

Q & A Regarding Middle School Consolidation and Elementary Reorganization

Q1. What is the plan for personnel? Teachers, TA's, Custodians, Lunchroom Staff, Counselors, and Principals. Specifics! Not a generic “everyone will have a job”.

A: We value our staff and are committed to maintaining our workforce. If the consolidation of the middle schools is approved, our goal is to retain all current employees by utilizing a variety of placement measures. It is our intention that no employee would lose their job as a result of consolidation. Employees are hired to work for the district and not a specific school and some reassignment of positions and/or assigned job site will be necessary during the process.

The first step will be to assign core academic teachers to the middle school based on their areas of certification on their teaching license. We will seek teacher and principal input for teachers who will need to teach 6th grade at the elementary schools. Consideration will be given to tenure within Avery County Schools, geographic location of the school and their home, and the preferences of teachers and school administrators. Each year, employees leave ACS for a variety of reasons, creating vacancies. Temporary positions for the 2025-2026 school year as well as retirements and resignations at the close of this school year will be utilized for assignment of other faculty and staff throughout the district to maintain positions for any reassigned employees.

Q2. Give a specific timeline of the process.

A: Until a final decision is made, a firm timeline cannot be set. However, there is adequate time to move forward thoughtfully.

Q3. Money? Do we have the money to do renovations? Or build a new school?

A: The current AMS building has significant repair needs. At this time, sufficient funding is not available for renovations or to build a new school. Repair and renovation and a new gym will cost approximately \$40 Million. A grant application for new construction was previously submitted to the State for \$52 Million but was not awarded. The district plans to reapply through the North Carolina Education Lottery Needs-Based Grant.

Q4. What is the plan for the AMS building?

A: At this time, the plan is to close the building. The Board's preference is to rebuild on the existing site, as the property is already owned. It may be possible to preserve the cafeteria; however, the classroom building would be reconstructed, along with a new gymnasium on the current gym site. If renovation is determined to be a feasible option, the work could not be completed while students are present on campus.

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Q5. What is going to happen to the funds that are specifically tied to the school's organizations? (Yearbook, Greenhouse, BETA, etc.)

A: Funds designated for school clubs and extracurricular organizations would transfer to the new middle school and continue to be used for the same clubs and activities.

Q6. Does the county plan to purchase the AMS building?

A: At this time, there are no plans for the county to purchase the AMS building. The board's plan is to eventually have the consolidated middle school back in Newland on the current site -as a new building or a remodel.

Q7. Does the county plan to utilize the AMS building as the senior center or another county space?

A: At this time, the county has not requested to utilize the AMS building for a senior center or any other county use.

Q8. How will lunches look at the CMS/FTES building with that many students? Can the cafeteria accommodate that many students and store that much food for prep?

A: The high school currently serves many meals per day with a staff of four (three assistants and one manager). The CMS/FTES building would operate with a similar staffing model, with the addition of one extra staff member. The building was originally designed to accommodate more students than it currently enrolls and has served larger student populations in the past. The cafeteria has the capacity to accommodate the increased number of students and can store sufficient food for meal preparation.

Q9. How will encores/specials, specifically PE look?

A: Encores and specials, including PE, will continue to operate full-time and will not be divided. Scheduling for these programs will be determined by the principal in collaboration with central office administration.

Q10. What are the bus routes going to look like?

A: Bus routing remains a challenge under all scenarios due to an ongoing shortage of bus drivers which is an issue across the State. Despite offering sign-on bonuses, the district has not yet received any applicants. The district is working closely with the transportation department to minimize travel times in the event of consolidation.

Q11. Why is there such a rush to get this approved?

A: The School Board is engaging employees, parents, and the community in this discussion in a deliberate manner. The need to consider consolidation has been driven by funding considerations, rising building and maintenance costs, and enrollment trends for the past several years. Consolidation provides greater opportunities for students academically, socially, physically, and emotionally. Moving forward now reflects the district's commitment to doing what is best for our students given the realities, especially the escalating cost to provide, repair, and maintain school facilities.

Q12. What about technology equipment? Will it move to Cranberry and return to AMS after renovations? Will it stay during renovations? Will it be sent to other schools? There are a lot of expensive tech tools at AMS.

A: All technology equipment is the property of Avery County Schools. The equipment will be moved as needed to support all students and teachers.

Q13. Is there a space for OCS/life skills students at CMS? What will this look like? These students are too old/big to be placed in elementary school in the same OCS class with kinders/younger students, and at the same time, too young to move to the high school.

