

CYPRESS SCHOOL DISTRICT
Cypress, California 90630

Dickerson/Vessels Follow-up Parent Meeting
January 29, 2009

What follows is the District's response to the questions about the Dickerson/Vessels closure and consolidation recommendation generated by the parents and community at Dickerson on January 7 and Vessels on January 8, 2009:

A. Why did the Facilities Master Plan Recommend Closing Dickerson?

1. *Why close Dickerson and not Luther or Vessels? Why not Vessels and move students to Dickerson and Morris?*

Many factors besides enrollment were considered by the Facilities Master Plan Committee when deciding to recommend the closure of Dickerson. For example, Dickerson is the oldest school in the District, resulting in more costly renovation needs than some of the newer sites such as Luther.

Enrollment, not just at individual schools, but at regions within the District was considered. The enrollment decline that has already taken place, not just projected, in the combined Dickerson and Vessels region is substantial and has left the District with two adjacent schools, less than one mile apart, each with an enrollment that is not economically or programmatically viable to operate. The ability to consolidate two small schools here, instead of closing a school to disperse students among two or more campuses, as when Damron closed in 2004, was a major positive influence in considering closure of Dickerson as a higher priority than Luther or Vessels.

In the recommendation to close Dickerson rather than Vessels, the committee considered the fact that the asset management potential of Dickerson is better than that of Vessels, which is in a residential track with more zoning requirements than in the City of Buena Park. The future asset management potential of the Dickerson property will bring more money back into the schools for programs that have suffered and continue to suffer during the budget and declining enrollment challenges the District faces. Part of the District's success has been due to the wise development of property like the Senior Housing development after closing Cypress Elementary School and the lucrative leases at the closed Damron School site.

2. *Why close Dickerson when it has been modified for special needs students already?*

Regarding the modifications that have been made at Dickerson to support the special education program, the physical facility improvements made to date are relatively minor when compared to typical projects of this scope. Further, had Dickerson remained open and been modernized, these spaces would have been totally gutted and redone as will happen at the Vessels campus. Moving the program to Vessels, the first school to be modernized, gives us the opportunity to create modernized spaces that are truly physically customized to support the educational and physical needs of this program.

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3. *Why not close Vessels due to poorer traffic/circulation and access?*

Traffic is a consideration at all schools, especially since schools were built when students walked to school. Today most parents drive their students to school. All schools in Orange County and the State of California are very crowded in the morning when school starts and at the end of the school day at dismissal.

Although the enrollment at Vessels has declined, the campus was originally built to, and once did, accommodate as many as 650 students. So, we feel the traffic issue, while not perfect at any school in the District, or any district for that matter, is able to be mitigated to the level where the expansion of Vessels is a viable project. Mitigation measures include expansion of the on site parking and drop-off areas and segregation of bus traffic from most parking and parent drop-off areas.

4. *Can we have access to the data and reports used to make the recommendation?*

The meeting minutes from the Facilities Master Plan Committee are available on the District's website. The Superintendent and principals at Dickerson and Vessels have copies of all the backup data and reports presented to the committee. The principals and the Superintendent have offered to meet with anyone who is interested in seeing all the reports the committee reviewed. Consultants from the Dolinka Group who have experience in studying enrollment trends and demographics, were hired to study the enrollment trends in our District and provide information with an unbiased perspective.

B. Will Transportation be Provided?

1. *Will transportation be provided for students crossing Valley View? Will this include interdistrict transfer students?*

Some Vessels students currently cross Valley View to get to school. However, in the new plan, transportation will be provided for students who must cross Valley View. The exact bus stops are not yet known. Bus stop locations and pick up times will be published in August on the Vessels website. Parents can also call the District in August for this information. We will continue to use the traditional methods of communication during the summer, to keep families informed. The District plans to provide optional bussing for at least the first two years of the transition from Vessels to Dickerson and back, to alleviate concerns. Additional years of bussing may also be possible.

Bussing will not be able to be provided for interdistrict transfer students.

2. *How will the traffic situation be addressed with respect to exiting onto Ball Road so that traffic does not back up in front of the school, and how will the District address the impact of the 4-way stop sign on the neighborhood?*

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The consolidated Dickerson/Vessels School will use staggered start times to help with traffic flow at the Dickerson campus. The 4-way stop at Bernadette is a busy intersection. The city will consider this as part of the development of the safe school routes plan. District administration met with officials from the Buena Park Police Department on January 25th, to address these issues. The police will monitor the traffic at Dickerson and make recommendations for crossing guards. They will work with the city's traffic engineer to study the impact of the traffic in the fall and assist with recommendations. We will add traffic arrows and signage in the drop-off area.

