

Uncertainty Grows as Alachua Schools Consider Closures, K-8 Shift

ALACHUA, Fla. — For decades, Alachua Elementary School has served generations of local families. Now parents and staff say they are worried about safety, logistics and job security as Alachua County Public Schools considers a plan that could close several elementary schools and convert some middle schools into K-8 campuses.

The district is reviewing multiple proposals that could close Alachua Elementary along with several other schools in the county. Some proposals would expand middle schools, including Mebane Middle School, into K-8 campuses and move elementary students there.

Supporters of the idea say combining grade levels could help the district address enrollment and facility concerns, but some parents say they worry about the impact on younger students.

Janelle Garner, whose children attend both Alachua Elementary and Mebane Middle School, said she is particularly concerned about the possibility of young children sharing a campus with teenagers.

“My son goes to Mebane, and I don’t particularly have a problem with the change,” Garner said. “I’m just concerned about having kindergartners in with teenagers. How are they going to separate them?”

Garner said she also worries about traffic if more students are moved to the same campus.

“Traffic is horrible here,” she said. “My twins came from Irby last year, and the traffic was backed up like a mile. If you’re going to add two schools to that one school, how are people going to get in and out safely?”

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SCHOOL/Add 1

Other concerns focus on how schools would manage daily logistics if multiple age groups share the same building.

Shirley Evans, a teacher at Alachua Elementary who plans to retire before the changes would take effect, said she wonders how basic operations such as food service would work on a K-8 campus.

“How are they going to do food service?” Evans said. “Are they going to have two kitchens, one for the little ones and one for the big ones?”

Evans said the district has hosted several public meetings to discuss the proposals, but she believes more community members should participate.

“A lot of people came, but not enough,” she said. “When people make decisions and come to see what’s going on, then you get what you’re getting. You have to show up.”

School staff say the potential closure also raises questions about what could happen to employees.

Ethan Dyer, who works with the school’s Extended Day Enrichment Program, said he is unsure what the change would mean for his position if the school closes.

“If this school closes, I don’t know if I’ll just be transferred or something,” Dyer said. “It would be bad if I just stopped having a job.”

Jonny Dose, who leads the school’s extended day program, said staff members are waiting to see what the district ultimately decides.

“Nothing is set in stone yet,” Dose said. “There’s a few different proposals, but I think all but one of them do have this school closing if they go into effect.”

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SCHOOL/Add 2

Dose said moving large groups of students to new schools could create short-term challenges as children adjust.

“Moving schools for any student is hard,” he said. “If you do that for entire third-, fourth- and fifth-grade classes all at once, there are going to be some growing pains.”

Still, Dose said the district has indicated it would try to find new placements for employees if schools close.

“They’ve told me they’ll find a spot for me when — if — the school gets shut down,” he said.

Some community members have also questioned the reasoning behind closing Alachua Elementary, which has served students in the area for decades.

Dose said the campus is older but still functions well overall.

“It’s a 70-year-old campus, so the buildings are a little bit old,” he said. “We have a few things that go wrong every now and again, like a water fountain breaking, but nothing that’s out of the ordinary.”

The district has not made a final decision on the proposals, and officials have said additional discussions and community feedback will continue before any changes are finalized.

For parents like Garner, the uncertainty leaves many questions about what the changes could mean for their children.

“I just want to know how they’re going to keep the kids safe,” Garner said. “If they’re going to do it, they just need to make sure the little kids are protected.”