Proposed Elementary and Middle School Consolidation and Rezoning FAQs

Why is RCPS having to consider consolidation and rezoning?

Overwhelmingly, the challenge that the district is facing is the sharp and persistent decline in school-aged children living within our district boundaries. This decline is caused by a variety of factors, most prominent among them being decreasing birth rates and an aging population. At present, there are more than 5,000 open seats across the district.

It is important to note that the number of families opting students into homeschooling or private schools in our area is a smaller factor contributing to RCPS's declining enrollment than is the decline in the number of school-aged children in our area overall. If every child in our county attended their neighborhood school and no children attended private schools or homeschool, the district would still be facing the same enrollment challenges and would therefore still have to consider consolidation.

Declining enrollment means declining funding, since state funding allocation is affected by the number of students enrolled. About half of the budget for RCPS comes from the state. For more information on how schools are funded in Georgia, click here.

What are the criteria for evaluating potential school consolidations?

Options for consolidation must consider many factors including student impact from program continuity and potential new offerings, financial sustainability, facility utilization for balanced enrollment and equity of program offerings, operational feasibility for transportation and staffing, and long-term flexibility for future growth and repurpose value.

Who gets to make these decisions?

The Superintendent is charged with making a recommendation to the Board of Education and the Board of Education will decide whether the recommendation will be approved. It is anticipated that the Board of Education will consider the recommendation at its meeting on December 17, 2026.

Will there be parent/community information sessions?

Yes, here are the information opportunities:

- Monday, November 16, 2026 – Information Session at Rockdale Career Academy at 6:00 p.m.
- Monday, November 30, 2026 – Information Session at Pine Street Elementary at 6:30 p.m.
- Tuesday, December 1, 2026 – Information Session at J.H. House Elementary at 6:00 p.m.
- Thursday, December 10, 2026 – Required Public Hearing, Central Office Board Room at 5:00 p.m.
- Thursday, December 17, 2026 – Required Public Hearing, Central Office Board Room at 6:00 p.m.

What about E-SPLOST and taxes, are they not enough to keep all schools open?

RCPS is extremely grateful for the support our community provides when it authorizes the E-SPLOST one cent sales tax for education. These investments make a significant difference in the day-to-day lives of our students. Funding from E-SPLOST is specifically allocated for clearly defined purposes based on the ballot language. By law, these funds may only be used for capital projects or debt reduction.
Local tax dollars are used to supplement the state funding formula for schools which has tremendous gaps in providing enough funding to support the increasing costs to support students and staff. Local tax dollars now account for about half of the school system's budget due to lack of state funding.

How is equity being evaluated in any proposed change?

The district believes in ensuring that all students in all schools have access to robust programming and learning opportunities. As we continue strategic planning for the district, making sure that all students have this access will remain a priority and we will continue our work to define how best to quantify, subjectively evaluate, and act upon equity as a criterion.

What is RCPS administration and central office doing to decrease their costs?

RCPS's central office began reducing its staffing and operating budgets over the past two years, resulting in $2 million cost reductions in positions and budgets. The superintendent will re-evaluate the organization structure and make adjustments as needed while ensuring services can still be provided to students and staff.

What costs are actually eliminated when a school closes but the building stays in RCPS ownership?

For the same number of students, it costs much more to run two libraries, two main offices, two cafeterias, etc. as opposed to one of each. Since 88% of RCPS's budget is staffing, much of the cost reduction would come from reducing costs for administration, maintenance, custodial, support staff, nutrition services, transportation services, etc. as two schools become one.
Since smaller schools receive disproportionately higher per-pupil costs to meet minimum staffing requirements (including positions like the principal, nurses, counselors, media specialists, office staff, among others regardless of enrollment), consolidating captures more funding efficiency by spreading those costs over more students. RCPS already shares staffing between schools as much as possible, but there's a limit to how much this can be done while meeting educational requirements and ensuring educational efficacy.

What happens to school buildings when a school is consolidated? Can the empty buildings be used to help funding?