3. *When will parents have answers about how students will get from Dickerson to Vessels?*

There is currently a crossing guard provided by the city, at Cerritos and Valley View. Staff met with the City of Cypress staff on January 20, and they are currently studying where students live and who would have to cross Valley View to get to Vessels. They will prepare a safe school routes plan and consider additional crossing guards, as needed. In addition, the District will continue to provide transportation for students who need to cross Valley View. However, Vessels will not be reoccupied with the expanded enrollment until fall 2010 and, therefore, it is likely that final safe school routes will not be finalized until spring 2010.

4. *When will the District know if they will get an extra drive at Vessels? Has the request been submitted to the City of Cypress?*

A request for an additional drive at Vessels has been submitted. The city's initial indicators are that this request will be granted in some form. However, it will not be formally approved until engineering plans are finalized, likely to be summer 2009. The parking lot will be expanded to about 65 spaces and will include a dedicated parent drop-off lane.

5. *Who would parents contact to request a traffic light on Valley View?*

We have spoken with city staff on January 20th, and they will study this issue.

6. *Have crossing guards been considered?*

There are currently crossing guards at Cerritos and Valley View (some Vessels students cross Valley View now) and at Juanita and Ball. Consideration of crossing guards is currently underway as part of the safe school routes being studied by both the City of Cypress and City of Buena Park.

7. *Concern about driving through neighborhood to get to Vessels.*

There are currently three major drop-off locations on different streets, in addition to the parking lot at Vessels. Vessels also has existing pedestrian entries to the school property from all four sides of the site. This allows the dispersal of pick-up and drop-off traffic, to alleviate

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congestion right in front of the school. Also, negotiations with the city are underway to add a second entry drive to the north end of the existing main parking lot and drop-off area, slated for expansion at the north end. Finally, please be aware that the original design capacity of Vessels was for approximately 650 students, which will not be substantially exceeded by the stabilized expanded enrollment of Vessels in 2010.

8. *Transportation issues should have been addressed before choosing to close Dickerson.*

Similar issues would have been faced regardless of which school was chosen for closure. Further, traffic and transportation were not the only factors considered for closure. This is a problem requiring mitigation under any closure scenario and, as such, the District feels this is a reasonable issue to continue to work on after the closure decision is finalized. The best possible plan will be implemented.

C. Plans for Dickerson/Vessels and Neighborhoods

1. *How long does Dickerson stay open?*

Dickerson will remain open to serve as interim housing for approximately 4-6 years, as other schools are being modernized.

2. *Concern about impact on home values/sales/price, and a school “twice the size” of all others.*

We have no evidence that closing schools, such as Damron in the past, has caused property values to drop. As the housing market improves and homes are once again being sold, we believe that when prospective buyers find out their students will be attending Vessels School in the high achieving Cypress School District, which is less than one mile away from Dickerson, their reaction will be positive. Cypress School District has the second highest achievement scores of elementary districts in Orange County. We believe this is a strong selling feature for all homes within our attendance boundaries, and also helps maintain property values. It is the District's responsibility to take fiscally responsible actions and to offer the best educational programs for our community. We believe that home values remain high when students attend an excellent school District such as Cypress.

In the 2009/10 school year, the consolidated school will have its largest enrollment of approximately 675 students, which is not twice as large as our other schools. Each year after 2009/10, the size will decrease as enrollment continues to decline. We anticipate approximately 635 students for the 2010/11 school year, when students return to the Vessels campus.

3. *Will the lunch area be enlarged?*

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While we will consider enlarging the lunch area for the long term future, it may not be needed since there are three separate eating areas now. Lunch benches will be added, as needed. At Dickerson, the combined enrollment will only be housed on site for one year, during the renovation of Vessels, then smaller schools will rotate through Dickerson. For this reason, to be as cost effective as possible, the first option is to increase lunch capacity through scheduling changes only. Additional lunch tables may be added if it is determined to be necessary by the school administrators. Also, using the multipurpose room for indoor eating is being considered, especially for kindergarten students.

