

Hoover's Third High School – An Historical Perspective 2000-2008

Compiled from *The Birmingham News* archives, and other sources as cited.

Hoover School Community Information Network

May 2008

Pulling 400 to 500 ninth-graders out of the existing high school and putting them in a separate building should accomplish that goal, Farr said. He would like to open a ninth-grade school two to three years after the second high school opens in August 2001. – feb 4 00 – *The Birmingham News* [NOTE: unless otherwise cited, all quotes are from *The Birmingham News*]

"What this will do is keep us from having a third high school," he said. Because western Hoover is expected to continue growing, it may be necessary in 10 years or so to expand the ninth-grade building and move 10th graders there as well, Farr said. Another option would be to build a third high school in western Hoover and convert the ninth-grade school into a middle school, he said. – feb 4 00

In two weeks, Farr and other officials plan to travel to Allen, Texas - a suburb of Dallas that has similar demographics to Hoover. The school system there has a high school with 2,100 10th- through 12th-graders and a separate ninth-grade school, Farr said. – feb 4 00 (note that this is a one-high-school district and remains so to this day)

Hoover High Principal Gene Godwin said he would love to get his school down to 1,400 or 1,500 students. Including adults, the school has close to 3,000 people, he said.

"You want to think you're doing a good job, but you can be a lost person in that many people," Godwin said. "It would help for it to be a little bit smaller."

However, building a ninth grade school will require a lot of thought, Godwin said.

Sometimes it's hard for students to develop a sense of belonging in a school with only one or two grades, he said.

"It would be important for them to feel like they're a part of the high school and not just in a holding place," Godwin said.

Keeping a ninth-grade building close and the students involved in high school activities would help accomplish that, he said. – feb 4 00

Hoover school officials plan to build three new schools in the next three to five years, including a 10th elementary school in Riverchase, a fourth middle school at Spain Park and a separate building for the ninth grade at Hoover High, Farr said.- feb 21 01

"We're meeting sometime soon with (Hoover planning consultant) Bob House to get updated population projections for the city, to plug that in and have a more definitive idea on which one needs to go first," Farr said.

Farr's guess would be the elementary school first, the middle school second and the ninth grade school third, he said. The ninth grade school might come later than three to five years from now, but not much later, he said. – feb 21 01

In five to eight years, the school board likely will need a \$17.5 million loan for a new ninth-grade building at Hoover High, or a third high school, Farr said. School officials should decide this summer which it will be, he said. – apr 4 01

Hoover schools are simply borrowing money for construction projects that school leaders pledged to build with money from property tax increases approved by Hoover voters in 1990 and 1998, Farr said. – apr 4 01 (note that this article was about borrowing \$90 million for construction of new schools and furnishings.)

Within eight years, the school system will need either a new ninth-grade building at Hoover High or a third high school, he (Jack Farr) said. A ninth-grade building should cost about \$17.5 million, (CFO Robert) Yeager said. – apr 11 01

Just four months after opening a second high school, Hoover school system officials are debating whether to build a third high school or a new ninth-grade building for Hoover High.

Hoover schools Superintendent Jack Farr said he favors a ninth-grade building, but at least two school board members said they prefer the idea of a third high school for the state's sixth largest city.

Regardless, something will have to be done to keep Hoover High from becoming overcrowded again in four or five years, Farr said. – dec 19 01

Building a separate building for ninth-graders would drop the student population at the main building down to about 1,400 and keep the school system from having to build a third high school for another 10 years, Farr said. – dec 19 01

A group of Hoover school officials went to Allen, Texas nearly two years ago to examine a ninth grade school, and Farr said he liked what he saw.

"The ninth-graders looked like our eighth-graders," he said. "Ninth-graders are a different breed," going through the transition from middle school to high school while their hormones are active.

Perhaps putting them in a separate school and slowing that process down will help some as far as growth and development, Farr said. – dec 19 01

School board member Susanne Bray also went on the trip to Texas and said she didn't care for the ninth-grade school concept. Putting children in a school for just one year might leave them without much of a sense of school ownership, Ms. Bray said.

A lot of problems can be solved by building smaller high schools, she said. – dec 19 01

School board President Robert Pears said that, as a parent, he would rather his children go to a traditional four-grade school when it's time for them to go to high school.

"I just simply believe that a traditional high school arrangement is best," Pears said. "I think a third high school is something we need to be talking about." - dec 19 01

Spain Park High School's first pupils have barely scuffed the floors and Hoover school officials are looking at whether to plan a third high school or an independent ninth-grade building at Hoover High. – dec 19 01 editorial by Peggy Sanford

The question is one of approach. Should the Hoover School Board build a third high school within about five years, or add a ninth-grade building and delay a third high school for maybe 10 years, according to Superintendent Jack Farr.

He has espoused the virtues of an independent ninth grade since at least early 2000, but some of the school board members are saying they would prefer adding another traditional four-year high school.

Acknowledging no personal expertise here, my gut wants to go with the superintendent. It's not just wanting to avoid another high school/ community split.

