

Frequently Asked Questions: Future of Dennis Lab School

Updated Jul 24, 2023

Below is a summary of frequently asked questions that DPS Administration has received throughout this process regarding the closure of the two Dennis Lab School buildings. **This information will be added to and updated as more questions and information arise.**

If you have a question that you do not see answered below, please submit it to WeListen@dps61.org so that it can be added to this document for all interested parties to get the information.

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Issues with Dennis Buildings

When was the last time a school safety survey was completed for both buildings?

The last 10-year Health Life Safety (HLS) Surveys and Reports were performed in 2013. Copies of these reports are linked at engage.dps61.org/dennisfuture.

Were any structural deficiencies found with either building in the previous HLS survey?

No, no structural deficiencies were identified in 2013.

Were any engineering or architectural surveys of the Dennis buildings completed as part of the plan to move Dennis to Lincoln Park?

Previous administrations decided to replace the Dennis buildings as part of the facility planning processes. The current DPS administration inherited the task of constructing a new Dennis building, which eventually was slated for construction at Lincoln Park due to lack of other suitable property in the West End of Decatur. During the planning for the new building, no in-depth engineering or architectural surveys were performed on the existing Dennis buildings, as they were slated for replacement and not renovation.

How did these issues get missed over the course of the past decade since the last structural review?

Architects and engineers have said there's no reason to believe that this was missed when the last Health Life Safety review was completed in 2013; we believe that these serious issues developed within the past few years and would have likely been found during this year's Health Life Safety Inspection.

Why did we seek outside firms for the structural analyses of the Dennis buildings?

We wanted outside parties that have no previous connection, existing vested interest, or conflict of interest with Decatur Public Schools.

Was BLDD involved in the process to close the buildings?

No. Outside firms were specifically sought to give expert opinions on the status of the structure of the two Dennis buildings.

How long will it be before students can get back to attending school at the Dennis Lab School buildings?

We are working with DPS Buildings & Grounds staff, as well as seeking an outside firm, to review the structural recommendations, cost estimates, timeline, and feasibility of repair and/or replacement options for the two Dennis campuses. As this work has just begun, we do not currently have a timeline for when these reviews will be completed.

What process will be used to determine if repairs will be made to the existing Dennis buildings?

Once staff and architects have reviewed the recommendations, cost estimates, timeline, and feasibility, that will determine our next steps in the process.

Is closing Dennis part of an overall plan to build a new K-6 or K-8 school?

No.

What is the plan to put Dennis back into one permanent K-8 building?

This will be determined as part of the long-term master facilities plan for all DPS locations.

Does this Dennis building crisis reflect the overall health of all of our school buildings?

No. The next oldest building of currently used DPS facilities is the Keil Administration building, constructed in 1928. The rest of the current school buildings were built in the mid-1950's or more recently. However, a thorough review of all DPS facilities will be undertaken as part of the upcoming master facilities planning process.

Moving to a New Location

When can staff go in and retrieve personal items and pack their belongings from the two Dennis buildings?

A plan is being developed to gather personal belongings and pack classrooms at the Dennis locations, which will include schedules to limit the number of people in each building at the same time. This info will be released to staff as soon as it is complete.

What if staff can not safely return to their location to pack their personal and professional belongings?

A plan is being developed to gather personal belongings and pack classrooms at the Dennis locations, which will include schedules to limit the number of people in each

building at the same time, as well as areas that are off-limits. This info will be released to staff as soon as it is complete.

When will Garfield staff be able to start moving to Stephen Decatur?

A plan is being developed with timelines for when Buildings & Grounds and Teamsters will move items to SDMS. This info will be released to staff as soon as it is complete.

Do DPS staff have the capacity to complete summer projects AND move two Dennis schools to a new location?

Staff are working to reprioritize summer projects so that Dennis staff and students can be moved to a different location.

Will there be time for staff to see new classrooms and new locations to see how things are set up?

Yes.

What does a modular classroom look like?

A modular classroom is a classroom that is mobile, state of the art, and can be set up anywhere. However, a lot of underground infrastructure must be put in place by the District in order to get the modular units up and running, including power, water, sewer service, fiber for internet access, etc.

What classrooms will be used for Alternative Education at Stephen Decatur?

A wing of SDMS will be sectioned off to create a self-contained section specifically for the Alternative Education program.

How many classrooms are at the Garfield location?

The Garfield building has 15 classrooms.

What happens if we cannot get enough modular units to fit all students in one location?

We will consider other alternatives.

Will the Libraries from both Dennis campuses be able to be moved?

Every effort will be made to move both libraries.

