

Recommended Rock Terrace School/Tilden Middle School Collocation Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the purpose of collocating a special education school with a general education school?

Collocating a special education school with a general education school provides opportunities for special education students to interact with their nondisabled peers in all aspects of school life, including academic, social, and extracurricular activities to the maximum extent possible or as part of the provisions of a free appropriate public education. This is a goal of the Montgomery County Board of Education and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), as well as federal education requirements. When a special education school is colocated with a general education school, separate learning spaces such as classrooms, laboratories, and hallways are designed to meet the needs of all learners. Spaces such as the instructional media center, auxiliary gymnasium, stage, and outdoor play areas may be shared when appropriate to meet the needs of the students. The schools will have separate hallways.

2. Why should Rock Terrace School be colocated?

Rock Terrace School is a stand-alone special education school in MCPS, and the facility is in poor condition and in need of facility improvements. The school was ranked in the worst facility condition in the 2010–2011 school year, as part of the Facilities Assessment with Criteria and Testing (FACT) process. The students who attend Rock Terrace School do not have the opportunity to interact with their nondisabled peers at this school because it only serves students with disabilities. Collocation is a best practice that helps to achieve the goal for disabled students to interact with nondisabled peers when appropriate. MSDE indicated that MCPS may not be eligible to receive state funding to improve stand-alone special education centers because the students do not have inclusion opportunities in the centers. Therefore, collocation allows MCPS to receive state funding to make the necessary facility improvements.

3. Why was Tilden Middle School selected for the collocation? Were other schools considered?

Because Rock Terrace School serves students countywide, a central location in the county was needed to minimize transportation times and travel distances for the Rock Terrace School students. A thorough review of other upcoming capital projects in the county was completed. Tilden Middle School was selected for the collocation because of the ideal location, site size, and access to accommodate both schools. The Walter Johnson cluster also has a strong history of serving and supporting special education students, including active Best Buddies programs at Tilden Middle School and Walter Johnson High School. Staff members, students, and families at these two schools serve as models for inclusionary practices and providing a welcoming environment for all students.

4. Which students does Rock Terrace School serve?

Rock Terrace School serves middle, high, and upper school students, ages 12-21, who have significant cognitive disabilities. These students have similar disabilities to students in the Learning for Independence programs (LFI), which are located at Tilden MS and Walter Johnson HS. Students are assigned to Rock Terrace School rather than an LFI program at a

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general education school because the student may have greater sensory needs and may have a difficult time navigating a large-school environment. Students with significant emotional disabilities typically are assigned to other special education service models. The Rock Terrace School program focuses on academic and school-to-work programs to prepare students to thrive in college, careers, and the community, similar to the LFI programs at general education schools.

5. Are there safety concerns with middle school students interacting with high school and upper school students?

As mentioned above, Rock Terrace School serves students ages 12 through 21, the same age group as proposed for the collocation. Currently, middle, high, and upper schools maintain separate instructional areas at Rock Terrace School. Staffing is aligned with the needs of the students and provides the ability for close supervision of students as required.

Recognizing the programmatic needs and the age span of the students at Rock Terrace School, opportunities for inclusion at Tilden Middle School only will be considered for individual middle school students when deemed appropriate. Every decision will be made on an individual student basis. These opportunities may include participation in the content subject areas, arts rotation classes, and extracurricular activities. Decisions regarding inclusive opportunities will be made by an IEP team consisting of members from Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School and parents/guardians.

For the high school students at Rock Terrace School, inclusive opportunities will be considered for individual students at Walter Johnson High School. Decisions regarding inclusive opportunities will be made by an IEP team consisting of members from Rock Terrace School and Walter Johnson High School and parents/guardians. Currently, it is difficult to provide inclusive opportunities to the Rock Terrace School students because the closest high school, Richard Montgomery High School, does not have a comparable special education program to support the needs of the Rock Terrace School students. Walter Johnson High School, which serves LFI students, will be better situated to provide inclusive opportunities to Rock Terrace School students because the students have similar cognitive disabilities.

Upper school students (ages 18-21) spend the majority of their day outside of Rock Terrace School. These students have one academic class at the school in the morning and then go to a community job site with a job coach for the middle part of the day and lunch. They return for one additional academic class and an elective at the end of the day. The upper school students may share an elective with the Rock Terrace School high school students but do not share electives with the Rock Terrace School middle school students. Structured interaction occurs with grade-alike students.

