

# SOUTH WINDSOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

**Dr. Kate M. Carter**  
Superintendent of Schools  
(860) 291-1205

**Daniel S. Hansen**  
Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
Curriculum and Instruction  
(860) 291-1210

**Richard A. Cormier**  
Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
Personnel and Administration  
(860) 291-1215

**Chris M. Chemerka**  
Director of Finance and Operations  
(860) 291-1260

---

EDUCATE ALL CHILDREN TO THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL

---

December 13, 2013

A message to the Wapping Community:

In addition to the enclosed parent letter that was sent to all K-5 families, I am sending this special communication to Wapping families. While the elementary facilities master plan will bring about change for all of our learning communities, the closure of Wapping School in 2017 presents a unique dynamic. I hope this separate communication will assist in your understanding of the rationale for this element of the plan.

## **Historical Overview**

As you may be aware, Wapping Elementary School has been closed in the past and in recent years there has been mounting pressure to close Wapping School again. In fact, in 2010 I composed a memo to the Board of Education in response to the growing pressure from some town leaders to close Wapping School. I recommended that the Board of Education postpone discussions related to the closure of Wapping School until such time that the closure of this school became part of a comprehensive elementary facilities plan.

In an effort to illustrate my long-standing commitment to a thoughtful redistricting process, I am including an excerpt from a letter I sent to Wapping families in October 2010 in response to the conversations that were occurring in the community regarding the anticipated closing of Wapping School.

Excerpt from Superintendent's October 14, 2010 letter to Wapping families:

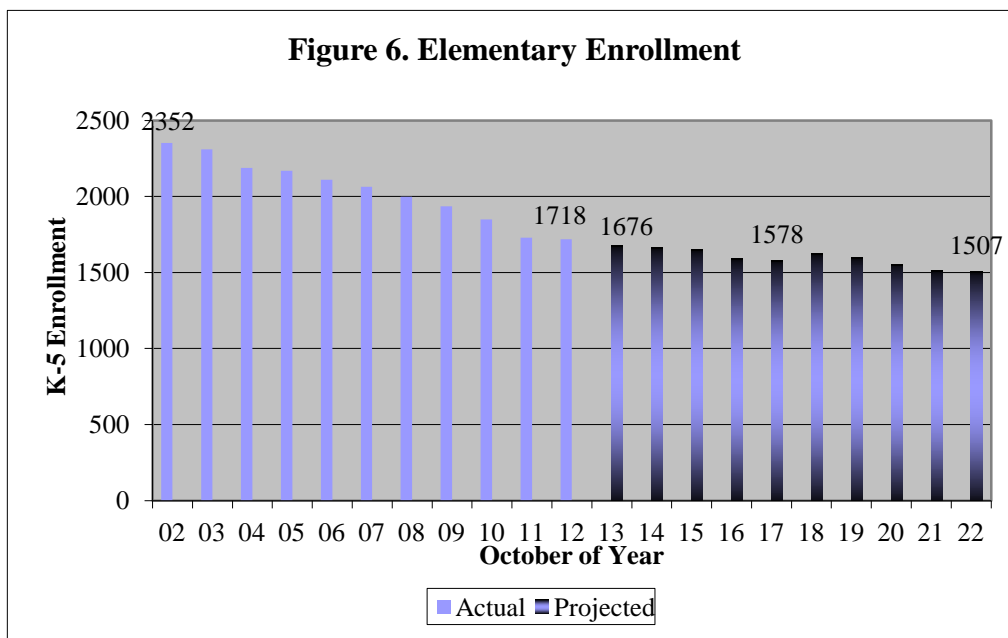
*In prior professional roles I have been part of two new school construction projects. I have also been a part of a district wide elementary school redistricting plan. These prior experiences inform my thinking and shape my perspective. I know closing a school and the impact of redistricting are emotional experiences for students, parents and staff. At a recent parent focus group held at Wapping School, I heard the distress in parents' voices as they shared that the uncertainty of Wapping's status was a source of anxiety for families and staff. While we cannot ignore the economic benefits of the eventual shift from five to four elementary schools, we must be sensitive to the impact this decision will have on all of our stakeholders. Saying goodbye to a part of our community's history is not easy, but if it must be done, it must be done thoughtfully and with sensitivity.*