Farr is, by no means, the first educator - or parent - who I have heard describe ninth-graders as "a different breed" while they struggle to adapt to high school and to stay afloat on a sea of raging, pubescent hormones. Actually, Farr's description is more charitable than many.

He cites students at a ninth grade school in Texas and says they "looked like our eighth graders." Maybe they were less frenzied in their quest to be grown. Farr sees merit in separating the young teens from the more mature sophomores, juniors and seniors, possibly giving the youngsters more time and space to develop.

Board member Susanne Bray saw the Texas ninth graders but still prefers adding a full high school, although she advocates high schools smaller than Hoover's two behemoths. Maybe smaller would take some of the edge off the transition from middle to high school, but the worried mother in me likes the idea of a buffer year for the 13- and 14-year-old set. There still will be plenty of pressure on them as sophomores to emulate the juniors and seniors, and most of them will still have the opportunity ahead to be thoroughly humiliated as college freshmen. That valuable learning experience won't be lost.

The debate is young. There's time to learn more about the options.

Farr says Mountain Brook High School, the state's top performer, has only 10th through 12th grades. Maybe that's a good place to look first.– dec 19 01 editorial by Peggy Sanford

Hoover's 10th elementary school should open in Riverchase in two years, and school officials expect to build an 11th in the Shannon Valley development within five years, schools Superintendent Jack Farr said.

Farr's comments came during a recent meeting of the Hoover Board of Education in which school officials discussed future capital projects. Other projects being considered include a fourth middle school next to Spain Park High, a performing arts center and either a third high school or a new ninth-grade building at Hoover High. – aug 7 02

Daniel Corp. and USS also have offered to sell the school system up to 120 acres in Shannon Valley at \$30,000 an acre for a high school site. That's a maximum of \$3.6 million. If the Hoover Board of Education doesn't want to build a high school in the

Shannon Valley development, USS extended the same offer on other land it owns in Hoover.

Price too high

Farr said last week that \$30,000 an acre is too high a price. He recommended that Hoover Mayor Barbara McCollum put \$15,000 an acre in a proposed agreement being worked out among the city, school board and developers, he said.

Farr told the school board that Hoover will need a third high school in five to eight years. He said he is unsure, however, whether the system can afford it within that time.

The school board may need to consider building a ninth-grade building next to Hoover High to ease congestion there and give the system time to build up its capital fund, Farr said.

The ninth-grade building, which likely would cost \$15 to \$18 million, could be converted into a middle school once a third high school is built, he said. That cost would be easier to handle in the next several years than a \$40 to \$50 million high school, he said.

School board member Joe Dean said he did not realize in earlier discussions that Farr intended for a ninth-grade building to be converted to a middle school. "That affects my thinking," Dean said.

School board member Robert Pears, who previously has said he didn't like the idea of a ninth-grade school, agreed. Pears said he wants to ensure, however, that the school board has plenty of debate and discussion about its five-year capital plan.

Farr said he intends to have an updated five-year building plan ready soon for the board to consider.

If the school board decides not to build a third high school immediately, students who live in Shannon Valley may have to be zoned for Spain Park High, Farr said. Hoover High likely will be too crowded for them, he said.

The distance from Shannon Valley to Spain Park is probably shorter than high school students from Greystone had to drive to Hoover High for many years, Farr said. – aug 7 02

As for the fourth middle school at Spain Park, Farr said that school should be needed in three to five years. He would like to open it in August 2005, he said. – aug 7 02

Sixteen percent of the sales tax revenue from commercial developments in Shannon Valley will go to Hoover schools, Austin said. – nov 20 02

Austin, reading from the mayor's comments, noted that Hoover passed along \$7 million in sales tax revenue to the school system last year and is expected to send about \$7.7 million this year.

"It is my understanding that these funds are used to hire teachers to help reduce student/teacher ratios," Austin said.

That money probably pays for roughly 150 teachers, school officials said.

However, "the City of Hoover does not dictate to the Hoover school system how to spend their money," Austin said. "The Hoover Board of Education is an independent board responsible for their own budget." – nov 20 02

The school board could set up a Greystone middle school zone to pull nearly 600 students from Berry and shift some students now in the Simmons' zone into Berry's school zone, McBay said.

That would allow for growth at Simmons, which could accommodate the expected higher growth rates in western Hoover, McBay said. It also could shift some of those students from the Hoover High zone into the Spain Park High zone, he said.

That might delay the need for a third high school or a new ninth-grade building at Hoover High, McBay said. – dec 18 02

Hoover's school system, probably as much as any one aspect of life in the city, is the carrot that continues to lure residents in. Standardized test scores for 2002 again affirmed that Hoover students, overall, are performing at the top levels in the state. The need for a third high school in Hoover is a given. The questions are how soon and how big? Will a third high school be another behemoth like Hoover and Spain Park high schools? If the city continues to add new territory and grow at its current rate, how can school officials avoid building another huge high school, even though there's research to suggest students perform better in small schools? – may 7 03

The comprehensive redrawing of Hoover school attendance zones proposed last week should shift enough students to delay the need to build more schools, officials say. It could keep the school board from having to build a third high school or ninth-grade building at Hoover High for two to three years, said Gary McBay, the director of school services who designed the rezoning plan. – feb 25 04

At the high school level, the major change would be that students who live in the Green Valley Elementary zone would attend Spain Park High instead of Hoover High. That will help keep Hoover High from getting overcrowded and delay the need for a third high school or a ninth-grade building at Hoover High, McBay said. – feb 25 04

Farr plans to recommend the construction of a new building next to Hoover High that initially could house Hoover High ninth-graders but later be turned into Hoover's fifth middle school.