6. Why weren't elementary school parents/staff and community members included in the Roundtable process?

The composition of the Roundtable was consistent with MCPS Regulation FAA-RA, *Long-range Educational Facilities Planning*. Staff and parent representatives were selected from

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the two schools that were the subject of the Roundtable. These parents were identified because of their understanding of the programs and organization of Tilden Middle School and Rock Terrace School. One of the representatives that served on the Roundtable lives in the community that surrounds the Tilden Holding Center and currently has children who attend Luxmanor Elementary School and Tilden Middle School. The composition of the group represented the needs and interests of both schools. Including staff from Tilden Middle School was of particular importance because the special education service model successfully includes and integrates the Learning for Independence and autism services students.

7. Why didn't the Roundtable process allow input from community members?

Consistent with MCPS Regulation FAA-RA, *Long-range Educational Facilities Planning*, all the Roundtable meetings were open to the public and observers were given an opportunity to ask questions at the end of each meeting. At the beginning of the process, a public information meeting was held. At this meeting, staff presented the Roundtable charge and process and answered questions from the attendees. At the conclusion of the Roundtable meetings, a second public information meeting was held where staff members presented the process, criteria used, site concepts, and answered questions. At the second public information meeting, the attendees also provided input through a feedback form, which was summarized by staff. This input was considered by the interim superintendent before making his recommendation.

8. Why weren't other options considered for collocation?

Collocation of a special education school with a general education school has been identified as the best practice to meet the goal of providing inclusion opportunities for students who currently attend stand-alone special education schools. Based on the upcoming capital projects, the Tilden Holding Center site has the size and access to accommodate the two programs. Because MCPS currently does not have a high school holding school, the current Tilden Middle School, which is located on the former Woodward High School site, will provide MCPS with a secondary holding school to allow future middle and/or high schools to relocate to when there is a large capital project such as a revitalization/expansion.

9. Why weren't the traffic impacts considered during the Roundtable?

The traffic impacts raised by the community, such as the width of the roads, the number of buses and cars, and pedestrian safety, are challenges faced in all MCPS school construction projects. During the Roundtable process, the architects were given the program requirements for both schools, including parking and bus requirements. The site concepts that were developed show that the site can accommodate an appropriate amount of parking and buses. As is customary for all school construction projects, these issues will be a part of the feasibility study, along with a traffic impact analysis. Outcomes from the traffic impact analysis will generate a plan to mitigate the concerns raised by the community, including circulation patterns and access points of both schools to ensure safe access for buses, cars, and pedestrians.

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10. How many buses will be needed to accommodate the Tilden Middle School and Rock Terrace School students?

Based on current enrollment, approximately 32 buses would be needed to transport the Tilden Middle School and Rock Terrace School students. When the current Tilden Lane facility was used as a holding school, 30 buses were used to transport the Herbert Hoover Middle School students and 29 buses were used to transport the Cabin John Middle School students. Therefore, if Tilden Middle School and Rock Terrace School are collocated, the impact on transportation will be similar to when the site was used as a holding school. During the feasibility study and design, the site will be designed to accommodate the number of buses projected for the two schools.

11. Why wasn't the impact of collocating the two schools on the character of the neighborhood taken into account during the Roundtable?

The school system understands that there will be some loss of green space if the two schools are collocated. During the Roundtable process, the architects were given the site requirements for outdoor physical education areas for both schools. The site concepts developed during the process show that the requirements for both schools can be accommodated on the site. Both Tilden Middle School and Rock Terrace School will have the necessary outdoor physical education areas.

Program requirements for our school projects have grown significantly and require larger buildings with additional floors. Almost all new school buildings are designed with a minimum of three stories to accommodate program requirements. By minimizing the building footprint with additional floor levels, green space on the site can be maximized. As is standard procedure with all school construction projects, the architects will work with the community to design an attractive facility that responds to the current architecture of the neighborhood.

12. Will the current infrastructure be able to accommodate two schools?

As is standard procedure during all feasibility studies, the design team will evaluate all existing utilities on the site including electricity, water, and natural gas, and provide necessary solutions to upgrade the utilities to support both schools.

13. Why is fencing needed on the site?

As new schools are built or existing schools are rebuilt, the need for fencing is included as a part of the comprehensive design process for all secondary schools. It is standard practice to fence particular areas, including those used for physical education and outdoor activities such as the tennis courts. Those same design principles would be applied in this proposed collocation. The proposal is consistent with the fencing that currently is in place at Rock Terrace School and the current Tilden Middle School site located on Old Georgetown Road. Based on input from the Roundtable participants, no perimeter fencing would be required for the site. In addition, no fencing would be required solely to separate Rock Terrace School students from Tilden Middle School students.