Has the administration explored other locations to build a new Dennis?

At this time, there is not a viable location within the current Dennis boundary suitable to build a new facility to replace the existing Dennis buildings. In addition, a new building would essentially come through a referendum.

Is the Garfield location air conditioned? And will the planned modular classrooms have air conditioning?

Yes, Garfield classrooms and the modular classrooms are air conditioned.

Does the Garfield location have a set of playground equipment?

Garfield does not currently have a playground; however, the DPS Buildings & Grounds Department is working to address this issue in the near future.

Will staff be paid for packing and unpacking their classrooms?

Per contract language, they will receive \$150 for one day of packing.

Details for 2023-24 School Year

How will this move affect the climate and culture of Dennis, the K-8 style, and work we have done with PBL and BIST?

Creating climate and culture is the responsibility of the building administrators — they will be tasked with working to continue the climate and culture, regardless of location.

How will these moves affect the workload of teachers for the upcoming school year?

Each teacher will be assigned a schedule per contractual obligations as they are every year.

Will all Dennis students be bussed to the new location(s) for the 2023-24 school year?

Yes. Transportation is currently working on bussing.

Will Extended Day be offered at the new Garfield location?

Yes, Extended Day will be offered before and after school beginning when Dennis students are in attendance in person at the Garfield location.

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~If Dennis teachers are moved to SDMS, will we be responsible for students other than Dennis students? Will Dennis and SDMS students be intermixed or separated?~~

~~This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.~~

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~What will happen for 6th grade, where will they be located, and will they still be considered “middle school”?~~

~~This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.~~

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~If 7th and 8th grade students move to SDMS, will that move be permanent?~~

~~This will be determined as part of the long-term master facilities plan for all DPS locations.~~

It sounds like the classrooms at the Garfield location will be for grade-level classes only. Is the plan for Encore teachers to be on a cart and move from room to room?

With the limited space available at Garfield, it's possible that Encore classes will not have a permanent location. This will be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~If Dennis students are divided into two locations, will a bus be available so we can visit and collaborate with students and staff in the other location?~~

~~The same resources will be available as they were during the 2022-23 school year.~~

Will the Dennis school bell times change for the 2023-24 school year?

Until we determine the final location where Dennis staff and students will be, we cannot determine if school bell times will change.

How will IEP minutes continue to be met?

School leadership and Special Education Administrators will continue to work together to ensure all IEP requirements are met.

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~Will Dennis still have its own athletic programs?~~

~~This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.~~

Will teachers have the same Professional Development days if we're at separate locations?

This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

If I turned down a magnet school seat and now want to change my decision and send my student to a magnet school, can I do that?

No. There is an existing magnet school process that we will continue to follow.

If I did not apply to a magnet school but now want my student to attend there, can I be moved to the top of the waiting list?

No. There is an existing magnet school process that we will continue to follow.

What and when will all this information be communicated to parents?

Robocall, email, and text went out to all Dennis families Monday June 19, 2023, regarding the special board meeting scheduled for Wednesday June 21. We will continue sending robocalls emails and texts to families regarding upcoming meetings and post regular updates on the Future of Dennis webpage.

Staffing Questions

Dennis was supposed to gain a second principal to provide better coverage for the dual campus concept — will that still happen?

This is yet to be determined.

NO LONGER APPLICABLE: ~~Will I be bumped out of my position if there is a teacher who has been here longer that wants it so as not to move to SDMS?~~

~~No.~~

Will we still have three teachers for each grade level?

Yes.

How will staffing work for specialist/Encore teachers? What about Special Education teachers?

This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

Will both Calm/CARE room teaching assistants go to the temporary location at Garfield?

This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

Where will the counselors be located?

This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

Where will the nurses be located?

This is yet to be determined, pending the final location for Dennis staff and students.

Where will custodians be placed? Or do we have to rebid our job? Do we get to retain our day and night shift hours?

All custodians will continue employment. Custodians will be placed as needed. Locations will be determined by Buildings & Grounds administration. Each assignment will be temporary until further notice, with shift and hours to be determined as defined by contract language.

When will our union leadership meet with us?

Reach out to your union leadership to determine this. We will keep them and the staff informed of next steps.

Specific Staff Questions About the Move

Can office filing cabinets be moved first so that staff can start send student info to other buildings?

Our suggestion would be to move the entire filing cabinet with all folders inside. All items will be moved in the most efficient order possible, as determined by B&G staff.

Can secretarial staff be of assistance other days/times? Can they help their staff by putting together boxes ahead of time and helping tape when boxes are full?