That hopefully should help avoid expected overcrowding at Hoover High, which could allow students from the Green Valley zone to stay at Hoover High, Farr said.

Changes in high school zoning hopefully won't be necessary until Hoover builds its third high school by 2010 or 2012, McBay said.

(School Board President Joe) Dean said it's important for people to understand that a third high school and other schools will be needed.

"Once people begin to come to grips with that, they should also be prepared to be thinking because building new facilities and the new zones that would be required could possibly affect them," Dean said.

Hoover already has begun the process of building Spain Park Middle. The ninth-grade building and future middle school next to Hoover High needs to be ready in three years, McBay said.

Three to four years after that, the third high school will be needed, and two other elementary schools likely will be needed by then, he said. – apr 6 04

"We should not have to buy any land in Hoover if developers want us to provide schools for their developments," school board President Joe Dean said at a recent school board work session. "They ought to provide that."

School board member Robert Bumpus, a former Hoover schools superintendent, agreed. "Developers need to be giving us land, not trying to sell us land," Bumpus told fellow board members.

Bumpus has made specific references to the 1,600-acre Ross Bridge development in western Hoover, which developers say should include 2,400 residences to be built over the next 12 years.

Daniel Corp., which is developing the home sites, has agreed to donate 20 prepared acres for an elementary school but offered to sell land for a high school site for \$30,000 an acre.

Hoover schools Superintendent Jack Farr, who is on medical leave until his retirement takes effect by June 1, has said for years that price is too high. Bumpus said any price is too high.

Gary McBay, who oversees capital projects planning and construction for Hoover schools, said the system doesn't have the money now to build a third high school to serve the western part of Hoover.

The school board two weeks ago zoned Ross Bridge high school students to Spain Park on the eastern side of Hoover because there's no room for those students at Hoover High. McBay said he would like to think that Daniel Corp. and United States Steel Corp. would entertain the idea of donating a high school site in Ross Bridge.

Charles Carlisle, a senior vice president with Daniel Corp. who has been negotiating with school officials on behalf of the developers, said donating land has never been mentioned to him.

"We've never been asked to consider that, one way or the other," Carlisle said. "Since it hasn't come formally from them, I really wouldn't want to speculate on what we might or might not do." – apr 20 04

The school system ended fiscal 2003 with about \$40 million in its "brick and mortar" fund, which receives 24 mills of property taxes each year.

Revenues into that 24-mill fund have grown from \$17.6 million in fiscal 1999 to \$21.3 million in 2000, \$22.7 million in 2001, \$22.8 million in 2002 and \$23.7 million in 2003, Craig said. The amount is expected to jump about 14 percent to more than \$27 million this fiscal year, he said.

This year's comparatively steep revenue jump comes because of recent property value reappraisals, Craig said.

The jump in revenues will increase the school system's borrowing capacity, if it chooses to borrow more money to finance construction, Craig said. The school system is in good enough shape now that it could pay for some construction projects with cash, if the board so desired, he said.

School board President Joe Dean said it's good to know the school system has the capacity to do what it needs to do if it manages its money wisely.

School board member and former Hoover schools Superintendent Robert Bumpus told his fellow board members last week that they may be able to solve some of their expected crowding problems if they "aggressively pursue" their building program.

Bumpus has said he believes Hoover will need a third high school, a fourth and fifth middle school and an 11th and 12th elementary school within the next six to eight years. Acting Superintendent Connie Williams said some people are saying the system doesn't need to build buildings now because there's room at some schools for more students if they're rezoned. That's what the debate concerning rezoning students in the Green Valley Elementary zone from Simmons Middle School to Berry Middle School and from Hoover High to Spain Park High is all about, Williams said. Those discussions continue. Bumpus said the school system can't control the level of building in Hoover, but it better get ready for it. He drove around in high-growth areas recently, and "it boggled my mind what is going on," he said. "What's happening to this city - it's going to catch us." – apr 28 04

The Hoover school board last week voted to begin preliminary work for the "possible construction" of a new school next to Hoover High and Trace Crossings Elementary. The school would be designed as a middle school but would be used temporarily to house Hoover High ninth-graders until Hoover's third high school opens, Acting Superintendent Connie Williams said.

This doesn't mean school officials have definitely decided to build the middle school building, Williams said. "It simply gets the ball rolling so that if that is decided, it may be possible to do it in time to open in the fall of 2006," Williams said. If they wait to get started, it could delay opening the school for another year, she said.

Time is of the essence because school officials have said they expect Hoover High to be overcrowded in a few years unless something is done to relieve it. Hoover High already has more than 2,000 students. It can hold about 2,200 without portable classrooms, school officials say.