A: Yes, there is a plan in place to accommodate OCS/Life Skills students at the new middle school. Appropriate space and resources will be provided to meet their needs.

Q14. Has a formal facilities study been conducted by an outside organization looking at the cost of operating all schools—buildings, staff, etc.—compared to the number of students?

A: No, because an external study is not needed under the circumstances. The repair / renovation needs at AMS are significant and the district has the ability to educate all students in appropriate school facilities under this plan. Formal studies of this type are typically very costly, and the district has chosen to prioritize using available funds to directly support student needs rather than fund an expensive external study.

Q15. Why has Avery County Schools not followed the procedures that other neighboring school districts have used prior to shutting down a school building? Should this not be a several year process?

A: Not every district follows the same procedure. Discussions regarding consolidation have been occurring administratively and within the community for the past eight years, though not always at the board level. The district has delayed action as long as possible. Waiting longer will only increase the financial costs. The decision reflects what is best for students and taxpayers at this time.

Q16. Why are we not building the new school and then moving, wouldn't that make more sense?

A: If sufficient funds were available, building first would be an option. However, students would still need to be relocated during construction. The district cannot wait for additional funding and must proceed with the plan that best serves the students' needs.

Q17. What about students who came to AMS due to unresolvable conflicts with peers or staff at Cranberry? They are already feeling very anxious and upset about this potential change.

A: While conflicts may feel significant, it is unlikely that any are truly unresolvable. Teaching students how to manage and resolve conflict is an important life skill. Counselors and mental health providers are available to support students in working through these challenges. Since these students will eventually be together in high school, addressing and resolving conflicts now will better prepare them for the future.

Q18. Why was AMS not given the promised resources to help performance status?

A: Over time, the district has offered multiple resources to support improvement efforts. Some of these resources were accepted and implemented, while others were declined. Additionally, curriculum programs were purchased and made available to support instructional needs.

Q19. Has it been taken into consideration that students come to AMS as non-English speakers and/or multiple years below grade level and at the middle school level it is very difficult to bring them to grade level at that point?

A: Yes, this has been taken into consideration. In the first year, EL/ML student test scores are not counted, and in the second year, their scores count only toward growth. Consolidating the schools will help concentrate resources to better support these students' academic progress.

Q20. Why has the board consistently allowed parents to pick and choose which middle school they want to attend, regardless of district lines, or poor reasons given such as “wants to be with friends” when this affects population, and therefore scores.

A: State law allows parents to select an alternative school if their child is assigned to a low-performing school and space is available. Each request is carefully reviewed with the best interests of the student and their family in mind.

Q21. Why have principals been allowed to “recommend” that parents send their students to CMS over AMS regardless of district lines when this affects population, and therefore scores.

A: Each request is carefully reviewed with the best interests of the student and their family in mind. Consolidating the middle schools will unify the student population under a single school structure.

Q22. Will teachers at AMS have to pack up their rooms to move? Will we have a place for our things at CMS?

A: Yes, teachers will need to pack and relocate their personal materials to their assigned school. Adequate space will be provided at the new middle school to accommodate all staff and their belongings. School owned equipment will be moved by the appropriate school personnel.

Q23. Why can’t AMS be the central school to begin with? The location is close to the high school and is in the center of the county. It is also a larger building.

A: While the AMS location is geographically ideal for the consolidated middle school, current facility needs necessitate the consolidated move to the Cranberry Middle School location. Neither the school board nor the County have the financial resources to repair and renovate AMS at this time. With consolidation, the new middle school will start as a C-rated school, with the expectation and goal of continued academic improvement.

Q24. What will the EC program look like with combining that many IEPs?

A: Adequate staff and resources will be provided to ensure that all students’ needs are met, and their Individualized Education Programs are fully supported.

Q25. What will happen to our principals?

A: The plan is for all employees, including principals, to continue their employment within Avery County Schools. Principals are employed by the district and not at a specific school.

Q26. Will other principals be shuffled/moved to different schools throughout the county? It seems that AMS is the only school that has had an inconsistent principal for years and has suffered greatly. It seems that now might be the time to reassign others as well.

A: Principal reassignment is a state-recommended measure for schools designated as low-performing. Any determinations regarding reassignment in connection with consolidation will be made at the administrative level.

Q27. Why hasn't AMS been maintained like CMS? It seems like there is a lack of care or interest in AMS.

