

Bedford Schools' future shouldn't rest in new buildings, but in technology

Bedford Public Schools' request for \$70 million does not add up. Yes, officials can take a lot of pictures of faults with the existing buildings and make them appear to be fatal, but isolated pictures do not tell the entire story and primarily are used as a marketing tool to justify demolition.

Today, I am addressing just the elementary schools, but the same logic can be used in other buildings.

One item in both Jackman and Douglas Road elementary schools was lack of fire protection (sprinklers). Installing fire protection reduces the fire ratings across the board for walls and door and building separations. There was a line item to improve the fire ratings on walls and doors, however, with fire protection, I believe the cost would be offset. That was one item of many that could be questioned

in the renovation that does nothing but raise the cost of renovation to justify demolition.

Let's assume as reported that the cost to bring up both Jackman and Douglas Road schools to meet today's and future needs is \$10 million dollars each, or \$20 million total. That is two neighborhood elementary schools versus one new \$20 million school. Plus the proposed design of the new school, similar to Monroe Road Elementary School, is not creative and does not address the problems inherent in school design today and into the future.

There is a theory that when you rely on educators or nursing home managers, for example, to set the tone in new design, you end up with old designs in new paint. There is a false comfort in thinking that a new school improves education; it

does not. Even though there is an initial wow factor in new buildings, that excitement dissipates quickly.

So what does renovating the two schools allow Bedford to do? This opens the door to sell Smith Road Elementary School possibly to the current occupant, Spring Arbor University. Sell Temperance Road Elementary School and its property to developers and let the developer decide the use of the building.

When it comes to educating our children, keep this in mind: Give a 3-year-old an iPad or a smart phone, and you will see immediately how they learn to manipulate games to educational programs. Technology, not buildings, will dictate the direction of education, and the future is here.

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