

## Community responds positively to combining Main, North Heights

- Rome City Schools plans to join the elementaries by building a new school in Main's place and refurbishing North Heights to house a state-of-the-art sixth-grade academy.

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Response to a proposal by Rome City Schools' officials to combine Main and North Heights was positive, but community members did have a few questions.

The two elementary schools would ideally combine this fall, as the system would start the process of tearing down the current Main Elementary building, which houses the lower grades, and build a new facility in its place. Main students would be taken to North Heights to attend classes during construction, which is estimated to take about two years.

Students from Main and North Heights would then begin attending classes at the new school in fall of 2019. System officials would then gut and remodel North Heights, making it into a sixth-grade academy that would house all of the system's sixth-graders.

During a public meeting recently, interim Superintendent Lou Byars explained the plan to a group of parents, educators and community members.

"This new school would be similar to Anna K. Davie," explained Byars, showing the crowd a picture of the media center at AKD. "This building is beautiful, and we can give this community the same kind of building and a safer place for your children to attend school."

Major concerns at Main are the fact that the children must move between the gymnasium, the cafeteria and the building on the hill above Main where class rooms for the upper elementary grades are. Space issues are also a problem.

The cafeteria — which was recently refurbished — and the gymnasium and the building that houses the upper elementary school would all still stay in place. The upper elementary rooms would be repurposed, Byars said. The cafeteria would be connected to the new school.

The main building would be torn down and the footprint of the school would be increased. Byars said that he and others have been discussing about rerouting traffic and creating enough space for the larger building.

The plan would be to have a building suitable for about 600 students. Main and North Heights together now have about 470 students combined.

"We want to make room for growth," Byars said. "We also have about 460 students in sixth grade now. We also would refurbish North Heights to fit about 600 students."

### **Questions about the plan**

Some citizens expressed concern about where the money would come from. The plan is to place the new building costs on a proposed education local option sales tax — ELOST 5 — which would go on the ballot in November.

"This means that parents have to support us," Byars said. "The support has to be there to get the ELOST passed. We want parent input on the plans and we want parents to share information about the plans so that the community will support the proposal."

A good portion of the money for the remodel of North Heights would be coming from state capital outlay funds, which is money earmarked to support remodeling and refurbishing school buildings.

When asked, parents and community members attending the meeting supported the idea of the new school.

Several members of Thankful Baptist Church on Spider Webb Drive, just down the street from Main, asked about how the larger school would affect the access to the church.

"We have already been discussing that," explained Byars. "We are talking with City Manager Sammy Rich and are making sure that everything would be simply rerouted. The school would not block the road. We also are discussing new plans for getting cars and buses in here."

An added benefit of the sixth-grade academy would be freeing up room at the elementary schools. The academy would also be a STEAM — science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics — geared school with everything from engineering labs to maker spaces to pathway classes to help students decide what they want to concentrate on.

The system also plans to expand pathways at the middle school and high school, Byars said.

"We have a healthcare pathway that will begin at the middle school next year," he explained. "We also plan to expand our offerings at the high school and add a building to house all Career, Technical and Agricultural Education offerings at the high school to increase room there as well and expand our program."

Byars added that no jobs will be lost in the combining of the schools.

"None of this is being done for cost reasons," he said. "We've discussed this with our teachers and staff and assured them that while there may be some shifting, there will not be any job cuts."

Faith Collins, chairwoman of the Rome BOE, said she has been pleased with the responses she has received from the community.

"I think the discussion went very well," she said. "We are very excited as a board about what is coming."

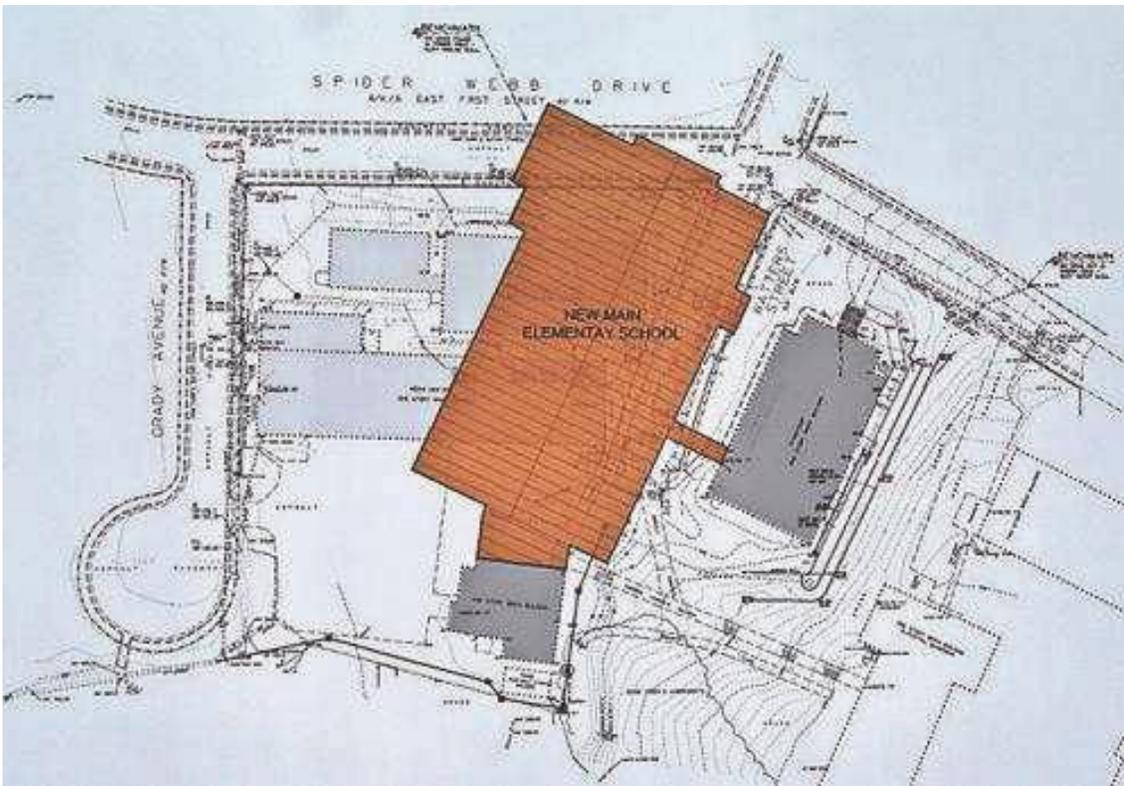
Collins said that the new building would make her feel better about student safety.

"My focus is the safety of our children and having them not have to move from building to building all the time would be wonderful," she said. "This building will be a great place to learn."



Kristina Wilder/Rome News-Tribune

Terrell Shields (left) discusses the planned changes at Main and North Heights with Rome interim Superintendent Lou Byars after a parent and community meeting at Main Elementary.



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This is an explanation of how the new Main building would be placed on the current property. Discussions are happening now with city officials to plan out how roads would be rerouted.