A: The CMS/FTES building is approximately 20 years newer than the AMS building. Neither school has undergone full renovation. AMS has had numerous maintenance issues addressed over the years, likely more than many other schools. However, there are ongoing challenges with plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and other systems that cannot be resolved while students remain in the building if a renovation is planned.

Q28. Why hasn't the county given a principal at AMS time and resources to make improvements? Changing principals every 2 or 3 years doesn't give anyone (the principal or teachers) a chance to make a difference. Improvements don't happen overnight. Every other school has been given the opportunity for a principal to stay over 4 years, retaining teachers long term, as well as backing from central services, allowing them time to positively impact the school. Why is ours not given a chance?

A: Principal reassignment is a state-recommended measure for schools designated as low-performing. For low-performing schools, changes in principal leadership are often recommended to address ongoing challenges and support school improvement efforts.

Q29. Is this really about a decline in enrollment or is that just what we're being told?

A: Declining enrollment is an issue, the school report card grade at AMS is an issue, the repair / renovation cost for AMS is an issue, and the cost to taxpayers to continue to operate 7 underutilized buildings is an issue. Addressing all four significant concerns is the reason.

Q30. If it is truly about a decline in enrollment, why have board members referenced that this combination will “take care of the “F”. Why can’t the board and county be transparent?

A: Yes—one of the reasons, as noted in the previous response, is declining enrollment, in addition to other contributing factors. Board members have referenced the consolidation addressing the “F” grade at AMS because the new middle school will adopt the grade of the higher-rated school, meaning a consolidated school will have a “C” grade. This determination is made by the state, not the Board. We are sharing this information to be fully transparent; however, consolidation is not driven by the current letter grade classification because future grades will be driven by student performance and not consolidation.

Q31. Who will decide, and how will it be decided which teachers will remain at CMS, which teachers from AMS will stay in middle school, and which will be moved to elementary level or other positions? WHEN will this be decided?

A: Please refer to the answer from question one.

Q32. Will the “new middle school” at Cranberry still be a combination with FTE? It should have its own data manager, own front office person, own counselor etc. & be treated as its own entity until we (hopefully) move back to AMS—not share resources with FTE.

A: Some resources, including certain areas of the building, will need to be shared. However, the top priority is ensuring that the middle school and FTE operate as separate schools.

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Q33. Is this a temporary move for a renovation of AMS or is this permanent?

A: The consolidation will be permanent, with the long-term goal of relocating to the more central location.

Q34. If 6th grade is moved back to elementary schools, how will that impact the elementary schools? Will they all have room and resources to house another grade level?

A: The elementary schools have the capacity to accommodate sixth grade students, and the district will provide the necessary resources to support them.

Q35. How, specifically, will this expand electives, fine arts, etc.?

A: While the range of electives may initially remain the same, consolidation will provide students with more equitable access to the available elective and fine arts offerings. Over time, the district will explore additional elective options as opportunities allow.

Q36. What about kids who already play sports?

A: Athletic teams will be combined to form unified teams, which will support increased school spirit and help strengthen athletic programs as students' progress to the high school level.

Q37. How does this plan make ACS more viable for a Needs-Based Capital Grant?

A: Consolidation strengthens the district's competitiveness under the Needs-Based Capital Grant guidelines by demonstrating efficient use of facilities and resources.

Q38. If there was regression, what was the impetus to move 6th graders to the middle school initially?

A: The decision reflected the adoption of the middle school concept that was implemented several years ago.

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Q39. What 2 bus routes are you referring to?

A: The reference is not to specific routes. Based on student ridership numbers, it has been determined that two routes could be consolidated.

Q40. Is there a timeline for the renovation?

A: At this time, there is no specific renovation timeline. The schedule will be determined once funding becomes available.

Q41. In 4.1 of the study, it looks like you expect ~8 teachers to retire or leave ACS to make this savings? And what happens if they don't? What objective criteria will be created to choose the employees who will depart? Who will make this decision? When will this be decided?

A: This question has already been addressed. Historically, teacher retirements and resignations occur on an annual basis. While first-year savings may be limited, the district's objective is to maintain employment for all staff members.

Q42. Is it safe to assume that bus riders will increase transportation time, in total, by 40 minutes?

A: Our goal is to minimize the amount of time students spend on the bus. However, until the first week of school and all routing details are finalized, an exact schedule cannot be provided.

Q43. If you are moving 1 cafeteria person to the CES and 1 person to ACHS, is that truly overall savings?

A: These positions were already budgeted as new openings, and the staff reassignments will fill those existing vacancies resulting in a savings.

Q44. What will the AMS building be used for after the consolidation?

