CCS Reconfiguration: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How many students are the buildings being designed for? Does this account for future growth?

Buford is being designed to accommodate 1,050 students, which allows for 23% growth from 2020-21 6-8 enrollments. Walker is being designed to accommodate 18 classrooms, which can house anywhere from 144 - 288 students, depending on the mix of age groups and the number of students with special needs. This is the same as CCS's current pre-K classroom space, but the Walker buildings will expand student, teacher, and family support spaces, and provide space for medical, dental, and nutritional services for families. The site is being master-planned to accommodate up to 14 additional classrooms with support space through future phases.

Will 5th grade fit back in the elementary schools? What about growth?

Yes, 5th grade will fit, but only if Pre-K is moved out of the elementary schools. If significant growth occurs in elementary enrollments in the future, CCS has already identified elementary facility expansion options in the 2016-17 CCS Capacity Study. Johnson, Jackson Via, and Burnley-Moran Elementary Schools were identified as feasible sites for additions, and the possibility of adding a seventh elementary school was also identified (site TBD).

Why is Jefferson school no longer used as Pre-K? Can't we just go back to that?

The Jefferson School building was not ideal for pre-K instruction as the building was designed to be a junior high school. When space that was more conducive to early childhood instruction became available at the elementary schools, the program was relocated. Jefferson School has since been renovated and repurposed, and because of its current usage, adequate space is no longer available to house the pre-K program.

Why don't we convert Walker and Buford into two 6-8 middle schools instead of having one big 6-8 school at Buford? Won't one school be too big?

Converting Walker and Buford into two 6-8 middle schools does not achieve reconfiguration because there is not enough room to accommodate 5th grade at the elementary schools without relocating pre-K. Currently, there is no other CCS-owned site that could accommodate a centralized Pre-K except for the Walker campus.

Middle schools that can accommodate 1,050 (or more) students in grades 6-8 are common in Virginia, particularly in Fairfax, Loudoun and Virginia Beach. Critical to the success of large schools is creating smaller communities within the schools, such as through teaming (establishing a group of teachers to cover core subjects for a group of students), reduced student/teacher ratios, and/or school-within-school models.

Why is Buford the 6-8 campus, and Walker the Pre-K campus? Can't we flip them?

The Walker site is very hilly, which makes it difficult to accommodate the amount of new construction as well as the size of the athletic fields needed for the expanded middle school program.

City leadership acknowledges that the Walker site is challenging to get to if you don't have a car, and is committed to working with the City to find ways to increase service to the site by Charlottesville Area Transit and/or others.

The Buford site offers more middle school students the ability to get to school easily on foot or using CTS if they accidentally miss the school bus.

When will key decisions be made?

October 5, 2021: City Council votes on the budget, schedule and approach, and whether the project should proceed. (Update: unanimously approved by City Council)

March 21, 2022: City Council votes on the Schematic Design and whether to proceed.

When will construction start? When will it be finished?

Buford: currently anticipating a June 2023 start of construction, with final completion in August 2026.

Walker: pre-K students will move to the temporary condition at Walker in August 2026. New construction at the Walker campus is contingent on funding, but can be completed within 2 years from the start of construction.

For more detail on the latest schemes you can view the recording of the latest Community Design Team meeting here.

What happens to students and teachers at Buford while construction is happening?

The current approach is to keep Buford occupied while the new addition is constructed. Once it is finished, students and teachers will move over into the new building and then the existing buildings will be renovated. Once the Buford campus is complete, pre-K will be moved to Walker and 5th grade will move back to the elementary schools.

You can see which students will be affected by the construction schedule here.

Shouldn't we just move everyone off of the Buford site while construction is going on?

One of the alternatives priced in July 2021 looked at relocating the entire school to portable classrooms at CHS in order to free up the campus for faster construction. The resulting cost estimates showed no major cost savings associated with this approach, and given the lower quality learning environments associated with the portable classroom camps, the team abandoned this approach.

Are teachers and CCS staff involved in the design process?

There are a number of staff members and educators on our current Community Design Team. In late October, the design team will convene two “Building Committees” which will be composed of current staff focused especially on Early Childhood and Middle School teaching & learning.

How can families, students, neighbors and other community members get involved?

Fill out the values survey–those that rise to the top help establish project priorities and define project success.

Talk to your neighbors and other community members about how important this project is for our community.

Take advantage of the public comment period at School board and City Council meetings to ask questions about and advocate for the project.

Where can I learn more about this project?

Everything that has been presented publicly can be found at the project website including recordings of presentations, capacity studies, etc. You can also attend Community Design Team meetings (open to all, check the project page for meeting dates and registration links).

Who is on the Community Design Team?

Current membership of the Community Design Team (CDT) can be found here.

Who is on the Working Group?

Current membership of the Community Design Team (CDT) can be found here.

How is the team controlling construction costs?

The design team is mindful that our community's ambition does not match the funding available, so controlling costs is key. Strategies include:

- **Starting construction sooner**: originally construction was slated to start in the summer of 2024; moving the construction start to 2023 saves escalation costs, which on a project of this scale can be as much as $2 to $3 million/year.
- **Reusing what we can:** renovating is less expensive than building new, so the team is reusing structures where they can while still providing improved learning spaces and increased site capacity.
- **Designing efficient buildings:** using compact footprints, efficient structural grids and right-sized building HVAC systems helps direct funds to where they can have the greatest benefit.
- **Working with a cost estimator.** The team has deliberately built into the project timeline regular cost estimates with a seasoned estimator, who knows the current construction market and has the experience to know where it is headed. These check-ins allow the team

to control costs throughout the process, so they know that they're within range of the budget when it comes time for the project to go out to bid.

Given the crazy construction market right now, shouldn't we just wait? How much would it cost to delay the project a year or two?

These are unprecedented times in the construction industry, and it is impossible to know what the state of the market will be when this project goes out to bid. That said, most experts believe that prices (and supply chain issues) will settle out before construction begins in June 2023. Each year of delay on the project is estimated to cost between $2 and $3 million due to escalation.

What are the goals for the project?

As stated in the initial Request for Proposals (RFP) issued by the City, the goals of this project are to:

- reduce transitions at the middle school grades in order to further academic and equity goals
- update current dated interiors to reflect state-of-the-art educational design
- address security concerns associated with open-campus layouts

Why is this important to do right now?

- **Middle school transitions are disruptive.** Reducing transitions at middle school will greatly improve the 6-8th grade experience and provide better continuity between grades/teachers.
- **Pre-K has an opportunity to offer specialized services.**. Centralizing Pre-K will provide a more efficient use of early childhood resources across the district, allow for future expansion of the program, and become a hub for the community to meet the needs of preK families..
- **Our learning spaces are from 1966.** Renovating learning spaces will better meet the specific needs of these age groups, improve indoor environmental quality, save energy and help meet city climate commitments, and help attract and retain teachers.
- **Investing in the right ages.** These grade levels are foundational to lifelong learning and achievement.
- **Our school buildings are obsolete.** CCS facilities are aging and significantly lower quality than many surrounding districts. Our last major investment in school facilities (CHS) was 47 years ago.
- **We said we would reconfigure.** It has been 13+ years since reconfiguration was first widely discussed and approved.
- **Time is money**. The more we delay, the more expensive reconfiguration becomes.
- **It's the best way to accommodate growth.** Reconfiguration is the least expensive way to create additional capacity at all CCS facilities.

- **Tomorrow is today.** Decisions we make today keep us on track to achieve reconfiguration in 2026.

How does this project further equity goals in our schools?

- Our Pre-K and middle schools have a higher percentage of students of color of economically disadvantaged students than CCS as a whole, yet are historically underinvested. This is an opportunity to address that inequity in both investment and in the quality of the learning environment.
- Neither campus is easily navigated by mobility-impaired students, staff or community members. Renovating the schools can not only address this inequity but also make the campuses more inclusive and welcoming in terms of neurodiversity, gender identity, visual and/or hearing impairment, and cultural background.

How does this project further academic goals? How can the design affect learning?

There is a lot of research around the connection between the built environment, the health of teachers, staff and students, and academic performance. Key points include:

- **Air quality = learning quality** Good indoor air quality can improve performance and reduce absenteeism in students, teachers + staff. Through this project we can bring in more outside air, making the air fresher and lowering CO2 levels, and also improve filtration at the classroom level–while at the same time reducing energy use..
- **Daylight matters.** Access to daylighting and views significantly influences both test scores and stress levels. The current buildings have very little daylight–only 10% of the spaces have enough daylight to read without the electric lights on. Through this project we can bring significantly more daylight into existing spaces and design new spaces to make the most of glare-free daylight and views.
- **Noise makes it hard to learn**. Students under 15 years old have more difficulty with complex listening tasks. The noise levels in current classrooms from heating, cooling and lighting systems is twice what they should be; renovations will make it easier for students to hear and to focus.
- **Teachers care.** Better facilities attract, support and retain better teachers.

For more information, Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health has published a comprehensive document that summarizes the evidence for investing in schools. The US EPA also has a resource page that summarizes evidence from scientific literature about improved academic performance associated with better school facilities.

Can a renovation really deliver a state-of-the art educational environment?

Absolutely! There are successful examples all around the region of public schools that have transformed their spaces through renovations, not just through new construction. An example of this can be found in the recent renovation projects at Jackson-Via, Clark and Burnley-Moran.

Will there be space for wrap around services? Who will the partners be?

The long-term dream would be to create a one-stop-shop to help preschool families access community benefits and services relating to parenting, healthcare, counseling, and resource insecurity. Throughout the design process, we will continue conversations with agencies, nonprofits, and families about how to implement this vision.

How will spaces be designed for students with special needs in mind?

The design team will be working with the building committees, as well as regional experts, to develop spaces that can accommodate a wide range of needs. This includes, but is not limited to, incorporating principles of universal design and trauma-informed design.

Will the buildings have solar panels on their roofs? Will they be sustainable/"green"?

The current scheme reinforces Buford's roof structure to allow for solar panels via Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). The team will continue to explore whether the project budget can include purchasing solar panels outright. Regardless, the energy performance of existing buildings will significantly improve through the planned high-performance renovations and the new construction will be net zero energy ready (which means a 70-80% reduction in energy use compared to the national average for K12 schools). The team is targeting Gold level certification using the USGBC's LEED v4 for Schools green building rating system, which also includes sustainability criteria for water, materials, indoor environmental quality, and landscape.

What will happen to the new Walker playground?

The new playground was designed to be relocated when the project happens--this was the intent all along.

What will happen to the Buford garden?

The garden will be relocated, enabling better vehicle access for servicing and better integration with the classrooms, enabling more students to experience it. The team will work to protect and relocate the soil that has been built up over time in its current location, as well as accommodate all of the storage and features currently provided in the garden.