4. *Why make a 650+ school if the ideal enrollment is 550?*

The ideal size of an elementary school, as determined by the Master Facilities Committee, is between 550 and 650-700 students. By consolidating two small schools, where joint enrollment is projected to decline to under 600 students, we are choosing an option that is less disruptive to the students in our District. All students, including special education students, at both schools will remain with their friends and the programs with which they are familiar. We think this offers the best option for the two communities.

5. *Why not move Dickerson to Savanna School District to keep it open?*

It is not in the District's best interest or the community's best interest to go through the very involved political process to change the attendance boundaries of our District.

6. *Will construction happen during summer?*

The Dickerson project will begin immediately when school is out in June. (Preparations will actually begin sooner.) Work is intended to be completed by August 15, 2009. Since work will begin in August at Vessels, we are confident that it will be completed and the move back will be done by the start of the 2010/11 school year.

7. *What will school start time be?*

To provide the transportation needed, the start time will hover around 8:30 a.m. and dismissal around 3:00 p.m. Dickerson currently has early dismissal on Wednesday, and Vessels does not have an early dismissal day. (The purpose of early dismissal is for teacher collaboration and staff development.) The teacher transition team and PTAs will be providing input. If we decide to proceed with early dismissal, the stop and start times will be adjusted by five to ten minutes around the 8:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. times. On Wednesdays, students would be dismissed between 1:30 and 1:45 p.m. The exact schedule will be available prior to the end of the school year.

8. *Will there be more space to accommodate combined daycare program?*

Yes. Our plan is to accommodate the same number of students receiving daycare and preschool at both campuses. Four existing classrooms will accommodate the program at

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Dickerson for one year. At Vessels, a totally new modular preschool/daycare facility (with four rooms) will be built at the northeast corner of the campus. Also, a totally new, separate play area, serving this program, will be provided.

9. *Will there be new playground equipment to accommodate additional special education children?*

No revisions are planned for Dickerson at this time. Due to ongoing PTA support, Vessels school is very well equipped with recently purchased playground structures. Any ADA modification needed will be made.

10. *Will Vessels renovation only take a year?*

The plan is for one year only, which we do believe is reasonable when compared to our team's successful completion of similar projects in other districts. If there were a catastrophic problem and construction were delayed, the students would remain at Dickerson longer, so as to prevent disruption to the educational program.

11. *Will school be named Vessels Vikings, even while at Dickerson? What will the name be after consolidation?*

The school starting next fall will be named Vessels. However, it will have a new mascot and school colors. Students will be involved in deciding the mascot and school colors.

12. *Are we planning for capacity if enrollment rebounds/grows?*

Yes. As part of the modernization of all schools, a master plan is being created to determine where approximately five additional modular classrooms could be located. As part of modernization, utility systems will be over-sized to accommodate this overflow capacity. This will make classrooms easier and cheaper to install, if ever needed in the future. This and the possible reopening of the closed Damron facility are considered our safety net if enrollment rebounds in Cypress.

13. *Following renovation will anyone live on campus (mobile home tenants)?*

No. The mobile home tenants at both Dickerson and Vessels have been given notice that their leases will end June 30, 2009. During the modernization process, cameras will be mounted on school buildings for security.

14. *Following renovation, will there be a fence blocking access to the public during non-school hours?*

No major modifications are currently planned for Dickerson. At Vessels and all schools to be modernized, reconfiguring fencing to secure the front of the school is a big priority and was a major feature of our bond measure. The exact layout has not been determined, but the goal is

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to make the school buildings safe and secure while allowing continued community access to and use of the school play yards after hours and on weekends.

15. *Could there be a combined Open House this year?*

Open House for Dickerson is scheduled for Wednesday, May 20 and for Vessels on Thursday, May 21. We separated the dates to allow parents to visit both schools and not be in a rush. The joint PTA will be planning a combined activity for this year.

D. Students

1. *What will be the effect on students transferring into District, if already here on interdistrict transfers?*

Students already here on interdistrict transfers, as well as new kindergarten siblings, will be welcomed and may continue to attend the new consolidated school. We will also continue to accept interdistrict transfers, especially in kindergarten. (Since our transient rate is minimal, we have limited seats available in grades one through six.) The office staff will try to find another space in the District, if there is no space available at the needed grade level.

2. *Will class size change?*

The only reason class sizes would change is if, due to the state budget crisis, they changed in the entire District at grades kindergarten through third.

3. *Will there be combination classes after consolidation?*

There may be some combination classes after consolidation, however, when there are more students at a grade level at a larger school, the result will be fewer numbers of combination classes.

