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In the Fall 2007 Issue of *The Salem Magazine*, I outlined the findings of the Comprehensive Facility Study completed at the direction of the School Board. Two of our six schools, G.W. Carver (1997) and Andrew Lewis (2005) have been fully renovated in the last ten years. The other four schools (Salem High School, East, South, and West Salem Elementary Schools) are in good repair but lack needed instructional space and feature heating, cooling, lighting, and electrical systems that have exceeded the expected service life and are inefficient by today's standards.

When discussing school facilities, I am occasionally asked the following very good question, "How is there a need for more classrooms when student enrollment in Salem is relatively stable?" There are a number of converging factors that create a need for more instructional space. Technology and the education of students with special needs impact all schools. Computer labs have displaced what used to be regular classrooms at all levels. The appropriate education of students with special needs is profoundly important and is also time, staff, and space intensive...requiring instructional spaces at all levels that historically were traditional classrooms.

Other factors are specific to elementary, middle, and secondary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

### **Elementary Level**

Over the last few decades, there have been federal and state initiatives to reduce class size. Prior to these reforms, an elementary school with 460 students and 27-28 students per homerooms would require 16-17 traditional classrooms. That same school with a class size of 22 students per class requires 4-5 additional classrooms and teachers.

Even as class size reduction efforts required additional classrooms, traditional classrooms have been needed for purposes not conceived of in the middle of the last century, such as computer labs and spaces for students with special needs. In Salem, each of our four elementary schools houses a specialty program for students with special needs:

- East Salem – Pre-school Program for Students with Disabilities
- G.W. Carver – Students with Emotional Disabilities
- South Salem – Students with Developmental Delays (including Autism Spectrum Disorders)
- West Salem – Students with Intellectual Disabilities

By locating a specialty area at each elementary school, every employee in each of those buildings has the opportunity to receive specialized training to meet the needs of the students served. Because these students have extensive access to the regular curriculum and participate in regular classroom instruction, it is important that every classroom teacher, the special area teachers (art, music, library, health/physical education), the custodial staff, the cafeteria staff, the nurse, counselor, and the

administrators all possess the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the students.

At South Salem, for example, two classrooms are used for the instruction and support of students with learning disabilities and two classrooms are devoted to support for students with developmental delays (including autism spectrum disorders). A fifth classroom is dedicated to serving as the computer lab for all students.

These space demands have resulted in difficult choices. This year (2007-2008), there is not a dedicated Art room at South Salem. Instead, students receive “art on a cart” where the art teacher takes as many materials as possible into the regular classrooms for art instruction. We have outstanding teachers and cooperative students who are making this work, but it is unreasonable to assume that the art program at South Salem will be equivalent to the programs at the other three schools. Either an addition to the building or a modular classroom unit will be needed at South Salem in the near future.

### **Middle Level**

At the middle school level, converging forces of class size reduction, the increase in credit-bearing, high-school-level courses (such as foreign languages), a much needed emphasis on Career Exploration, and the previously mentioned increase in the number of computer labs took over a considerable number of traditional classrooms. The recent renovation of ALMS was built around an Instructional Plan designed to provide the space and support for technology (electricity and network infrastructure) necessary for the next 30 years. Approximately 950 of Salem’s children benefit from that investment every school day, and it will serve many future generations!

### **Secondary Level**

At the high school level, credits required for graduation have increased dramatically in recent years. In the early years of Salem High School (the “new” high school that opened in 1976), a student had to receive permission from the principal to take a full schedule of classes. During that era, most students had at least one study hall where large numbers of students could be supervised by just one teacher.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, students are encouraged to take as many rigorous courses as possible to prepare them (and our nation) for a globally competitive workplace. Nationally, credits earned increased from 21.7 per student to 25.8 between 1982 and 2004. Students in the Salem High School Class of 2007 earned an average of 28.5 credits with two-thirds earning an Advanced Studies Diploma. Many Salem graduates earn well over 30 credits because college admissions offices are looking for more math, science, and foreign language coursework than is required even by the Advanced Studies diploma.

The net result is that as more students complete more courses that more teachers and classrooms are required.

Since establishing its independent school division in 1983, Salem has consistently provided the resources necessary to provide its children with an excellent education. In

return, Salem City Schools and our students have earned a reputation for excellence that has helped establish Salem as a city where children truly come first. Indeed, our city's fine reputation attracts other families with similar values who help sustain our tradition and quality of life.