



Business, Finance and Planning

TO: School Committee

FROM: Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Financial & Administrative Officer
Stephanie Gilman, Director of Planning, Project Management and Sustainability
Ayesha Farag, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education

DATE: May 22, 2023

RE: Underwood and Ward Task Force Mission Statement and Guiding Principles

As reported in the March 13, 2023 Facilities Update to the School Committee, a consultant has been selected for the Underwood and Ward Facility and Enrollment Study, and a Task Force has been established. Both Underwood and Ward Elementary Schools occupy buildings that are nearly 100 years old, and both are experiencing enrollment declines that are beginning to impact the educational experience of students. The selected consultant, Perkins Eastman Architects, and the task force will work together over the coming months to help the district identify and examine options to address facility, educational, and enrollment challenges at Underwood and Ward.

The Task Force is made up of representatives from the Underwood and Ward family and staff communities, NPS administrators, City of Newton Administrators, City Councilors, and School Committee members. The task force will be meeting monthly and meetings are public. There will also be meetings with the staff and families at both schools, as well as community meetings and opportunities for staff, family and community input. The task force will review and discuss options and will make recommendations to the School Committee for consideration based on the group's review and community feedback. The study is anticipated to be completed by December 2023.

The first step in this process has been to develop a [Draft Mission Statement and Guiding Principles](#) for this work. The task force reviewed and discussed the attached draft mission statement at their first two meetings on April 25, 2023 and May 9, 2023, and the draft document has also been posted on the NPS Underwood and Ward webpage, shared with the Underwood and Ward staff, and shared in a May 17th email newsletter. The document will also be shared with the Underwood and Ward families at meetings with the Ward families on May 18th and with the Underwood families on June 6th.

The draft document is attached for your review and discussion, and a vote will be requested at the School Committee meeting on June 12, 2023. We look forward to the discussion and answering any questions.

Additional information, including task force presentations and meeting minutes, is posted on the [Underwood and Ward Facility and Enrollment Study webpage](#).

Questions can also be emailed to npsunderwoodwardstudy@newton.k12.ma.us.

DRAFT

Ward and Underwood Facility and Enrollment Study Task Force Mission Statement

Revised May 9, 2023

The Newton Public Schools (NPS) strives to educate, prepare, and inspire all students to achieve their full potential as lifelong learners, thinkers, and productive contributors to our global society. NPS is committed to ensuring that all students have safe, clean, modern, accessible, and inviting school buildings equipped to facilitate/foster positive and engaging learning environments. With this in mind, the district has developed a long-range facilities plan that details the timeline and plans to address building-based needs at many NPS Schools over time.

As a part of this ongoing work, the Underwood and Ward School buildings are now slated for a comprehensive review to help address **facility, educational, and enrollment challenges** in each school. Built in 1924 and 1928, respectively, the Underwood and Ward School buildings lack many of the spaces found in today's modern schools. Many spaces are inadequate and their physical conditions are significantly compromised. Simultaneously, the enrollment of both schools has dropped to levels that impact students' educational experience given challenges with staffing, scheduling, class sizes, and social opportunities. These factors impact the daily operations of the school, limit programs, and dilute the quality and diversity of the educational experience.

Working with a consultant to support and help guide the process, this initiative will focus on studying the current and projected student enrollment, the physical facilities and sites, as well as the current and ideal education programs. Further, these studies will generate reports of existing conditions and potential solutions for the district.

The goal of this initiative is to employ a collaborative and transparent process with community stakeholders to examine and analyze a myriad of information about the Ward and Underwood Schools. This stakeholder team will collaborate to review relevant information, and identify feasible short and long-term options to preserve high quality instruction and positive learning conditions for all Ward and Underwood students and to address current challenges. Through this process, team members will evaluate possible facility and district solutions for the students, families, district, and community to ensure that the highest quality educational experience is delivered for current and future students in the Ward and Underwood School Districts.

The results of this work will be to present short and long term options to the School Committee and Superintendent on the future of both school buildings by December of 2023.

Guiding Principles

1. A task force composed of representatives from the parent communities of each school, teachers from each school, members of the School Committee, City Council, and School

and City staff shall be formed for the purpose of reviewing and analyzing information, providing feedback, and identifying feasible options to present to the School Committee. The process shall be transparent and collaborative and will include regular community updates with ample public dialogue.

2. Existing condition reports, analysis, and supporting documents shall be posted on the Newton Public Schools website to provide easy access to information as it becomes available.
3. To maintain Newton's standards of academic excellence and student diversity, the target number of general education classrooms in any proposed solution should be in the range of 18-22, similar to other recently completed and planned elementary school projects. Additional classrooms may be warranted based on either current or projected enrollment, or district wide programming.
4. This initiative will analyze and provide reports and recommendations for several potential scenarios including but not limited to:
 - Renovation of both Schools.
 - New construction for both Schools.
 - Renovation of one school and new construction of the other.
 - New construction for the Ward or Underwood Elementary School to be the new home for both schools, resulting in consolidation of the two schools.
 - Redistricting Ward and Underwood Elementary School students into other elementary schools in the district.
5. The educational program options and inadequate learning environments in these aging facilities are the primary driving factors for this initiative.
6. Capital and operating costs will be one of many factors considered when determining the favorability of potential solutions. Conceptual cost estimates will be generated and considered, and when all things are considered equal, cost implications may be considered when determining a recommended solution.
7. Newton's long-standing tradition of neighborhood schools will be one of many factors considered as part of the context of the review and analysis process for proposed options.
8. The study will not present a final solution but rather will present several options and will use a criteria matrix to help determine option viability and favorability to help inform the Newton School Committee, who will make the final decision in a formal public vote. Recommendations for both short and long term solutions that improve educational programming and address building challenges will be presented.
9. Evaluations and recommendations will consider the impacts of each scenario on multimodal transportation needs and transportation costs to both Newton Public Schools and families.