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The Evolution of a Charter School

This is the Frequently Asked Questions handout distributed by the school district in 1994 regarding the proposed Promega Partnership.

Madison Middle School 2000

Questions & Answers Regarding the Proposed Promega Partnership

1. What is Madison Middle School 2000?

Middle School 2000 is an experimental school featuring state-of-the-art technology, multicultural curriculum and instruction that integrates all academic subjects within a common theme. It was established by the Board of Education to serve the West High School attendance area and reduce overcrowding at Cherokee and Hamilton middle schools. It opened in August 1993 with 80 6th grade students. The anticipated enrollment by 1995 is 240 students. Middle School 2000 is temporarily located at the former Hoyt Elementary School until a permanent location on the south side of Madison can be found. After evaluating more than 40 potential sites, Superintendent Wilhoyte recommended in late August that a permanent home for the school be located in the Fitchburg Center research campus and be developed in partnership with [Promega Corporation](#) and the [BioPharmaceutical Technology center Institute](#) (BTCI).

2. Is Middle School 2000 the same as the south side middle school that has been discussed for years?

In 1991, the Board unanimously approved a resolution that guides the administration in developing a south side middle school. The Board specified that the school should be located on the south side in the Franklin, Leopold or Lincoln elementary attendance areas. The resolution stated that the school should have experimental status and that students should be allowed to choose to attend. In other words, the Board did not intend the school to be a neighborhood school for

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the south side.

3. Do we really need another middle school?

Without middle School 2000, the west area middle schools would be at 106% of capacity and are projected to be at 108% of capacity by 1996-97. The optimum enrollment for a middle school is between 90% and 93% of capacity in order to enable them to accommodate periodic fluctuations in enrollment or program changes. The overcrowding in West area middle schools was one of the Board's primary considerations in voting to establish a third middle school in the area.

4. Why is the City of Fitchburg being considered as a site for a Madison school?

The educational opportunities that the Promega partnership would offer students-- especially South Madison students -- simply cannot be replicated anywhere else. This pioneering educational venture would give students a chance to learn in a real world setting, give them access to the laboratories and resources of an internationally known biotechnology firm, and allow them to interact with researchers and lab technicians. Both Promega and BTCI have expressed a keen interest in program coordination with Middle School 2000. Because of the school's emphasis on technology, this is a natural partnership. And because Middle School 2000 employs a curriculum that is designed to make learning the basics more captivating by integrating core subjects into themes students help develop, the site's physical environment -- with everything from woods to wetlands -- and cutting edge facilities are ideally suited to the kind of academic exploration the school promotes.

5. Is this site located in the Madison school district?

Yes. The Fitchburg Center, which houses Promega and three other biotechnology firms as well as the BTCI educational institute and the Woods Hollow Children's Center, is located off Fish Hatchery Road and is in the Leopold attendance area. The Madison school district is comprised of all or part of the cities of Madison, Fitchburg and Monona, the villages of Maple Bluff and Shorewood Hills, and the towns of Blooming Grove, Burke, Madison, Middleton and Westport.

6. What other sites were under consideration?

Since 1991, an exhaustive search of Madison's south side has been conducted to find a permanent location for the school. To date, 48 sites have been explored. Of those, the vast majority were eliminated from consideration because of unavailability, environmental concerns or lack of suitability for construction of a middle school. The only sites that were considered in the final selection and are currently available to the district are Longfellow, Lincoln, Leopold and the Promega partnership. The state recommends a minimum of 20 acres for a middle school site. The Longfellow site is only 1.7 acres. Lincoln is 8.5 acres and Leopold is about 15 acres, but both sites currently are also home to elementary schools. Adding a middle school to those sites would not only raise space concerns, but also is less than ideal from an educational standpoint.

7. Will South Madison children continue to have access to Middle School 2000 if it is located in the Fitchburg Center?

Middle School 2000 is designed to serve the West High School attendance area and its student population is balanced by race, gender and socioeconomic status to reflect the diversity in the West area. Minority students are guaranteed 40% of the seats and currently the student population is comprised of 50% minority students 50%non-minority students. The commitment to serving a racially and socioeconomically diverse student population was established by the Board and will be upheld regardless of the school's location.