DESPA staff may assist with any tasks if they are working during their normal established work calendar and hours.

Do we move our things, or will Buildings & Grounds move them? If we have to move them, where are we taking them to?

Staff who are in areas of the building that remain accessible have the option of moving personal belongings. Custodians will also be available to move boxed items to the threshold of the building, Teamsters will then load and transport them to Garfield.

Do we have rooms assigned at Garfield yet?

Administration is currently working on room assignments. This information will be shared when available.

Are Buildings & Grounds taking bulletin boards down? Materials from bulletin boards etc.?

If not, do we get money to replace that?

Administration will revisit the feasibility of this request following the initial move.

Will we get paid to unpack boxes because of the mess that will be sorting stuff and resetting up a classroom?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

Can other DPS employees that would like to help be able to come help?

Building staff ONLY (no friends, no family, nor other non-DPS assistance) will be allowed to enter designated areas.

What are we writing on boxes?

Containers should be labeled with the teacher's name, current room number/location, future destination, and other pertinent and appropriate information.

Do we get paid for each day or just once?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

When can we start working on our new classrooms at Garfield?

The building administrator will communicate timelines when available.

Will we get paid?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

According to Administration, B&G will not transport personal belongings, especially furniture, so if we are in section C, how do we get those belongings?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items "containerized" by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

If we are not able to retrieve our belongings and they will not remove them, will we be reimbursed?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

If items are broken, will we be reimbursed?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

Why can B&G go into our classrooms, but we cannot?

Administration is working to isolate the areas of suspect structural integrity and the adjoining spaces by limiting access to authorized personnel only (as determined by the Director of Buildings & Grounds).

Are B&G getting and moving EVERYTHING? Pictures, bulletin boards, posters, etc.?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Will our ENTIRE space be cleaned?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Locations are labeled wrong on the colored map — how do we ensure we get our stuff in the area on the map labeled wrong?

Please work with building administration to review building layouts.

Will there be a lost and found space? Things will get lost or misplaced. Where will they be stored?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Confidential student information is in many classrooms and the office. How does that remain confidential?

B&G will handle and transport all items with professionalism and respect.

IF people are out of town the days we are allowed to get in, how do we go about getting different time to go in?

There will be a make-up day for packing items, that date and time has yet to be determined.

If we will not be going to Garfield and maybe not staying in the district, how can I get my belongings? Will shelves installed be taken off since it was paid for by me?

DEA members and Building Administration will be responsible for informing B&G of special circumstances concerning issues such as a staff member leaving DPS or moving to a different building as B&G is not currently privy to that information.

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Will PE equipment be moved? Will B&G move it all to Garfield?

All District equipment will be moved by B&G.

If we have to move our own stuff straight to that building, can we get paid mileage since some people travel over 50 miles to work?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

What about teachers’ desks and filing cabinets, kidney tables etc., who is moving them to Garfield? How do we mark them to make sure they get put in the correct place at Garfield?

All District equipment will be moved by B&G. Containers should be labeled with the teacher’s name, current room number/location, future destination, and other pertinent and appropriate information.

How many days were negotiated for packing and unpacking?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

Will the air be on?

Whenever and wherever possible, typical climate controls will be in place.

If we are in section C, how do we then get those belongings?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

How will B&G know what are school materials and what are personal?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Some of our materials, including instruments, have to be packed and transported in specific ways as to not destroy them. How will B&G know how to do that without communicating with us?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items “containerized” by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Can staff in section C FaceTime/Zoom with them in our rooms telling them what is ours?

No.

Can we be in the parking lot to get our personal belongings as they pack them and bring them down?

Staff who are in areas of the building that remain accessible have the option of moving personal belongings.

Can we sign a waiver to go in?

No.

If we are not able to retrieve our belongings and B&G does not move them, will we be reimbursed?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

If items are broken, will we be reimbursed?

Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

Why can B & G go into my classroom, but I cannot?

Administration is working to isolate the areas of suspect structural integrity and the adjoining spaces by limiting access to authorized personnel only (as determined by the Director of Buildings & Grounds).

What happens to section C teachers who are moving to another school?

DEA members and Building Administration will be responsible for informing B&G of special circumstances concerning issues such as a staff member leaving DPS or moving to a different building as B&G is not currently privy to that information.

Several people are going to be out of town the days that we are allowed to go into the building.

How do they go about finding a different time to go in?

There will be a make-up day for packing items, that date and time has yet to be determined.

If we are not allowed to get our stuff and Buildings & Grounds is not permitted to pack up personal belongings, do we need to file some sort of lawsuit?

