



# The Alpine High School Citizens Committee

www.AHSCC.com • ContactUs@AHSCC.com • 619.445.1234

## A Three Academy Alpine High School is Warranted

The Alpine High School Citizens' Committee (AHSCC) representatives assigned to the Grossmont Union High School District (GUHSD) Design and Curriculum Team have under separate cover, responded to the GUHSD Proposal for the Alpine High School. That response of the AHSCC expressed support for a 3 academy high school to open on the targeted September 2013 date.

We stated that the 3 academies should be:

School A – Language Arts/Media/Communication

School B – STEM school

School C – Business/Finance/Entrepreneurship

We briefly stated our curriculum and education rationale for a planned opening of three school academies, but referenced this separate document to justify why a total of three academies are needed. The small academies proposal by GUHSD ultimately contemplates 5 “schools within a school”, a concept for which there is broad consensus on the Design and Curriculum Team and the AHSCC members of that team. The AHSCC believes that the new school cannot adequately serve the academic needs of our students without embodying three academies (small schools), when it is fully open with all four grades present.

### 1) The Bond Language Does Not Preclude Opening With Three Academies:

The Prop U bond language text has been presented as the primary, if not sole, obstacle to building a school of three (or more) academies. The “small school” concept that we all embrace sets forth a general guideline of about 400 students per academy, hence, the assumption that two academies would accommodate 800 students; three would accommodate 1200 students, etc. The Prop U text, however, states nothing that addresses the number of small schools or learning academies that may exist within the new high school.

Prop U states (excerpt);

...begin and complete construction – *classrooms and general use school buildings and grounds to accommodate up to 800 students*, adequate academic/vocational/job training equipment, library/multimedia facilities, computer and science labs, food service facilities, and space for student support services. (Italicized emphasis added)

There is nothing in the Prop U text to limit the number of buildings at the school campus. The current and preliminary architectural design concepts show additional buildings to accommodate

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administration, food service, library and arts/auditorium facilities. The design concepts show additional future buildings for a build out to accommodate up to 2000 students. The only campus limitation in Prop U text is contained in the phrase *“classrooms and general use school buildings to accommodate up to 800 students”*.

There is no limitation on the number of buildings in this phrase. The limitation is specific to *“classrooms”* and *“general use”* buildings. There is also no stated limitation on teacher or student conference areas, study rooms, and common area space. All facilities mentioned in the bond text, including the multimedia and lab facilities, have no tie in or connection to any attending number of students.

The relationship of this language in the Prop U bond text and the three academies the AHSCC supports is best understood in the context of how the academies might function along the lines of the proposal endorsed by the GUHSD Design and Curriculum Team. First, the upper level classes, particularly seniors, will spend a lot of time outside of generic classrooms, working on special projects, online courses, science labs, and even outside the school on internships, or at community colleges. Many students will also be spending some part of their day involved with common school activities such as athletics, music, etc., and are not in any type of classroom. Second, there are dissimilar needs for *classrooms and general use school buildings* among the planned for academies. The recommended STEM school building will likely be loaded with science and technology labs and other special purpose rooms, while the recommended Business/Finance/Entrepreneurship, and the Language Arts/Media/Communication academy buildings will likely have mainly classrooms of only general use.

With this basic understanding of how the three academies will function, it is therefore relatively easy to mesh the recommended 3 academy proposal with the Prop U language. Here is but one example where the number of general classrooms accommodates fewer than 800 students, but the overall student population is closer to 1200. There also can be many other combinations or variations of this same concept, and there is sufficient flexibility to add up to another 150-200 students since up to that many senior students likely will not in the buildings, or will be off campus on any given day, or doing internships.

