

# KNOX COUNTY SCHOOLS


ANDREW JOHNSON BUILDING

*Dr. James P. McIntyre Jr., Superintendent*



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair and Members  
Knox County Board of Education

FROM: Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr.  
Superintendent 

DATE: April 8, 2015

RE: Fiscal Year 2016 Capital Budget and Planning Priorities

Attached please find the capital improvement plan for Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) that includes and builds upon the capital recommendations made in my March 10, 2015 memorandum to the School Board. In addition to my previous recommendations, I am proposing the following additions to the FY16 Capital Budget:

### *Middle School Construction*

After carefully reviewing the information and analysis provided by the firm of Brailsford and Dunlavey in the Comprehensive Middle School Demand Analysis Report, I believe that it is necessary to build a new middle school in the Hardin Valley area to address projected enrollment growth and shifting student distribution. Since the Board of Education already has approximately 14 acres available on the Hardin Valley Academy campus, I think it is most appropriate to examine the feasibility of building a middle school for 1,200 students at this site.

As noted in the report, this school will need to be operational before the year 2019 in order to have the greatest impact on the current and projected student population and enrollment at the middle schools that currently serve the western portions of the county. This capital proposal recommends \$1.5 million in FY16 to begin design of this new school and a total of \$33 million in FY17 and FY18 to complete construction of the school in time to open in August 2018.

I have also carefully considered the request from many in the community to build a new Gibbs Middle School. While I have come to deeply understand and respect the community *interest* in a new Gibbs Middle School, I cannot discern a substantial and viable *need* for such a new school facility. Holston Middle School is some distance from the Gibbs community, but the education students are receiving there - including personalized learning opportunities supported by instructional technology - is very high quality. The financial impact of building a new middle school on our general fund budget is considerable. Just the projected debt service for construction would total close to \$3 million for each of the next 20 years. Such a financial commitment is challenging enough when there is a clear necessity, but I do not believe it would be fiscally responsible for the School Board to take on such a significant debt obligation for a school that an independent expert has told us we simply do not need. We will work diligently to ensure that the middle grades students residing in the Gibbs community continue to benefit from an excellent education at Holston Middle School.

#### *New North-Central Elementary School*

As discussed in my previous memorandum, we have been working to identify the most viable solution to the elementary student population growth we are experiencing in the north-central area of the county. As this population grows, it is creating capacity challenges at many schools that we continue to address with a variety of imperfect strategies, including temporary or modular classrooms. The elementary schools in this region that are facing these challenges include Adrian Burnett, Norwood, Powell, Inskip and to some extent Copper Ridge.

We have carefully considered a major addition and renovation of Adrian Burnett Elementary School, but I am concerned that this extensive level of work could not be completed on this very small campus without a potentially disruptive impact on the education of students over a protracted period of time. Also, this project alone would not fully address the facilities challenges at these multiple schools. Therefore, I am convinced the most appropriate solution would be to build a new elementary school at a centrally located site for 1,000-1,200 students. This capital improvement plan recommends \$21 million over a period of four fiscal years to acquire property, design and construct a new elementary school in the north-central corridor of Knox County to open in August 2019.

While a new strategically located elementary school in the north-central part of the county will do much to alleviate population growth pressures and the need for temporary classrooms, it does not address the underlying concerns about facility adequacy at Adrian Burnett Elementary School. Therefore, I believe it is important that we keep Adrian Burnett in our capital priorities and plan a much more modest renovation project to be initiated after we open a new elementary school. This smaller scale Adrian Burnett project would add a gymnasium, build additional classroom and administrative space, modify the school's open classroom design, and address a number of aesthetic issues as well.

### **Conclusion**

While developing a budget often entails making difficult choices and facing unattractive tradeoffs, I believe that this capital budget recommendation will allow the Knox County Schools to continue with our long and proud tradition of providing safe, healthy and inviting learning environments for our children.

I respectfully request the Board of Education approve this FY16 Capital Budget and Capital Improvement Plan.