A: There is no plan at this time.

Q45. How will lunches be served at the CMS/FTE building with the additional students?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q46. How will encores/specials, PE be handled?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q47. With the current traffic at CMS/FTE, how will the new traffic be addressed?

A: We have reached out to the Department of Transportation for assistance with this matter.

Q48. Why the urgency of making this change?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q49. What is the plan for the technology equipment at AMS?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q50. Will CMS/FTE have an OCS/Life skills space? If so, please describe/explain.

A: This question has already been answered.

Q51. Describe the specific resources and monetary amounts granted to AMS that were above and beyond other schools to assist with performance.

A: This question has already been answered.

Q52. Will teachers have to move their own rooms?

A: This question has already been answered.

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Q53. How will the EC program work with combining so many IEPs?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q54. What was the AMS building maintenance plan prior to the consolidation study/plan?

A: The maintenance plan included installing a new roof and addressing facility needs as funding allowed. The estimated cost of a new roof alone is approximately \$800,000.

Q55. What is the composition of the support staff at CMS/FTE under this consolidation plan?

A: This question has previously been addressed. The plan is for the new middle school and FTES to operate as two separate schools, with some support staff shared between them, similar to current practice.

Q56. Who conducted the study? What members of ACS were involved? When was it started?

A: This process was initiated last fall by Dr. Penley in collaboration with district directors and legal counsel. The study is required for the Board to consider any reorganization or consolidation and enables the community to more effectively comment and provide input through the multiple public input sessions and through written comments and questions.

Q57. Where are the school owned and maintained fields mentioned in the study? I am unaware of any owned by ACS.

A: We are working on a potential lease with the Cranberry Corporation for use of their athletic field where we currently maintain the turf.

Q58. How will the additional MLs be addressed at CMS/FTE?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q59. If the grant money isn't awarded, what would the next steps be to fund?

A: The district will continue to explore other funding opportunities to support the project.

Q60. How will you measure success?

A: Measuring success in the new school will be multi-dimensional, focusing not only on academics but also on culture, engagement, and growth.

Q61. Can you clarify whether Pre-K students at Riverside are included in the figures that were presented? If so, does that inclusion affect funding projections, given that Pre-K students are not calculated in state allotments?

A: 92 was including Pre-K but enrollment numbers fluctuate on a daily basis. All funding projections are made on the appropriate state allotments.

Q62. My understanding is that the athletic fields adjacent to Cranberry Middle School are not owned by Avery County Schools, but by the Cranberry Corporation, and are accessed through a Memorandum of Understanding. How long is that agreement in place? If access were to change or be lost, how would that impact the proposal?

A: We have utilized these fields for many years, and we have maintained the turf. We are exploring long term solutions.

Q63. What is the plan for the current Avery Middle School building? Would it be repurposed in the interim prior to construction of a new middle school, and if so, how? Is the proposed new middle school anticipated to be located on the same property? If not, has funding for property and site prep been included in projections?

A: This has already been answered.

Q64. The proposal appears to rely heavily on the eventual construction of a new middle school and the funding mechanisms necessary to support it. Much of that funding seems tied to the ability to secure a needs-based capital grant.

A: As discussed previously, Avery County is currently designated as a Tier 2 county under the NC Department of Commerce Distressed County Rankings, though those rankings fluctuate. For instance, Avery County moved from Tier 2 to Tier 3 between 2022 and 2023 and has since returned to Tier 2.

Q65. What is the plan if the grant application is unsuccessful again in the 2026 cycle and the county transitions back to Tier 3, making it ineligible for needs-based capital funding?

A: This has already been answered.

Q66. How involved has County leadership been in the development of this proposal? To what extent were they aware of the details shared last night prior to the presentation?

A: They were actively involved in the grant application process, committed to a matching contribution, and signed the application submitted in October 2025. Board chairs have met a couple of times to review the proposal details, while the Superintendent and County Manager have held meetings on the matter. Prior to the public announcement of the proposed consolidation, the commissioners were provided with copies of both the announcement and the presentation.

Q67. Has County leadership been engaged in direct discussions regarding consolidation models? If so, what forms of consolidation would they support, if any?

A: Yes, County Leadership has been engaged in direct discussions regarding consolidation options.

Q68. How does the Board plan to address the apparent discrepancy between the County's perceived ability to pay and its actual level of investment?

A: There is no apparent discrepancy. The County has multiple funding obligations and Helene recovery required the advance expenditure of capital funds and a request for FEMA reimbursement. In addition, construction, repair, and maintenance costs escalated significantly after the Covid 19 pandemic and have not stabilized.