4. *Will parents be able to request interdistrict transfers out of Cypress if they don't want students to cross Valley View?*

Parents may always request an interdistrict transfer out of Cypress; however, we would expect that going to another district would require our students to cross a busy street, as well. Therefore, requests to leave the District for this reason will not be granted.

5. *May students remain at Dickerson as it is used for interim housing for other schools during modernization?*

Parents may always request intradistrict transfers to other schools within our District, and they are granted if there is room at the particular grade level requested. However, please keep in

mind that if students stay at Dickerson while each school uses the campus as interim housing during modernization, your children will not be going to school with their friends each year.

6. *Is there a special day class program at Vessels?*

Currently there is no special day class program at Vessels.

7. *What will be the impact on student performance and academic preparation, and will programs be different or will they have more programs because the school is the largest in the District?*

There was discussion and a consensus reached by the Master Facilities Committee, that schools this size can provide better programming due to more collaboration, finances, and resources. Therefore, we anticipate student performance will continue to improve. We currently have a transition team of teachers from both schools, with the intent to minimize the disruption to students so that we can begin our academic programs in the fall immediately upon the start of school.

8. *Have we considered the emotional impact on children, especially younger children, and will we try to keep class groups together?*

Change is sometimes more difficult for the adults than it is for children. When a new school year begins, children make new friends within their new classroom. The teacher makes sure that every student has a successful beginning to the new school year. Vessels students will have the opportunity to communicate with their prospective classmates via pen pals, e-mail, etc. and to visit the Dickerson campus between now and June. Other transition activities will be planned including the choosing of a new mascot and school colors.

9. *Can 6th grade students come back and graduate in the Vessels multipurpose room next year?*

There will be a committee of parents and teachers planning 6th grade activities and promotion for next year. At that time, the promotion venue will be discussed.

10. *Will there be special arrangements or plans for 5th graders?*

Although our sixth grade class will be the largest class, the consolidation plan made an effort to keep all of our sixth graders with their friends at one site. Most of the Vessels students and Dickerson students are excited about the consolidation, as they will get to make new friends who will also be going to Lexington. They are excited about camp and junior high. Once again, the 6th grade parent committee and teachers will make plans, as part of the normal process, starting at the beginning of the next year.

11. *May students transfer to another District school if they don't like the consolidated school?*

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According to Open Enrollment process, parents may request to transfer their children to any Cypress school that has openings in the grade levels requested. Transfers from Vessels School will be approved according to the current guidelines, which dictate there should be no programmatic impact for Vessels and that space must be available at the requested school(s).

E. Staffing

1. *Will any teachers lose jobs as a result of closure/consolidation?*

No teachers will lose jobs as a result of closure/consolidation. It is possible, due to other districtwide trends (declining enrollment) and decisions (budget cuts) that teacher jobs will be lost in the District next year, including those currently at Dickerson and Vessels. Layoff is determined by districtwide seniority.

2. *Will there be one or two principals? Who will it be and how will it be decided?*

As you all know, the recommended principal for the newly consolidated school will be Mrs. Jane Snyder. Mrs. Donna Layne will be retiring at the end of this school year.

3. *What will happen to the rest of the support staff?*

There will be a blend of Dickerson and Vessels staff. Classified support staff currently at Dickerson and Vessels will be assigned to the new consolidated Vessels as positions allow; others will be transferred to other sites or laid off, depending on districtwide seniority. Any reduction in work force that might be necessary (if there is insufficient natural attrition) due to the closure/consolidation would affect the least senior employees throughout the District. That is, an employee from Dickerson could be reassigned to another school, and the employee at that school would be laid off.

4. *Will staffing ratios remain the same as at Dickerson now? Could there be two secretaries and one clerk?*

As with all schools, the amount of time for special education staff (for example, speech, psychologists, resource specialists, and instructional aides) at the consolidated Vessels School will be assigned according to actual student needs (caseloads and IEPs). The consolidated Vessels School will have the same amount of classified support staff as other schools in the District, with the exception of night custodial services. Given a higher number of regular education classrooms, as well as the autism program, the District will assign eight hours of night custodian time daily to Vessels. This is more than the districtwide standard, which is eight hours one night and four hours the next. In addition, the District provides a basic allotment of noon duty supervisor time to each school. Schools often supplement with local resources. School budgets are based on student enrollment, so larger schools have additional resources to address additional noon duty supervisor needs.