B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items "containerized" by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

Will boxes be pre assembled? Are they providing tape?

Packing materials will be provided.

If they aren't preassembled, can we have a non-DPS person building boxes in the parking lot?

No.

Who do we contact if we have people who are DPS employees that would like to help?
Building staff ONLY (no friends, no family, nor other non-DPS assistance) will be allowed to enter designated areas.

What are we writing on the boxes?
Containers should be labeled with the teacher's name, current room number/location, future destination, and other pertinent and appropriate information.

If we need to go all three days, are we getting paid for all three days or is it one flat fee?
Compensation is being discussed with the unions and will be communicated to staff upon final agreement.

Is Garfield available for us to go and start working on our classrooms?
The building administrator will communicate timelines when available.

Are B&G getting and moving EVERYTHING... as in pictures, bulletin boards, posters, etc? Will my ENTIRE space be cleaned?
B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items "containerized" by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

My location is labeled wrong on the colored map - how do we ensure we get our stuff if the area on the map is labeled wrong?
Please work with building administration to review building layouts.

Where does my stuff go? Will it be placed in a common area at GLA for me to retrieve? When? Will it be moved to my new location?
All District equipment will be moved by B&G. Containers should be labeled with the teacher's name, current room number/location, future destination, and other pertinent and appropriate information. The building administrator will communicate timelines when available.

Is or will there be a lost and found space? Things will get lost or misplaced, where will they be stored?
B&G will do their best to move items. B&G will consider all items "containerized" by B&G to be DPS property. As such, B&G will handle and transport those items with professionalism and respect.

I've got confidential student information in my office — how does this remain confidential?
B&G will handle and transport all items with professionalism and respect.

Questions Submitted by Reed Sutman

What was the process for acquiring a proposal from BFW? Was there a public bidding procedure? When did you make the request for a bid?

A proposal was requested from BFW via a telephone conversation between Kent Metzger, DPS61 Director of Buildings and Grounds, and Phillip Holthaus of BFW. There was no public bidding process because Architectural/Engineering services are specifically exempt from the bid process requirement. The request for a quote (not bid) took place by an exchange of phone calls and messages with Phillip Holthaus of BFW on, and after, February 22, 2023.

What was the process for acquiring a proposal from Klingner? Was there a public bidding procedure? When did you make the request for a bid?

A proposal was requested from Klingner via a telephone conversation between Dr. Michael Curry, DPS61 Chief Operating Officer; Kent Metzger, DPS61 Director of Buildings and Grounds; and Michael Fries, Klingner. There was no public bidding process because Architectural/Engineering services are specifically exempt from the bid process requirement. The request for a quote (not bid) took place after the phone call with Michael Fries of Klingner on May 31, 2023.

The District timeline says inspection was attempted to be schedule on March 22nd. Email records show a contract proposal on March 23rd and no communications prior. When and how were communications conducted prior to March 23rd, in an effort to secure a March 22nd inspection?

The first contact to schedule the inspection was actually February 22, 2023, made via telephone call.

The District timeline says inspection was attempted to be scheduled on May 17th. Email records show that Holthaus offered possible inspection that week & also the following week. Metzger replied on May 15th asking for a May 30/31 inspection. Why did the District claim May 17th was attempted & can any proof be provided to support that claim?

After a series of emails, the Director of Buildings & Grounds determined that the next available date which fit into both his and the inspector's schedules was 5/30/23 and/or 5/31/23.

On May 8th, Holthaus offered a May 9th inspection. Why wasn't May 9th accepted?

See answer to question above.

Why didn't anyone take action after the public comment on August 23rd 2022 about the stairs at Dennis separating from the building?

Dr. Clark was hired in February 2022 and does not recall the individual referenced speaking about this.

How was DPS able to get a second opinion (from Klingner) so quickly, if the first opinion (from BFW) took 3 and a half months to secure?

Once BFW performed its investigation and discovered the significance of their structural concerns, DPS reacted with appropriate caution and sought a second professional opinion to substantiate or dispute the BFW opinion.

Were other firms sought for the initial inspection?

No other firms were sought. BFW was recommended to DPS as a qualified firm with experience in these types of issues.

Denise Swarthout told Scarlett O'Hara on May 31st "We requested the analysis from a structural engineer this spring, but yesterday was the first availability on his schedule to come out and do the analysis." Why did she place sole blame for the scheduling on BFW, who had multiple cases of prior availability not acted upon by the District?

As stated, a mutual time was needed as both parties needed to be present. There was no blame.

Ten-year HLS surveys are due by December for both French & Dennis. When were those scheduled for?