Q69. Have other consolidation scenarios been considered beyond the middle school level?

A: Administratively, yes. We are focusing on what we believe best supports our students, while remaining open to other ideas.

Q70. Why has the closure or consolidation of Riverside Elementary not been included in the planning discussion? Could those students be absorbed into Crossnore and Freedom Trail, and if so, would that approach yield greater fiscal efficiency or academic benefit than the current proposal? Should other underperforming elementary schools be considered as part of a comprehensive consolidation strategy?

A: If enrollment trends continue, elementary consolidation will be considered.

Q71. Asked for a timeline and to see the plans we have made.

A: This question has already been answered.

Q72. What are things that need to be looked at long term?

A: Student Enrollment trends and Academic Achievement

Q73. Bus Routes... what time will the first get on the bus and the last one get home?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q74. Facilities of Special Needs Children — will CMS building be able to address those needs? If not, what modifications will need to be made?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q75. How involved were School Improvement Teams (SIT) and long-term growth needs?

A: These were administrative decisions.

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Q76. Are we supporting AMS like it should be?

A: This has already been answered.

Q77. Are we closing a school to make the system look better?

A: We are considering consolidation with the best interests of students as top priority.

Q78. Is this a remodel effort or a reconstruction?

A: This has already been answered.

Q79. What is the timeline for full execution?

A: This has already been answered.

Q80. What is the plan if the grant is not received in the specified timeline?

A: We have already answered this question but, the consolidation will be permanent, with the long-term goal of relocating to the more central location.

Q81. What specifics were communicated to commissioners for local funds for future capital outlay?

A: This has already been answered.

Q82. What is the plan to address staffing if fewer than 8 or 11 people retire/leave? What will the criteria be for choosing those departing employees? Who will be the decision maker in RIFs? What is the timeline for notifying staff?

A: This has already been answered.

Q83. How much local funding will this consolidation actually save?

A: This has already been answered.

Q84. Will this consolidation address the reduction in funding due to declining enrollment for next year and approximately how much in state funding?

A: This consolidation goal is to help navigate funding concerns for future sustainability but maximized savings may not be realized in the first year.

Q85. Have commissioners agreed to the realignment of capital funding to operational funding?

A: We have not discussed this realignment.

Q86. What does redirecting local funds to instruction really mean in Section 1? How specifically are saved local funds actually going to be spent on instruction? What direct impact will it have on instruction and the students?

A: Funds not spent on underutilized facilities will be directed towards instruction-whenever is needed.

Q87. What does execution look like for this proposal? Will you be having discussions and meetings with teachers and staff impacted by the consolidation to address the nuts and bolts?

A: These will be administrative conversations that will take place if the consolidation plan is advanced. If a decision for consolidation is made, all staff groups will be invited to the Board of Education to help plan for the new middle school process.

Q88. What metrics define success with this consolidation for the district, for the state, for the community, for the parents. What are the measurable outcomes you will be monitoring?

A: For the state, success will be measured by improving academic achievement, student growth, attendance, and overall student performance grades while demonstrating fiscal responsibility and efficient use of resources. For the district, success will be defined by operational efficacy, stable staffing, appropriate class sizes, expanded academic and extracurricular opportunities, and a smooth transition from 6th to 7th grade. For the community, success will mean sustained enrollment, strong participation in school activities, clear communication, and growing confidence that consolidation strengthens opportunities for students. For parents, success will be reflected in a safe and supportive learning environment, clear communication, strong academic outcomes, positive student well-being and confidence that their children are prepared for the next level of learning.

Q89. What specific support do you plan on giving the consolidated middle school to ensure success for staff and students to ensure outcomes are positive?

A: Specific support will be determined on an administrative level, but we can assure that student needs are met through the appropriate resources.

Q90. How does this proposal fit in the long-term vision/plan for ACS? What is the plan for CMS once the middle school is completed?

A: The proposal directly aligns with a long-term vision of Avery County Schools by creating a more sustainable, efficient, and student-centered Middle grades model. In the short term, consolidation strengthens academic programming, maximizes staffing, and ensures responsible fiscal management. In the long term, it positions the district for growth by aligning grade configurations, improving instructional consistency, and building a stronger academic pipeline for the elementary through High School. Keeping 6th grade at elementary level supports age-appropriate transitions while allowing the district to concentrate middle grades resources strategically.

The current CMS facility will be utilized for student centered services when the long-term plans of moving to central location are realized.