School officials now will begin securing a topographical survey of the land next to Hoover High and do a site design that would include clearing, grading and installation of utilities, Williams said.

The best chance to open a new school there in August 2006 would involve using the same middle school design being used for Spain Park Middle School, with some minor modifications for programming purposes, she said.

Williams has not made a recommendation to the school board concerning redrawing attendance zones for middle and high schools. School board member Joe Dean said there needs to be more discussion regarding potential uses for Berry Middle School if it is closed before a rezoning decision is made. – may 26 04

From December 6, 2004, Hoover City Council Minutes. [Please note that at the City Council's next meeting, a specially called meeting, on December 16, 2004, the City Council unanimously voted to rescind a resolution from 1994 that gave the school system 16% of Hoover's sales tax proceeds.]

Dr. Williams stated the Board of Education is currently in the process of rezoning their schools and this sort of thing will be taken into account. She stated the critical situation is at Hoover High School. She stated she does not envision much additional zoning toward Spain Park High School as there is not a huge amount of capacity at Spain Park.

Mr. Lott questioned if the Board had looked at the possibility of building a new high school in Ross Bridge. Dr. Williams stated they have looked at this possibility. There is

an elementary site identified with the possibility of purchasing land in Ross Bridge for a high school. She stated the high purchase price is a concern. Going through the zoning discussions the fact that Berry Middle School is located on the edge of the city has been an issue. This has been an issue when considering the construction of a new high school in the Ross Bridge area as it is also on the fringe of the City limits. This could create a situation similar to the one currently at Berry Middle. She stated they are looking desperately for a site for a third high school. She stated it takes two to three years to build a high school even if the site has been selected and purchased. She felt Hoover High would be at capacity by that time.

Mr. Ivey questioned the possibility of expanding on the Hoover High School site versus another high school.

Dr. Williams stated the original plans were drawn so that it could be added on to. She noted she had served as Principal for five years at Hoover High and there was discussion whether it should be added on to or another facility be constructed. The community was vocal to the Board that a second high school was preferable versus having a “mega high school”. Now that Spain Park is as large as it is and Hoover High is as close to capacity as it was originally when Spain Park was built, they recognize that if they had added on to Hoover High, they would still be in a crowded situation at that location. She again stated she was not sure how large the community would want a high school to be. She did state they could not add on to it enough to take care of all the potential development on this side of town.

There is property to add more classrooms to the existing building. She stated another scenario that has been discussed is the possibility of a 9th grade facility. This would be a building, designed as a middle school but would be used to house the 9th grade at Hoover High School across Buccaneer Dr. from the high school until such time as a third high school could be built. That school could be converted to a middle school at the same time a third high school would be opened. That would not take quite as long because they have a middle school under construction and the plans could be used.

Mr. Wright stated he had asked how close the proposed third high school site in Ross Bridge was to the City of Homewood; he was told it was 4,200 feet. He stated he had ridden with Mr. Bumpus in this area looking for a high school site. He noted that Shades Mountain and the Cahaba River were two natural barriers that made it very difficult to find such a location. Dr. Williams stated that 80 to 100 acres is necessary for a high school site.

Some (community planning) team members suggested Berry could be turned into a charter school, vocational school, or perhaps school officials could move the alternative school or International Baccalaureate program to Berry. Maybe it could be Hoover's third high school, another said.

Some have suggested turning Berry, at least temporarily, into a 9th-grade building for Hoover High, which is expected to reach capacity next year. – jan 26 05

The ongoing process of redrawing school attendance zones in Hoover and the fear and bitterness that stirs is a poignant example of the problems unfettered growth can bring. Less than four years after the city built its second high school, a third is needed and can't be built fast enough to avoid crowding Hoover High School, again. – feb 9 05 editorial by Peggy Sanford

A Community Planning Team made up of Hoover parents has given Williams a ranked list of 11 ways to rezone students. The top three ideas would close Berry Middle School, either completely in the next school year or gradually over three years. They also would immediately begin construction of a ninth-grade building at Hoover High, which could be converted into a middle school once a third high school comes on line.

The top-ranked scenario that doesn't close Berry would shift students from the Bluff Park Elementary zone to Berry from Simmons Middle and keep students from the Riverchase and Shades Mountain elementary zones at Berry. Only students from Greystone and Rocky Ridge would go to the new middle school at Spain Park, under that scenario. – feb 16 05

Planning team's top four ideas

Here are the top four rezoning ideas submitted to Hoover schools Superintendent Connie Williams by the Community Planning Team.

No. 1 Scenario

- Close Berry Middle in 2005-06.
- Send students from Greystone, Rocky Ridge and Riverchase elementaries to Spain Park Middle.
- Send students from Shades Mountain Elementary to Simmons Middle and Hoover High.
- Build ninth-grade building at Hoover High.
- Bumpus Middle may need minor expansion in 2008-10.

