numbers for the Middle and High School over the past several years? (See Power Point slides below)

Enrollment



Enrollment as % of Maximum