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Q91. What steps did you take to generate this proposal and study?

A: We have followed DPI guidance for school consolidation.

Q92. Do you believe the current approach you have taken was the best approach to ensure transparency and inclusion of the ACS staff and transparency to the community?

A: Our approach is to make the best decisions for students and their needs. We were also waiting on the grant results and making the best decisions that we could.

Q93. What alternatives did/do you have identified for this proposal/consideration?

A: This has already been answered.

Q94. What are your next steps in this process?

A: This has already been answered.

Q95. How many children will this proposal impact?

A: As of today, this will directly affect our current 5th through 7th grades which totals 317 students.

Q96. From the study provided, it doesn't appear to address ML/Title III students. What/where is the data for this student population?

A: The study does not single out any subgroup population as these populations will be served with the needed supports and resources.

Q97. What/where is the data that supports the statement of minimizes transportation burdens?

A: This has already been answered.

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Q98. What/where is the data that supports that yearlong classes are better?

A: This is not necessarily based on yearlong classes versus semester long, it is about all students in Avery County receiving equitable instruction time.

Q99. What/where is the data that supports that moving 6th graders to elementary school will improve the transition to middle school?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q100. What/Where is the data that supports a positive impact on “student performance on standardized testing”?

A: Consolidating teachers and resources will allow students to have more intervention support and targeted resources.

Q101. What/Where is the data do you have that shows “supported by the elementary principals?”

A: Mrs. Edwards responded to this question: Prior to the January 13 Board meeting, I visited each school and met with all principals to share the proposal that was presented to the Board. During those visits, I discussed both the consolidation plan and the possibility of sixth grade returning to the elementary school level. Following the public forum on February 12, I was informed that my statement indicating that principals were supportive may have been perceived as a misrepresentation. As I could not recall which individuals may have felt misrepresented, I sent an email the following morning to all elementary principals apologizing if my comments had inaccurately reflected their positions. I asked that they contact me if they felt misrepresented, and I committed to issuing a public apology at the next meeting if needed. Only one principal responded, and I want to take this opportunity to publicly apologize to that principal. Since that time, the principal has expressed support for sixth grade remaining at their school.

Q102. What/Where is the data/feedback have you collected from existing middle school staff on the proposal?

A: If a decision is made on March 10th to consolidate, faculty and staff will be consulted and extensively involved in planning for the new middle school.

Q103. What/Where is the data that supports the \$40M estimate for the remodel/reconstruction?

A: ClarkNexsen, an architectural/ engineering firm out of Asheville, NC completed all construction estimates.

Q104. What lessons learned from the High School construction will you be applying to the reconstruction/remodeling of AMS?

A: We plan to have a project manager on site to supervise the project. Students do not need to be in the building while construction is underway.

Q105. When do they plan to consolidate? Exact date expectation, moving dates, equipment, etc.

A: Until a final decision on consolidation is made, no definite timeline is available. The Board will vote on March 10th to select one of the previously discussed options. If consolidation is chosen, additional meetings and discussions will be held to establish a clear timeline. Once a principal is appointed for the new middle school, that individual will take the lead in working with teachers and staff to plan and prepare the school.

Q106. What will this look like for core teachers, encore teachers, support staff?

A: Once staffing allotments are determined and the schedule is developed, it will be the responsibility of the principal and staff to manage assignments and placements.

Q107. What happens if people do not retire or quit?

A: Historically, Avery County Schools has been able to find appropriate placements for staff.

Q108. Certifications and preferences?

A: Licensure will be the primary factor in staff placement. Teachers are encouraged to communicate any preferences they may have. Decisions regarding requested transfers will be made collaboratively by Human Resources, the principal, and the Superintendent.

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Q109. Study document mentioned further opportunities for extracurriculars, clubs, etc. — with fewer staff than either school currently has?

A: Adequate staffing will be maintained to meet the needs of all students. While the range of extracurriculars, clubs, etc. may initially remain the same, consolidation will provide students with more equitable access to the available offerings. Over time, the district will explore additional options as opportunities allow.

Q110. Do we have the money? Debt free? Specific name of grant, requirements, who will be writing/applying for it. 3, 5, 10-year plan!

A: The district has sufficient funds to facilitate the consolidation. Closing a building is estimated to generate approximately \$900,000 in annual cost savings. The grant in consideration is the Needs-Based Capital Grant, funded by the North Carolina Education Lottery. The \$52 million grant has already been prepared and can be updated and resubmitted next year. This is a competitive grant, with funding decisions typically made by November.