RCPS is in the process of exploring how its buildings might be used in the future. Some ideas that have been considered include leasing/renting the space, selling the property, potential affordable housing, program use, partner with non-profits and local government to provide community services such as recreation centers, among others. Whether such partnerships or alternate uses of facilities could result in revenue streams for the district remains to be seen.

How will this impact staff?

This may result in a reduction in force for some positions. Affected employees will have the opportunity to fill vacancies at remaining schools. Certified teachers in good standing will be given priority through a transfer process that will precede the normal annual transfer process. Other positions may be filled through attrition and/or by applying for vacant positions at other schools.

What might the impacts of consolidation and rezoning be on class size?

School consolidation and rezoning will not have a significant impact on class size. Staffing is currently calculated based on 20-22 students for PK-K, 23-25 students for grades 1-3, and 25-27 students for grades 4-8. Staffing will continue to use these same calculations, leaving class size consistent. The difference is how the buildings are being utilized with their capacity.
Please note: class sizes may differ slightly due to enrollment in individual grade levels and student interest in specialty classes (for example, not having enough to add another classroom).

Which courses or electives are most impacted when schools have low enrollment and how will this change if schools are consolidated?

As enrollment declines in schools, school budgets also contract, which means that staffing resources are typically reduced. Often, the courses that are most impacted are elective classes and specials classes like art, music, physical education, and specialty offerings. Each principal is responsible for determining the school's staffing plan and what courses can be offered each year. If schools are consolidated and their enrollments increase, efficiencies in staffing and operating budgets are created, which means that schools can offer more robust course offerings including electives as well as specials.

Are other districts having to have this same conversation, or is it just RCPS that is unable to figure out better solutions to these problems?

Yes. Districts across the state and country are facing the same challenges because many areas are facing similar demographic trends resulting from low birth rates and aging populations. Locally, Newton County Schools, Atlanta Public Schools, Decatur City Schools, DeKalb County Schools, Fulton County Schools, and more are facing similar challenges. Across the country, districts like Broward County in Florida, Denver Public Schools in Colorado, Austin Independent School District and Corpus Christi Independent School District in Texas are all currently planning to close schools in response to what they are referring to as the "enrollment cliff."

If we do consolidate and rezone schools – what do students, teachers, and taxpayers get out of that?

If schools are consolidated, students will have the opportunity to access more robust programming and learning opportunities. Instead of stretching our resources thin across our current schools, by combining some schools, we will be able to offer more to our students. This will also result in a more equitable distribution of per-pupil funding across the district.

How can spending be reduced while improving educational outcomes?

Consolidation is being considered because educational outcomes are not best served by spending taxpayer dollars to operate a number of schools designed to serve a much larger student population than what currently exists in this area and than is anticipated to exist in the future. In order to fund so many schools below capacity, and some at half-capacity, funding has to be redirected from other areas and can result in the need to make reductions to programming, staffing, and services.

What schools are proposed for consolidation and rezoning?

The following schools are proposed to close and consolidate with other schools:

- M.G. Barksdale Elementary
- D.L. Sims Elementary
- Shoal Creek Elementary
- Hightower Trail Elementary
- Memorial Middle School

The following schools have sections being rezoned to balance enrollment and transportation across schools:

- Flat Shoals Elementary
- Honey Creek Elementary School
- Edwards Middle School

When will the consolidation and rezoning take place?

The proposed consolidation and rezoning will be implemented for the 2027-28 school year.

What happens when a school that is being consolidated is named after a person?

RCPS will review all options to keep names attached to schools. We are proud to have school buildings named after people who have made an impact on the local community and wish to continue their legacy. One option might be to combine school names. For example, Barksdale-Honey Creek Elementary which keeps both school names while consolidating the schools into one building. RCPS will work with local school communities to determine the best way to address school names.

How do I find out exactly what school my child will attend next year?

If the Board of Education chooses to approve the proposed consolidation and rezoning plan, parents will begin receiving letters in February 2027 with their new school attendance zones. RCPS will have a website with specific attendance zone information by street address.

What happens to Specialty and Choice programs at the middle school if consolidated?

RCPS plans to keep current program offerings in place.

Are high school attendance zones changing?

No, high school attendance zones will not change.