

Firm presents 7 scenarios to address Balto. Co. high school overcrowding; all include new Towson High



Baltimore County Public Schools "High School Capacity Study" by: Anirban Basu, Sage Policy Group Inc.



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Towson Times

JULY 13, 2018, 2:05 PM

During a Thursday night public information session in Towson, Baltimore consulting firm Sage Policy Group presented seven options to solving one problem: current and future overcrowding through 2027 in Baltimore County high schools.

About 100 people attended the meeting held at George Washington Carver Center for Arts and Technology during which Sage CEO Anirban Basu and his team presented the seven scenarios, each a different combination of utilizing redistricting, conversion to magnet schools and new construction, and costing within a range of \$275M and \$617M.

Baltimore County is predicted to have a 1,700-seat shortfall in the next decade, according to Sage. With no intervention, Towson High School will be the most overcrowded – the building intended for 1,260 students will have 749 more students than seats by 2027. All seven scenarios include building a new Towson High School.

Four scenarios proposed building a new Loch Raven High; two suggest building a new Lansdowne High; one, a new Sparrows Point High; and one, a new Dulaney High School.

Some scenarios would make use of existing seats, moving students in overcrowded schools to those that are under-capacity. Other scenarios involve moving and expanding magnet programs to redirect magnet students to schools with more space. One scenario proposes building additions at all overcrowded schools. Each involves some combination of redistricting, construction and magnet school shifts.

Towson High sits on only 27.6 acres – by contrast, Dulaney High sits on nearly 43. That means there is not enough land to build a new school adjacent to the old one while the old one is still in use, like the Carver Center did when the new school opened in 2012.

Staci Lanham, of Idlewylde, said she has concerns about how that would work practically.

“Towson has the smallest footprint in the county,” Lanham said. “I’m not sure how to build a new school, increase capacity and maintain it for kids for that duration.”

Basu said the scenarios’ cost estimates take Towson’s situation into account: In calculations, Sage used the higher cost of constructing a new school in pieces, while students were in classrooms inside other parts of it.

Lanham said Towson parents are concerned about building such a large school: to accommodate all 749 students, Towson High would have to be built to hold more than 2,000. A 2,000-student Towson High School is featured in every scenario but one. In that scenario, Towson-area students would be redistricted to other schools.

Lanham said though none of the proposals were the “right fit” for Towson, the “Toward ‘Optimal’ School Size” scenario was better than the rest given her capacity concerns. In that scenario, Towson High would hold 1,700 students – but some students would be redistricted, which can be controversial, she said.

Basu told the audience that the information session was intended to show the public a series of hard choices and find out “what they view to be least objectionable.”

Other attendees pointed out what they saw as a fatal flaw in the research: it did not take the condition of aging facilities into account. Parents said that without that consideration, any plan risks spending money to put students in seats in buildings that will not be adequate in 10 years.

“Dulaney [High School] is falling apart,” Jennifer Hano, of Timonium, said while looking at a chart of one of

the proposals. “They printed that damn thing up and it’s not going to work.”

Burst pipes, brown water, cracked tiles and a lack of air conditioning are just some of the problems facing Dulaney High School. Parents have pushed for a new school.

But because Dulaney is not expected to be overcrowded, only one Sage scenario involves a new Dulaney High. At \$617 million, it is the most expensive proposal on the list.

“It feels as if the study only addresses short-term needs ... not conditions,” said Julie Henn, who represents Towson on the Board of Education. “I think that’s short-sighted.”

Community members can attend one last public information session at Dundalk High School at 7 p.m. July 17. They can also read in detail about all the scenarios on the school system’s [website](#) and fill out an [online survey](#) until July 22.

After that, Basu said the scenarios will be tweaked according to public input and presented again to the community in September for more public input. Sage will present a final report to the Board of Education in November.

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