No. 2 Scenario

- Close Berry Middle gradually.
- Open Spain Park Middle with sixth-graders from Greystone, Rocky Ridge, Riverchase and Shades Mountain elementaries; add seventh and eighth-graders over next two years.
- Build addition at Spain Park Middle to handle those students.
- Build ninth-grade building at Hoover High.
- Bumpus Middle may require minor expansion in 2008-10.

No. 3 Scenario

- Close Berry Middle in 2005-06.
- Send students from Greystone, Rocky Ridge, Riverchase and Shades Mountain elementaries to Spain Park Middle; still must find way to accommodate extra students until Spain Park Middle can be expanded (perhaps use trailers or Spain Park High).
- Build ninth-grade building at Hoover High.
- Bumpus Middle may require minor expansion in 2008-10.

No. 4 Scenario

- Send students from Bluff Park, Riverchase and Shades Mountain elementaries to Berry Middle.
- Send students from Greystone and Rocky Ridge elementaries to Spain Park Middle.
- Move students in Trace Crossings Elementary zone from Bumpus Middle to Simmons Middle.
- Expand Spain Park High immediately.
- Start construction of third high school, to open in 2007-08 and to be fed by Bumpus Middle. – feb 16 05

From the Adopted Rezoning Plan Feb 28 05: Construction will begin as soon as possible on a facility on or near the Hoover High School campus. This facility will be used initially to house HHS 9th graders. At the point in the future when a 3rd high school is opened, it will be converted to a middle school. The plan anticipates that this facility will be opened for 9th graders at the beginning of the 2006-07 school year. The projection is that this facility should be designed for approximately 1200 students.

Hoover High No. 3 Rising land costs create need to choose site soon

The contentious Hoover school rezoning debate is over, but other challenges, such as choosing a site for Hoover's third high school, loom on the horizon.

Hoover school leaders have identified three potential sites for a third high school: The new Ross Bridge community in western Hoover, land along South Shades Crest Road and land north of Simmons Middle School, city school Superintendent Connie Williams said.

Gary McBay, Hoover's director of school services, said he believes, however, only one of those sites has real potential right now - Ross Bridge.

That's because the developers of the 1,600-acre Ross Bridge development - Daniel Corp. and USS Real Estate - have set aside up to 100 acres for a high school, McBay said.

"We have talked to no one else about any other definitive site," McBay said.

Ross Bridge developers have offered to sell the land to the school system for \$30,000 an acre, and Hoover school officials have made no secret they think that's too much.

Shades Crest site

Along South Shades Crest Road, no specific site has been identified, but there's a lot of undeveloped land there.

Off Chapel Road, north of Simmons Middle School, there are about 170 acres of undeveloped land, mostly unincorporated, estimates developer Charles Kessler. He and a partner own about half of it and want to put garden homes and town houses on their portion, he said.

A Hoover-size high school will require 80 to 100 acres, including all the athletic fields and parking, McBay said.

Hoover school board President Kay Witt said school officials need to explore their options quickly. Hoover likely won't need the third high school until about 2011, she said, but "land in Hoover is quickly becoming scarce."

Land availability isn't the only consideration. School officials also are trying to predict where future growth will occur.

They want time to see how fast Ross Bridge will grow, and they're keeping an eye on land south of Hoover Metropolitan Stadium, where developers already have sought to build more homes.

Timing of the site selection is important, Williams said. "The sooner you do it, the more likely you are to make a mistake about where you put it," she said. School officials want to delay that decision as long as possible, Williams said.

That's a big reason why school officials decided last month to build a ninth-grade building at Hoover High School that later can be converted into a middle school instead of building a third high school immediately, she said.

Burgeoning Hoover High

Hoover High is expected to reach its capacity of 2,200 students in the next school year. A ninth-grade building that opens in August 2006 will provide relief until the third high school comes on line, Williams said.

The more pressing issue is what to do at Bumpus Middle School, which is projected to be over its capacity of 1,200 students in the 2008-09 school year, Williams said.

Planning consultant Tim Aho said Bumpus is projected to have 1,205 students in 2008-09, 1,224 in 2009-10 and 1,284 in 2010-11. The school might be able to squeeze students in until August 2010, he said.

Williams said school officials have to decide how they will address that crowding problem. They could try to have a third high school ready by the time Bumpus is full so that the ninth grade building can be converted into Hoover's fourth middle school to relieve Bumpus, she said.

Two other options are to build an addition at Bumpus or to move some of Bumpus' students, such as eighth-graders, to the ninth-grade building, Williams said. The ninth-grade building is being designed to accommodate 1,200 students and should have room for some of the Bumpus students if that were the preferred option, she said.

Delaying construction of a third high school would help financially because high schools are much more expensive to build and operate, and additional time to save money for that will help, Williams said.

School board member Joe Dean said he would rather build a third high school sooner than later because he doesn't want to see Hoover High get too large.

It would be better to have three high schools of 1,500 students than two, with one having more than 3,000 students, Dean said. "High schools should be able to offer a robust selection of academic programs and extracurricular activities when their enrollment does not exceed 2,000 students," Dean said. "We could still be competitive academically and athletically."

Regardless of when the third high school is built, the school board still must decide who will attend it and the fourth middle school.