Q111. What is the timeline for job placements, final decisions, etc. Longevity of CMS as main building?

A: If consolidation is approved on March 10, 2026, Human Resources, district directors, and the principal of the new middle school will begin immediately to review staff licensure, consult with teachers and staff, and make placement decisions as early as possible.

Q112. What other funding options have been explored? Are the middle schools specifically using too much money? Are other schools being evaluated?

A: Early in this process, members of the County Commission, the County Manager, and the County CFO met with the Superintendent, Board Chair, and Vice-Chair. The Commissioners, along with the School Board, signed the grant application to pursue funding. While the Commissioners have been involved in the process, they are unable to make any financial commitments at this time due to ongoing obligations with FEMA and other county priorities.

Q113. AMS demolished? Building upkeep money even if vacant

A: The Board's preference is to construct a new middle school on the current Avery Middle site. The cafeteria may potentially be preserved, while the classroom building would be reconstructed along with a new gym on the existing gym site. If renovation is pursued as an option, it could not be completed while students remain on campus.

Q114. Athletics — 6th grade local or bussed, 7–8 teams, JV/varsity, uniforms, conference breaks, etc.

A: For many sports, students are already transported to the appropriate site. CMS students, for example, are currently bussed to Newland for football, soccer, wrestling, and track. Similar arrangements can be made to accommodate athletics under the consolidation plan.

Q115. Lunch — currently not enough food prepared, placement for “extra staff” person, food storage, student seating, Elem/MS lunch time overlap as is. Cafeteria already feeds the largest number of students in the county, adding one staff member will not support the addition of AMS 7/8 students as well as siblings that will move to FTE as a result of travel needs for families.

A: This has already been answered.

Q116. Funding to provide equipment to prepare additional food, store food safely until served, and maintain said equipment — if being moved from other schools, is it in working order and will it be in place and operable by August?

A: We will address this issue if consolidation occurs and further cold nutrition equipment or storage is needed. The district will provide the resources necessary to serve student needs.

Q117. Dumpster capacity for increased usage? Currently emptied once a week and the only dumpster for entire FTES/CMS building

A: An additional dumpster or an extra trash pickup would be requested to accommodate the increased usage at the school site.

Q118. Freezer/Refrigeration concerns: One small freezer and one small walk-in refrigerator is the current extent of space for cold storage and one small pantry for dry ingredients. These will not hold the increased amount of food that will be needed weekly for this number of students.

A: Additional food storage can be arranged at the central office if needed.

Q119. Serving times — The current serving schedule begins at 10:30 am and extends to 12:40 pm with 100% of available seating being used in the later half of this time. This does not include the time that staff needs for required cleaning procedures. Additional numbers from 26–27 Pre-K class, kindergarten entries, siblings moving in from other schools to travel with AMS students transferring, keeping the current 5th, and gaining 7–8 AMS population.

A: Some adjustments to meal scheduling and service may be necessary to accommodate the additional students.

Q120. Influx of students at FTE for siblings that will be forced to CMS

A: Any out-of-district transfers would require Board approval and are contingent on available space. It would be the responsibility of the principal to inform the Board if space is not available for a requested transfer.

Q & A Regarding Middle School Consolidation and Elementary Reorganization

Q121. Average mileage vs mode of mileage changes for bus transportation, time in those extended bus routes (4am wake up times for preteens??)

A: Bus routes may be adjusted regardless of consolidation. Longer routes could occur due to low ridership on certain buses, and the ongoing shortage of drivers is also a factor under consideration.

Q122. OCS (self-contained) — Spacing? Age Appropriate? Resources

A: A proposed plan has been developed that is age-appropriate, and adequate resources are available to meet the needs of these students. As this involves personnel matters, additional details cannot be shared at this time.

Q123. Asst Principal that will bridge between MS and ELEM?

A: The meaning of “bridge” between middle school and elementary school is unclear. The middle school principal will be involved in making decisions related to this.

Q124. Shared staff? SRO, Nurse, Counselor, ESL, office secretary — will we have full-time positions?

A: The goal is to have as many full-time support staff positions at the new middle school as possible. Some positions may still be shared with other schools as needed. The plan also aims to reduce travel for encore and other positions while offering more year-long academic courses.