I share this excerpt with you to provide a historical context for the Board's recent decision to adopt a ten-year facilities plan that includes the closure of Wapping School. I have learned that some Wapping families who are new to town may be unaware that the conversation regarding closing Wapping School (for a second time) has been around for years and is in response to declining enrollment.

## Declining Enrollment

Our current enrollment projections indicate that our student population can be sustained through the operation of four elementary schools. The enrollment projections were forecasted by statistician Dr. Peter Prowda. Dr. Prowda is retired from the State Department of Education and is now a private consultant who has conducted enrollment projections for South Windsor in the past and his services are utilized widely across the state. Enrollment projections are among the many state requirements of the school construction process.

The following graph is taken from Dr. Prowda's May 2013 report. As you will see below, the projection illustrates a twenty-year decline in enrollment significant enough to warrant the closing of a school. Specifically, the overall K-5 enrollment shows a district-wide decrease of 634 students from 2002-2012 and projects an additional decrease of 211 students by the year 2022; resulting in 845 fewer K-5 students over a twenty-year period.



## Rationale for Selecting Wapping School

As previously stated, Wapping School has long-been discussed as the school that would close in the event that the district is able to operate with one fewer elementary school. The rationale is based on its central location, its proximity to the Community Center, and its value to the town in relation to other community needs.

Its central location allows for the most reasonable redistricting plan as Wapping School is the only elementary school that borders all four of the other elementary school districts. This will allow for the shortest possible bus routes for students redistricted to surrounding schools. Ensuring appropriate bus route lengths is clearly in the best interest of our students.

Wapping School's proximity to the Community Center also makes it a logical choice. Seniors who participate in programs at the Community Center have expressed a need for additional space. The Human Services Department shares space with the Parks and Recreation Department at this facility. Parks and Recreation representatives have also identified a need for additional space. Turning Wapping Elementary School over to the town creates the conditions for the potential relocation of the Parks and Recreation Department to the Wapping school building. The town manager has cited the benefits of this plan at a variety of public meetings, noting the savings delivered to the town if it were to re-purpose Wapping School as a recreation center and simultaneously provide more dedicated space for seniors at the Community Center.

It should be noted that it is the Town Council, not the Board of Education, which will decide the future use of Wapping School. I do, however, find solace in the possibility that Wapping School may continue to serve the children of South Windsor in a different capacity.

### **Ensuring a Smooth Transition for Students and Staff**

While the redistricting of Wapping School is more than three years away, I want to assure parents that proactive efforts will be made to ensure a smooth transition for students and staff. The decision to close a school is one that deserves serious attention and thoughtful consideration. Please know that I am committed to a process that honors Wapping School's history and places the needs of our students first. Students moving to new schools will be accompanied by familiar staff members from Wapping School. Class placement decisions will consider purposeful grouping of Wapping students as they transition to a new school. Opportunities for students to visit their new schools will take place well in advance of the first day of school. There are many initiatives we will undertake to ensure that we meet the needs of our students. I have met with Wapping staff and they will be an invaluable resource to the children and families during this transition. My prior experience with redistricting tells me that children are very resilient and the redistricting process tends to be more difficult for the adults. To that end, we will identify ways to support the adults as well. It is comforting for children to see their parents embrace change as they prepare for the transition to a new school.

I hope the information in this letter is helpful to you and assists in your understanding of the overall plan. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions. I plan to offer multiple opportunities in the coming months for parent meetings that will allow for meaningful dialogue and personal communication. Of course, more detailed information will be disseminated in future years as we get closer to the closure of Wapping School in 2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "KATE CARTER". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

Kate Carter, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools