

Here Are Ten Reasons to Vote NO on Article 2.

Amherst's schools *will* be updated. This vote says NO to the former superintendent's unpopular vision, but NOT to upgrading our schools. Voting NO on this flawed plan affords us the opportunity to advance a better plan for our children, with strong public, teacher, and parent support.

There is no crisis. Our schools, with their open plan, have been operational and regarded as top ranked for over 35 years. We can afford to wait for what's best for our children and community.

- 1. Fewer than 50% of Amherst Voters Supported This Plan.** Only 45% of voters voted FOR this plan. 44% voted AGAINST it, and another 10% abstained -- and that's not even considering the student vote. This vote demonstrates deep division on a radical proposal that to restructure our schools & assume a heavy debtload.
- 2. Not Educationally Sound.** Research supports K-6 education and small schools as best for kids. Even many supporters of this plan admit they prefer K6. Transition between 1st & 2nd grade splits early childhood educators & young siblings. Larger grade cohorts increase difficulties for teacher collaboration, for discipline, & for learning. **When asked, only 4% of teachers & only 6% of parents chose this plan;** an overwhelming majority preferred to keep K-6 schools.
- 3. Hurts Vulnerable Families & Kids.** Kids suffer in larger environments & from additional transitions. Families without cars will be greatly burdened by having young siblings split up & sent to opposite ends of town.
- 4. Bad for the Environment.** Renovation is greener than new construction, but Article 2 demolishes two buildings, builds another, paves Wildwood, & requires roadwork at Strong / E. Pleasant. Energy upgrades can happen with any renovation or new construction, but Article 2's consolidated grades significantly increase fuel use & emissions by adding 4 new bus routes, and busing many more kids, many more miles, every day.
- 5. Too Much Money for a Bad Plan.** This \$67 million building is the most expensive elementary in the state. It has higher per pupil & per square foot costs than similar projects. It would be the largest debt exclusion ever borne by Amherst-- \$33 million for the building, \$55 million w/ interest-- for a controversial consolidation.
- 6. Less Playspace for More Kids.** Our kids currently enjoy large open grassy spaces on which to play at our three elementary schools, especially at Fort River. Article 2 nearly doubles the kids and pavement at Wildwood, while halving open play space. The only open playfield that could even accommodate a small soccer pitch would be timeshared with the middle school, located down a steep hill that drops 20 feet over a 40 foot slope.
- 7. Traffic and air pollution.** Article 2 ships all 1000+ kids through downtown, adding traffic and pollution. It adds bus routes & sets up a double-layered bus loop at Wildwood for 23 buses, about the same number that Boston's South Station's Bus Terminal accommodates.
- 8. Bigger grades, fewer teachers.** Enough said.
- 9. Flawed Procedure, Flawed Plan.** The Administration hand-picked insiders for the School Building Committee -- 18 of 21 members were current or former employees or School Committee-- & rejected other volunteers. Their closed process excluded the very community it should have brought in, as evidenced by the town's shock when the plan was announced. The former Superintendent pushed this plan, & her team gave short shrift to parent & teacher suggestions, e.g., renovation & dual K6. They chose an architectural firm that specializes in hotels & casinos, had no experience renovating open classroom schools, & put in the highest bids for renovation.
- 10. There Are Better Options.** For instance, the dual K6 school would be better (& cheaper) than the consolidated grades, solving the building problems of both Wildwood and Fort River and not creating the logistical problems of grade consolidation. Or consider renovation: Many school districts have renovated their open plan schools for \$15 - \$20 million, using architects experienced with renovation.

Still not convinced? Here Are Six Reasons NOT to Vote for Consolidation.

The “yes” side has advanced a number of arguments for the plan. We’re not persuaded.

1. **Open floorplans.** Open floorplans are not a crisis. We had them when Amherst schools were tops in the state. Do we want to update them? Yes. But there are lots of different ways to resolve them -- including cost-effective renovations.
2. **Air quality.** Wildwood’s air quality tests show no problems. Fort River’s air quality hasn’t been comprehensively tested--despite our requests--in ten years. But most importantly, **there are other, faster, better ways to deal with air quality concerns.** A plan that gets these kids to a new school for kids in three to four years is not a way to deal with air quality concerns now. The State has funding available for expedited renovations, and prioritizes health issues. **The only responsible thing to do is to TEST NOW AND TREAT NOW.**
3. **Equity.** Equity considerations actually run against this plan, according both to educational research and to local research on apartment complexes and transportation.
4. **“Two schools”?** The single building will have two names, two principals, and two hallways. It will also have 750 kids, 1 entrance plaza, 1 bus loop, 1 parent car loop, 1 combined sixth grade, 1 cafeteria, 1 gym/auditorium, 1 library, and 1 nurse’s facility. Co-located schools are another new, untested trend, like open classrooms, that even now have a poor track record in terms of actual operational efficiency and typically are more distinct physically than this plan.
5. **Pre-School.** We love preschool! But we don’t need this plan to do it and it is not part of what this upcoming vote provides. The funding for more preschool in this plan is contingent on operational savings that may or may not be realized and in any case have already been over-committed to multiple initiatives. Instead, we can expand the number of preschool slots in a location that makes much more sense to the town, such as at a site in the north of town. We also need to provide more full day preschool for the large number of working families who need it. This is also *not* a part of this plan.
6. **State funding.** No, we won’t “lose the money”. The MSBA has never rejected a community coming back after a failed vote.

There is a way forward if we vote no.

All the consultant work and site evaluations have already been done in the current feasibility study and do not need to be repeated. We know the two alternatives that are most likely to succeed (dual renovation or a PreK-6 school in the north) and the questions we need answered to decide between them. Our community obviously *wants* to engage on this issue.

Let’s bring the town together in support of our schools rather than tearing it apart with a controversial plan that is deeply unpopular before ground is even broken.

**Amherst has amazing schools. We should fix what’s broken and keep what’s working.
That’s the sustainable approach to town finances and to education.**