Q125. Inaccuracies within the document — Is this from misinformation or information that is purposefully being ignored/“glossed over” (i.e., missing building needs on the capital outlay on CMS building such as water and mold issues, HVAC problems, building settling, unsafe sidewalks, entire library out of commission due to humidity issues during the summer)

A: CMS/FTE is scheduled for a roof replacement this year, and a new HVAC system was installed a few years ago. Other facility needs are prioritized and addressed within the district’s planning process. Each year, principals and Mike Buchanan submit a list of school capital needs for the budget request to the County Commissioners. The Commissioners review the compiled list and allocate funding for selected projects. Projects are then prioritized based on safety and other considerations, with additional funding sought through lottery funds, grants, and other sources to meet remaining needs.

Q126. Will proper edits be made and shared to combat misinformation? (i.e., building needs, fields, shared spaces with k-6, staff, etc.)

A: Once the plan is finalized, it becomes a public document. Clarification is requested regarding what is meant by a “proper edit to combat misinformation.”

Q127. Intent forms — those have not been submitted — where does the number 8 come from in the attrition number provided in the document

A: The number reflects an anticipated decline in state-allotted teaching positions based on county-wide enrollment trends. Not all staffing reductions are specific to the middle school. Some reductions would result from consolidation, such as the reduced need for substitutes to cover itinerant teachers and the elimination of duplicate positions, including the need for two separate ISS positions.

Q128. Class sizes? Increase in student: teacher ratio, even with 4 cores; three “core” classrooms on the lower hall, encore classrooms, spaces, etc.

A: Scheduling is the key.

Q129. Pre-K exposure to older students (language, clothing, behavior, etc.), rewrite expectations and policies?

A: Older students are already present in the building, and there is minimal interaction between Pre-K students and middle school students.

Q130. Left side entrance, maintenance on steps/sidewalks, security system for the left entrance

A: These issues need to be submitted in the capital needs request for the budget.

Q131. Media Specialist? Full time for tech, research needs, support for classrooms. Tech Coach?

A: A technology support staff member would be assigned to the school. At this time, there are no plans to add positions beyond those currently provided at other schools.

Q132. Money to change colors, uniforms, signage, etc.

A: Funding will be allocated to address these needs.

Q133. Traffic — congestion, homes beside the road that become completely blocked, buses, shared side with FTES or complete separation? Traffic congestion at 19-E/194 intersection — constant traffic issues with current enrollment

A: The North Carolina Department of Transportation has been contacted by a county commissioner to request assistance in addressing this need. The DOT is aware of the need independent of any consolidation considerations.

Q134. Annual savings — transportation costs withheld — transparency?

A: Transportation costs are estimates only. If routes are combined and some drivers transition to full-time status, there would be an increase in benefit costs; however, eliminating two routes would result in cost savings. Overall, transportation costs are expected to increase, but that increase would likely reduce the total savings from closing the AMS building by approximately 10%. Notably, the utility costs alone for operating Avery Middle School exceed the potential increase in transportation costs.

Q135. Adding an underperforming teacher to a strong, high-performing staff does not improve outcomes. How will teachers be selected and assigned to staff?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q136. Will schools be required to accept assigned teachers, or will they have the opportunity to conduct interviews and hire their own staff?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q137. Two or three teachers can significantly impact the climate and culture of an entire school—especially in a close-knit, conservative community like many we have. How will we ensure that any staffing decisions preserve the positive climate and culture that defines our schools and our close-knit communities?

A: Building level administrators would be responsible for setting the climate in their schools.

Q & A Regarding Middle School Consolidation and Elementary Reorganization

Q138. Are incoming teachers aware that they may not remain in 6th grade roles and will be required to complete LETRS training, which will carry additional costs for the system?

A: When those staffing decisions are made, those employees will be notified of requirements, and the district will support as they have always done.

Q139. Will schools be allowed to accept internal transfers from other schools?

A: If there are openings that would allow these transfers.

Q140. Will any current elementary staff members be displaced?

A: There is no plan to displace but if staffing assignments are made at a building level, those decisions are up to the building administrators.

Q141. What curriculum support staff will be provided to serve grades K–6?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q142. Given elementary growing enrollment, what additional support staff will be available to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs?

A: This question has already been answered.

Q143. Will funds be allocated to purchase a 6th grade curriculum that aligns with the existing K–5 program to ensure seamless vertical alignment? Will there also be funding for necessary instructional materials?

A: Funds will be available to meet the needs of students.

Q & A Regarding Middle School Consolidation and Elementary Reorganization

Q144. Will the principal's salary be held harmless under this proposal? With an increase in enrollment and responsibility, compensation should reflect that growth—not remain stagnant or decrease.

A: Principal salary is based on the state salary scale.