Approval for HLS surveys is on an upcoming BOE agenda on August 8, 2023.

Al Scheider said "As far as other structural things, Kent [Metzger] had, twice this year, has gone through a whole list of all the schools and what they were doing." - Can you provide this list?

The list is referencing projects the B&G department was scheduled to complete this school year, including window and door replacements, playground installation, etc.

The 2013 HLS survey shows several cases of water damage to the Dennis building. Were these issues addressed since 2013? If yes, can you provide documentation?

There are no documents responsive to this request.

In August 2022, a student made public comment about gas leaks being unsafe at the Dennis building. Are there gas leaks at Dennis/Mosaic? Have they been inspected / fixed?

We have had gas leaks reported at both Dennis campuses, but there is no point of reference to acknowledge or deny any reported gas leak by a student in August 2022. Reports of gas leaks are ALWAYS investigated immediately upon receiving a report. Reports are generally unfounded and are odors often attributable to other issues. Any confirmed gas leak is immediately addressed.

I heard from a student that Stephen Decatur has water leaks in the ceiling and at windows. What do you know about that? Is it being addressed?

No student or staff has reported this to administration.

There was a May 31st zoom meeting with Holthaus, and emails suggest BLDD was part of that call too. What was the purpose of that call? Can you provide documentation about and recording of the meeting?

This is inaccurate. A Zoom meeting did not occur on this date.

Why didn't the district announce the June 19th staff meeting, such that press could attend?

It was a staff meeting, not a press conference to which media were invited.

Do you believe the district should have notified staff and families prior to BFW's inspection on May 30th? Why / Why not?

Staff and families were notified as quickly as we could confirm the situation at hand.

Why wasn't a "community forum" scheduled prior to presenting a recommendation to the board, like the district timeline promised?

The Community Forum is for our long-term plans. The community has been invited to board meetings to get updates on the short-term plans.

Dr. Jay Marino and Deanne Hillman were panelists for the June 19th staff meeting. What is their role in this whole process?

The District Leadership Team (DLT) is welcomed at all staff meetings.

What is the security plan to ensure that Garfield & Stephen Decatur students don't intermix? Krista Hudson expressed concern about only having 11 classrooms. Why doesn't GLA have 13 classrooms & what is being done to address this concern?

Building administrators will work together to ensure each school's needs are met.

Krista Hudson expressed concern about only having 1 hour of gym time. What, if anything, is being done to address this concern?

Building administrators will work together to ensure each school's needs are met.

What is being done to get a new principal for Garfield?

Mrs. Dianne Brandt is the Principal.

I got a tip that boxes and tape for moving Garfield to SDMS are being taken out of the Garfield building/supplies budget. I was told this came from someone named Brad at the "warehouse" (someone with Buildings and Grounds?). Can you confirm if this is true/false and provide any further details?

Everything a school does that has a financial expense is linked to their individual building – this is defined by ISBE as [Site-Based Expenditures](#). This is how districts keep track of spending. This does not take anything away from education or money needed for the building as a whole.

What is being done to get a 2nd assistant principal for Dennis?

We are in discussions at this time. When a decision is made, we will let the staff know.

Since Dennis will be on one campus, is the District no longer intending to get a 2nd head principal?

No.

Deborah Sonder asked "What about art and music?" ... are these programs remaining unchanged?

Building administrators will ensure each school's needs are met.

Keith Creighton asked "If we have questions that occur later, what is the best way to submit or communicate those?"

Questions and answers are added frequently to the FAQ document, from a variety of sources.

Allison Brikoetter said "With zero math and limited science teachers at sdms" ... Are there "zero math" teachers at SDMS? And if yes, what's the plan to address the shortage?

Building administrators will ensure each school's needs are met.

Why weren't everybody's questions displayed to the entire chat?

Participants were asked to use the Q&A feature so that a log of questions could be downloaded after the session ended and added to the FAQ document for all staff and families to get the answers.

Who was the "Anonymous Attendee"?

This is unknown as the attendee remained anonymous.

Keith Creighton asked "What will be communicated to parents and when? Do we hold this information or share?" ... What was the answer to this question?

All of the information regarding Dennis is kept updated on the [Future of Dennis webpage](#) and FAQ document.

Anonymous attendee asked "Will dennis teachers be teaching just Dennis kids? Or are you going to use us to fill empty vacancies at sdms to knock down the number of teacher vacancies in the district to make numbers look better" ... Was there any intention to use Dennis teachers to fill SDMS vacancies? Is there any intent to use Garfield teachers to fill SDMS Vacancies?

Building administrators will ensure each school's needs are met.