The rezoning debate will be back. As Dean put it, "this is just one step in a process, and it will not end." – mar 23 05

Hoover plans to put most of its \$80 million share of the money toward a building for ninth-graders from Hoover High. That ninth-grade building will be converted to a middle school when the system adds a third high school. Hoover Superintendent Connie Williams said if the money doesn't come through, the school board will have to use its own money or adjust its construction and technology plans. – aug 7 05

The Hoover school board has decided to build a separate ninth-grade building for Hoover High until a third high school can be built. The ninth-grade building then will become a middle school.

Some outsiders credit Hoover's success to its large pool of students and ample financial resources, but Hoover officials and parents say there's a lot more to it. Strong community support, talented faculty and students, good management and old-fashioned hard work all play into the equation, they say. – aug 14 05

The superintendent had asked for council members' suggestions on a new high school site, as well as their thoughts on what should be done with the old Berry Middle School. The Columbiana Road campus, once the city's only high school, is set to close next year as students move to the new Berry Middle School at Spain Park.

Williams said she hopes city and school officials will start meeting on a quarterly basis, and in future meetings, she hopes there will be time for public comment.

Petelos also said he hopes to plan more joint meetings to continue to discuss developing issues, like the opening of a new high school.

Choosing the right location for the school will be a tough decision, the mayor said, because there are a lot of unknowns about future development in the city. – nov 16 05

Williams said it's unclear how long the Freshman Center will be needed before enrollment growth triggers the construction of the city's third high school.

The main concern is not how quickly Hoover High will fill back up, but how quickly Bumpus Middle School will reach its capacity of 1,100 students, she said. The school has 919 students enrolled this year.

"The primary determinant will be the enrollment of Bumpus Middle School and how quickly that (Freshman Center) will need to be converted to a middle school," Williams said.

But the school system cannot convert the Freshman Center into a middle school until the third high school is built because all those freshmen will not fit into Hoover High.

When Bumpus Middle fills up, Williams said officials may consider moving its eighth-graders to the Freshman Center to delay the middle school conversion and the construction of a third high school.

She cited several reasons the system might want to put off the high school construction as long as possible, including the cost of building a high school, estimated at a minimum of \$60 million.

Staffing a high school is another major expense, she said. Officials also want to build the third high school in a location that would be convenient for students, but future residential development is difficult to predict.

The longer the construction of a third high school is delayed, the better the chance of building it in the right place, Williams said. – nov 24 05

In other business Monday, the board awarded a \$29.8 million contract to Doster Construction for a Hoover High freshman center the company will build on 40 acres just south of Hoover Metropolitan Stadium. Doster was the lowest of three bidders.

Clearing land should begin next week, said Gary McBay, who oversees construction projects for Hoover schools. The 180,000-square-foot school is scheduled to open August 2007. Hoover officials plan to convert it into a middle school once the system builds a third high school. – mar 1 06

From March 13 06 Board of Education Minutes:

Mr. Veitch asked that based on one Board members opinion, that the Superintendent consider the following items:

Delay building a new high school for as long as possible;

Conduct a study, done by an outside source, to see whether or not we can leave the sixth graders in the elementary school, consider the junior high type school, compare the cost and see if that would help delay having to build another high school;

Baker and Bolt also emphasized financial accountability. Baker said there needs to be sound long-range planning. Her experience and education in the construction and development fields will allow her to contribute strong leadership in the growth and management of physical assets, she said.

Bolt said he wants to look at future expansion plans to reevaluate their necessity. "They are very expensive," he said.

He'd (Bolt would) like to study possible ways to delay the construction of a third high school, such as redrawing high school attendance zones to put more students at Spain Park High, building a freshman center for Spain Park High or pushing ninth-graders back into middle school and sixth-graders back to elementary school, he said.

He also wants to make sure they're not spending any more than necessary on construction while at the same time keeping first-class facilities, he said. – apr 26 06

The problem, as Baker noted, is that "there's not an endless supply of money, and there never will be." With the school board still contemplating building a third high school, "I'm not sure that's the wisest way to spend money," she said. --- from a nov 15 06 editorial by Jon Anderson discussing spending \$1.4 million on artificial turf, Coach Rush Propst stated that he leaned toward an indoor practice facility.

The real questions are: What should the priorities of the school board be? What are the biggest needs, and what are the best ways to handle enrollment growth?

The new freshman center being built for Hoover High should prevent crowding there, but only for so long. With Bumpus Middle School expected to reach capacity by 2008 or 2009, the freshman center will need to be converted into a middle school (as planned) to provide relief for Bumpus.

So does Hoover need to start building a third high school? School board member A.W. Bolt said he wants to avoid that because of the tremendous cost.

Some people have proposed that the old Berry school be reopened as a smaller high school. Others have suggested pushing ninth-graders into middle school and sixth-graders back to the elementary level. The latter, to me, creates more problems than it solves. Bolt said the school board is working on a capital projects plan. The big question is whether the new school board will undo the work of former Superintendent Connie Williams and the community planning team that recommended closing the old Berry Middle School.