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There will be one secretary and one clerk, as has been the case even when enrollment at some Cypress schools was 700.

5. *How many teachers will go to Dickerson?*

Staff will be administratively assigned, with the intent of creating a blended staff. The number of teachers assigned to the new consolidated Vessels (at the Dickerson site for 2009/10) will be determined by the number of students at each grade level and the respective class sizes. Class size will be a budgetary decision made districtwide. There are still unknown variables (related to the District budget), but as many of the current Vessels and Dickerson teachers as possible will be assigned to the new consolidated Vessels. If teachers must be assigned to another school or are affected by a layoff in the District, those decisions will be based on districtwide seniority.

F. Other Questions/Comments

1. *Did you look into special funding to keep Dickerson open?*

As explained at the parent meeting on January 7th, the educational community throughout the state, comprised of teachers, classified, administrators, parents, and school Board members has been lobbying over the last several years, to prevent deeper cuts to education. The State of California is experiencing a budget crisis with an over \$40 billion deficit at this time. The governor's proposal for cuts to education for next year could amount to an over \$2 million cut to the Cypress School District. For these reasons and because of our decline in enrollment, which has negatively affected our revenue for the past several years, we and many other districts are having to take the step to close our smaller schools, in order to remain fiscally solvent. It is our commitment to continue to provide excellent academic programs for our students and the community.

2. *What happens if the Board declines to close Dickerson?*

The Master Facilities Plan would be reinstated to consider other options for closing a school for the 2009/10 school year.

3. *Is there a chance the decision could be delayed?*

Yes, the Board could make that decision, although this would also delay the start date to begin the modernization of all of our schools.

4. *Can another meeting be scheduled when more answers are known?*

The meeting this evening, January 29th, was scheduled as a followup, to provide answers.

5. *The neighborhood should be notified, not just Dickerson parents*

The neighborhood will be notified at such time as Dickerson School will no longer be used as interim housing and the District begins to consider other options for the property, i.e. the District may consider leasing, developing, or selling the Dickerson School property.

6. *Good idea to post a diagram of proposed renovation on website*

The latest versions of both school plans are being presented at each public meeting. Once plans are finalized, they will eventually be put on the District's (now emerging) Measure M website.

7. *Can trees be added?*

We will get input from the site on the need to add trees and where. However, trees represent a serious ongoing maintenance cost to clean-up debris, do annual trimming, and trim back surface roots to prevent tripping/safety hazards. Therefore, this item is not certain for inclusion in the project.

8. *What is our confidence level regarding bond sales and completing construction on time?*

Our confidence level is good. Our **same financial team** just completed a very successful bond sale for Poway Unified School District, which is a very similar issuance to ours. This makes us even more hopeful for a good outcome in our program. However, we are developing multiple contingency plans, in case bond sales are slower or more expensive than we hope. The Cypress community is stable and not impacted by home foreclosures. The Cypress School district has a history of fiscal solvency. Both factors contribute to a positive bond rating.

9. *What will be the impact on release of bonds as a result of the "budget mess" in Sacramento?*

Our bonds are for facilities uses only, not for general fund operating expenses. Also, they will be secured by local property taxes, not by any state funds. So, there is no direct impact/correlation between our bonds and the current Sacramento situation. However, the volatile financial markets may affect the interest rates we must pay to make our bonds saleable, and the impact of the economy on assessed property values in our community may slow down the rate at which we can obtain our local funds. All this is being considered in developing the master project funding plan and schedule.

10. *How much of the Measure M money will go to Vessels?*

This figure has not been finalized, as we are planning numerous financial scenarios for the whole program. Final numbers for Vessels will be established in April 2009. However, \$7 million is a current ballpark figure.

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11. Will we know the order in which the other schools will be modernized?

The current tentative schedule is to modernize schools from oldest to youngest, except for Vessels. This campus is moving to the head of the line due to the consolidation. The current order we will be discussing with the school Board is Vessels, King, Cawthon, Morris, Swain, Arnold, Luther, and Landell. When the order is finalized, we will provide information to the community.

12. May the public speak at Board meetings?

Yes. There is an item on every school Board agenda that invites the public to speak on any item within the jurisdiction of District business. Since the Board will be considering the school closure/consolidation of Dickerson/Vessels at the February 10, 2009 Board meeting, the public may speak on this item on that date.

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