For example:

**School A (Language Arts/Media/Communication) Building:**

- + General classrooms to accommodate 250 students.
- + Multimedia labs; project rooms, communication technology facilities to accommodate 100 students.
- + Out-of-building or off campus activities for 50 students (seniors)

**School B (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) Building:**

- + General classrooms to accommodate 200 students
- + Science labs, technology labs, project rooms, machine shops to accommodate 150 students.
- + Out-of-building or off campus activities for 50 students (seniors)

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### **School C (Business, Finance, Entrepreneurship):**

- + General classrooms to accommodate 250 students
- + Computer and technology labs, project rooms to accommodate 150 students.
- + Out-of-building or off campus activities for 50 students (seniors)

### **2) The Student Population in the Greater Alpine Area Supports Three Academies:**

The other primary reason for 3 academies is that we need to have all of Alpine kids attend our school and, particularly, *every* student graduating from Joan MacQueen Middle School, including all Harbison Canyon kids. That number in 2015, when the high school is fully occupied, is conservatively estimated to be about 950 students and assumes the current demographic decline with no growth in Alpine. Also, the Harbison and Crest communities were devastated by the 2003 Cedar Fire; they merit our support for new inclusion in the new school.

Additionally, we should include all Indian tribal students from Sycuan (in the Dehesa Valley area) who wish to attend and work collaboratively with Mountain Empire USD so that some of those kids, particularly from Descanso and Pine Valley, can also elect to attend. Currently, over 40 MEUSD kids already attend Joan MacQueen.

Finally, we need to estimate and add to the count those Alpine kids who attend private schools, Julian Charter School (located in Alpine), and the home schooled who would very likely take advantage of a new local HS. When all these numbers are added up we are up to around 1200 kids, hence, an added reason for 3 academies at the onset.

### **3) Adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> Academy Will Save the District Time and Money**

The District's plans call for an ultimate build out to 5 academies so it forecast that future construction will be needed. However, if a 3<sup>rd</sup> academy is truly justified to accommodate the Alpine student population, when all grades are in attendance in 2015, then it will save the District both time and money to build that academy building during the Prop U construction phase. The incremental cost of a 3<sup>rd</sup> building (virtually identical to "School A in the Grossmont proposal) would be far lower, in the current economic environment, than brand new design, permitting and construction years later.

The other cost factor would be temporarily accommodating the actual student population, which we know to be well in excess of 800, that will inevitably occur when all grades are present. The only option would be to use temporary modular or portable classrooms. To use portables just 2 years following the opening up of a brand new school would not only be costly to the District but would undermine the very small school concept upon which the new high school is premised. This unappealing outcome should and can be avoided by constructing the 3<sup>rd</sup> academy building.

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### **4) Our Recommendation: Commence A School Boundary Study:**

The basic issue of the number of students who will ultimately (and initially) attend the new Alpine high school can be best and most fairly resolved by commencing a school boundary study. Such a study would resolve how many students are closer (both distance and time-wise) to the new school than other Grossmont schools. The study will also give the District some notion of how many students to put in an option area so as to give their parents choice over which school to select.

The GUHSD total student population has increased (instead of declining as projected) and many schools remain very overcrowded. The new high school offers a relief valve for this pressure and the District has 3 years, prior to the opening of the new school, to phase in a comprehensive boundary redistricting plan. For example, Granite Hills High School (GHHS) has about 2800 students enrolled in a 1950's designed campus likely built to handle only 1800, as was typical of schools built in that era. With a new boundary study that incorporates a three academy school for Alpine, it is estimated that as many as 800 students from GHHS, could be shifted to the new school. Not only would this relieve overcrowding at GHHS, but it would also prevent the unnecessary expenditure of Prop H and Prop U funds to accommodate those 800 students at GHHS.

The planning and the work on a boundary study needs to commence as soon as possible. Such a study will show how student populations can best be balanced to most effectively serve the needs of all Grossmont students and will give clear guidance about the appropriate student population and size of the new high school. Just as important, it will provide cost saving guidance on how to allocate and most effectively spend remaining bond monies. With that information in hand the Superintendent and Grossmont Board can make an informed and prudent decision on how best to proceed.