Whatever the school board does, it should allow public input. The Hoover School Community Information Network is trying to help by conducting a survey on its Web site, asking people to rank spending priorities. – dec 13 06 editorial by Jon Anderson

(Superintendent Andy Craig) He'll have to see the data, but Craig said in general he's not fond of one idea for addressing growth: a third high school.

"I worry about the long-term risk that a third high school could potentially bring, in terms of diluting the programs we can offer, diluting the quality of the programs, diluting our ability to always invest in the classroom and in our teachers," he said. – feb 25 07

Hoover needs a third public high school, and it needs to be similar to the existing two, according to respondents to an online survey by the Hoover School Community Information Network. – may 23 07 (link to survey results: *Thoughts on the Third High School*: <http://www.hscin.org/Survey%20Results/ThirdHighSchoolSurveyResults.pdf>)

The opening of a second high school in 2001 was a milestone, and now a third high school is a possibility, as school officials decide how to handle secondary growth if the freshman center becomes a middle school as planned. – may 23 07

Bigger isn't always better. That's according to a recent online survey by the Hoover School Community Information Network. Seventy-one percent of the 191 survey respondents said Hoover children are not best served by the "mega-high school" format, defined as one that serves more than 1,000 students. Seventeen percent said they liked that format, while 12 percent weren't sure.

A whopping 76 percent said Hoover needs to build a third high school, creating three 1,200-student high schools. Hoover has about 2,200 students now, and Spain Park has more than 1,300.

"Huge high schools prevent many kids from developing their talents when only a tiny percentage of the student body can be part of activities such as sports, student government, performing arts, etc.," one survey respondent wrote.

Hoover school board President Donna Frazier said she is "totally opposed to a third high school" right now. "I would rezone before I would build a third high school," Frazier said. Yes, she knows rezoning is a "horrendous" process that gets people up in arms. But Frazier said it doesn't make sense to build a new high school when Spain Park High can take hundreds more students.

"We do not have unlimited funds . . . We have got to be good stewards of our money," Frazier said. "We can't just flippantly spend \$70 million plus to build a new high school." "Long-range planning is something that has got to be done," Frazier said. "We owe it to the community to come up with a plan. I would like to start that immediately."

If the board waits much longer, it could spell trouble. Bumpus Middle School is expected to reach capacity in 2008 or 2009, meaning the new Hoover High Freshman Center will be needed for its planned conversion into a middle school.

Let's hope the board includes the public in that planning process.

I close with a comment from one of the survey respondents: "I think it is imperative that school and city officials engage the community they serve through honest and meaningful dialogue before making decisions that affect us all." - may 23 07 editorial by Jon Anderson

The school system is also considering buying land for a high school in Ross Bridge, but no decision is expected soon, (Gary) McBay said. – jun 27 07

McBay said discussions between the school system and the developers could result in a different site being chosen. The school system also is talking to the developers about the

possibility of buying land in Ross Bridge that would be the site of the city's third high school.

McBay said a high school campus would require 70 to 100 acres.

The school board has not decided whether to build a third high school. McBay said it could expand Hoover High School or rezone instead.

Frazier said she likes the idea of identifying land for a third high school because suitable properties are scarce. But she said she would not be in favor of building a third high school now because Spain Park High School is under capacity.

Frazier said she would favor rezoning to send more students to Spain Park before construction of a third high school. "Everybody can't be a Hoover Buc," she said. – jun 27 07

The stated plan to relieve Bumpus is to turn the new Hoover High freshman campus into a middle school. But to do that, you've got to have a place to put the freshmen.

There's not room at the main Hoover High campus. Hoover needs a third high school very soon, or there needs to be some rezoning to move some of the students from Hoover High to Spain Park High.

If school officials plan to build a third high school in time to relieve Bumpus, they better get busy identifying some land and turning some dirt.

It takes a while to build the mammoth high schools that this community seems to like.

However, school board members have not looked highly on building a third high school.

That means rezoning is more likely. But we have yet to hear any public discussion about what kind of rezoning might be needed.

Another possibility is turning the freshman center into a school for eighth-graders and ninth-graders on a temporary basis. That would be unusual, but Hoover has been known to mix up its grade levels.

Hoover school board members and the central office staff said a year ago they were working on a plan to address growth. Some hoped to have ideas to present to the public by the end of 2006. We're still waiting, and the clock is still ticking. – sep 12 07 editorial by Jon Anderson

A third high school is definitely in Hoover's future. It's just a matter of when. Some people may want to preserve Hoover High School's huge size as long as possible to maximize the athlete pool, but there will be a tipping point. And a third high school likely will cost in excess of \$70 million. – dec 12 07 editorial by Jon Anderson

Finally. It appears we are starting to see some significant movement on a plan to address growth in Hoover schools.

When former Superintendent Connie Williams was fired in June 2006, her plans for building new schools went with her.

The newly appointed school board at the time voiced displeasure with the decision to close the old Berry Middle School campus on Columbiana Road (which was recommended by a community planning team and approved by the previous school board). The new school board also spoke against Williams' plan to build a third high school.