8. How far is the Fitchburg site from South Madison? What about transportation?

The proposed site is just over 2 miles south of Badger Road off Fish Hatchery Road. By comparison, the temporary location at Hoyt is more than 6 miles from the intersection of Badger Road and Fish Hatchery. Other middle schools that currently serve South Madison students include Cherokee, Hamilton and Jefferson. Cherokee is 4 miles from South Madison, Hamilton is more than 5 miles, and Jefferson is nearly 8 miles from the south side. Of the eight West area elementary schools that can feed into Middle School 2000, the proposed site in the Fitchburg Center is closest to Leopold and Lincoln.

At its current location at Hoyt, yellow buses are used to provide transportation to all students. At its permanent home, that will continue to be the case. Middle School 2000 also periodically holds parent-teacher conferences in locations such as the

South Madison Neighborhood Center or provides parents transportation to events and conferences at the school. This practice will also continue on the site.

9. What is the anticipated cost of building a new middle school? How will the project be founded?

The estimated cost of building a facility to accommodate 240 students is \$5-6 million. When the Board authorized creation of a third middle school for the West area, \$3.5 million was borrowed for construction and start-up costs. Of that amount, approximately \$800,000 has been used to support the development of Middle School 2000 at its temporary location, leaving approximately \$2.7 million. The remaining cost would be funded by using the \$2.7 million in anticipated surplus funds from the 1993-94 operating budget. To expand the facility's capacity beyond 240 students would require the community to approve additional borrowing in a referendum. For example, the estimated additional cost of building a facility for 400 students would be about \$5 million.

10. Is Madison Middle School 2000 a charter school? What does that mean?

The Board of Education has approved charter status for Middle School 2000. Under the state's charter school law, a school essentially enters into a renewable contract with the school board. The school is exempted from many of the state regulations governing districts. This gives the school real freedom to change. However, because the school is chartered for a limited term, it is held accountable for results. Renewal of the contract depends on student achievement. Charter schools are accountable in a second way. A charter school is a school of choice. Students are there only if they want to be there. Making Middle School 2000 a charter school was based on the district's interest in freeing the school from the input-oriented state mandates dictating course content and classroom hours. Middle school 2000's educational philosophy is based on the idea that all students can learn, although not in the same way or by the same day. Being free of content and time restrictions will allow the school to fully implement its innovative integrated thematic approach to instruction.

11. What role will Promega's staff play in the school? Will they teach?

Students at Middle School 2000 will continue to be taught by professional teachers employed by the district. The partnership would give students access to the

facilities and resources at Promega and BTCI. Students will be on the campus with research and development scientists, and all of the employees running a manufacturing business. Employees of Promega and BTCI could act as mentors for student, helping the Middle School 2000 staff to bring instruction to life by giving students a glimpse into the real world of work in a high-tech environment. The campus offers students opportunities to work side by side with researchers, discuss projects over lunch, shadow apprentices in biotechnology, participate in Saturday seminars with visiting lecturers, work with teachers who can receive training through BTCI, and utilize the campus setting of woodlands, meadows and wetlands for experiments in earthkeeping. Students also will share the campus with over 150 infants, toddlers and after-school students at the woods Hollow Children's Center, a subsidized child care setting.

12. What if a student doesn't want to become a scientist? Or just isn't ready for career choices yet? Will students at Middle School 2000 learn the basics?

One of the great myths about specialty schools is that they focus on preparing students for life in the area of the specialty focus, and that they neglect to teach the basics. To the contrary, the goal of a specialty school like Middle School 2000 is to improve achievement in the core subject areas by bringing to life material that students otherwise often find dry and boring. Specialty schools are designed to teach the basics better than other schools by capturing students' interest and accommodating different learning styles.

13. Why does the Board of Education need to make a decision on the permanent location of Middle School 2000 so quickly?

Middle School 2000 is temporarily housed at the former Hoyt Elementary School. Because of overcrowding in the West Area's elementary schools, the West Area study Committee recommended that a ninth elementary school be opened at Hoyt. The need for additional elementary school space can only be met if a permanent location is found for Middle School 2000. In order to be able to have Middle School 2000's new home open by the beginning of school in 1995, the district needs to move forward on planning and construction in September, 1994.

Several meetings were held to discuss the proposed Promega partnership.

Public Hearing

5 p.m. Monday, September 12
McDaniels Auditorium, Doyle Administration Building
545 W. Dayton Street

Area Meetings
(Information/Dialogue)

7-9 p.m. Tuesday, September 13
Leopold Elementary School Gymnasium
2602 Post Road

4-6 p.m. Wednesday, September 14
Lincoln Elementary School Gymnasium
909 Sequoia Trail

7:30-9:39 p.m. Thursday, September 15
Hoyt School Gymnasium
3802 Regent Street



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