But ever since then, we've been waiting for a new plan to emerge. School board members initially said they hoped to have a plan to present by the end of 2006. We waited and waited, but nothing ever came. – jan 30 08 editorial by Jon Anderson

Eventually - in a galaxy far, far away (when enrollment at Hoover High is large enough that opening a third high school won't dilute the football talent pool too much) - Simmons could be converted into a third high school. This is thanks to the city of Hoover's decision to buy 79 acres next to Simmons, which could allow the school system to expand the campus into a Hoover-sized high school if school officials have the interest.

This plan is not a done deal, Craig said. It's still being studied, along with other ideas. Regardless of what you think of this plan, it's encouraging to know that someone is indeed planning. – jan 30 08 editorial by Jon Anderson

The freshman campus would become a middle school, and Simmons would become a ninth-grade campus, leaving open the possibility of eventually expanding Simmons into a third high school.

Some parents were concerned that moving the freshman campus to Simmons would create logistical issues for students and teachers shuttling between the ninth-grade campus and Hoover High. They also questioned whether the former Berry site could be brought up to the same standards as the current middle schools.

Craig said the plan is "not ideal," but it would give the school system time to see how residential areas develop before making any pricey decisions at the high school level. Craig said that option is a bridge plan that would require a decision on whether to build a third high school or add on to Hoover High sooner rather than later. – feb 5 08

The councilman(Jack Wright) points out that because of the land's rocky terrain, it's unlikely the property is suitable for a much talked-about third city high school.

Some City Council members suggested it would be better to first let school officials settle on a plan for using the land before the council decides what to do with the land. "I'm not ready to tell the school system where or where not to plan for any kind of school," said Councilman Brian Skelton. – mar 5 08

When I wrote the story, few people seemed to care. New schools still were being built and others renovated. But people are beginning to take notice now as school officials say they don't have the money to build a third high school, and they're talking about shuffling students to get by.

If there isn't money to build a third high school, it's because school officials didn't save for it. The money has been coming in from property taxes. They've just been using it on other things.

I still question whether affordability is the real issue with a third high school. The school district has more than \$80 million in a debt service account - money received from Jefferson County's bond issue supported by a 1-cent sales tax increase that went into effect in 2005. That money could go toward a third high school, or at least toward a debt payment on it.

I'm no finance expert, but some things just don't add up. – apr 9 08 editorial by Jon Anderson

Some parents who heard Craig's presentation said they are concerned about whether the district will be able to build a third high school.

Craig said funding and building a third high school would take time and planning.

He said a five-year plan being devised by the school system's capital planning committee would allow time to pay down debt and provide a bridge between now and the "next event," whether that is building a third high school or some other solution. – apr 16 08

SUMMARY

It appears that all of school system's leadership was looking towards the third high school until December 2004, when the city council's actions all but made it impossible to build that third high school. Some have speculated that may have had to do with the worry over splitting the athletic pool that currently feeds Hoover High.

When Dr. Williams discussed the idea at the November 2005 one-and-only joint meeting of the School Board and the City Council, the idea was met with cold stares and many questions about how to avoid building that third high school.

Board President Bill Veitch has stated his desire to "delay" the building of the third high school as long as possible. Board Members Suzy Baker and A.W. Bolt clearly stated their desire to not build that third high school. It is apparent that the current School Board has no intention of following the previous Board's voted-on-and-approved-plan which included the language of "when a third high school is built".

Newly-appointed Superintendent Andy Craig, in his first interview, stated that he was not in favor of building a third high school.

It appears that those making the decisions have been clear about how they feel about a third high school. But who do those folks represent? Supposedly the community, right?

This community has been loud and clear about what it wants: **BUILD THE THIRD HIGH SCHOOL**. All of the rhetoric since 2000 regarding Hoover's growth and the need to continue to build buildings included discussion of a third high school. The Approved Zoning Plan adopted by the Board of Education in February 2005 made it clear that the Ninth Grade Building was a temporary bridge to ease overcrowding while plans were drawn up for a third high school.

The voters in Hoover's community have voted themselves two property tax increases, one in 1990 and the other in 1998. Voters believed that those revenues, equaling 24 mills of property tax, would be utilized for building purposes. The current administration has taken the position that those funds are needed for other purposes, and that use of those funds for other purposes is legal because the actual language used in the ballots did not restrict those funds for "brick and mortar".

The funds received from the 24-mill property tax are what set Hoover apart from our neighbors in Jefferson County, the system from which Hoover separated in 1988. Those funds were to make certain that Hoover's growth would always be properly managed and buildings would be able to be built when needed.

Somehow, that seems no longer to be the case.

The HSCIN is committed to further research to determine just how viable a third high school is and in what form a third high school could take to give Hoover's students a more individualized high school experience. Perhaps research will show it is impossible, as Mr. Craig has intimated through his interviews with *The Birmingham News*. Perhaps we are just stuck inside the box of "what one school has, so must the other."

We plan to devote a page to the Third High School Idea. We encourage you to submit your thoughts as well. Please write to HSCIN@HSCIN.org and share your thoughts. Please include your full name and phone number if you would like it considered for publication on our page.