



# W.B. Beam Intermediate School

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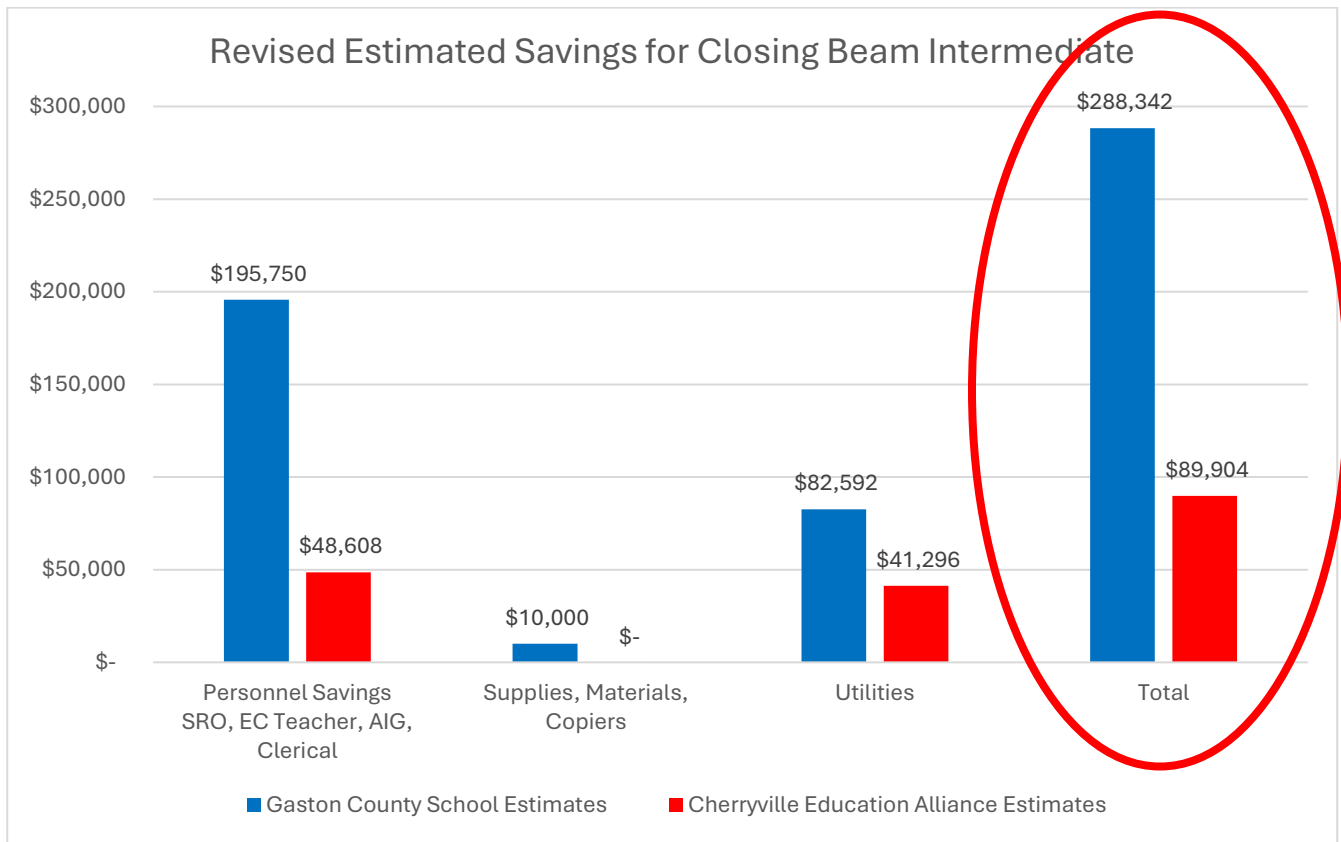
## **Community-Driven Closure Feasibility Study**

Prepared by: Cherryville Education Alliance and City of Cherryville

Scenario under review: Close W.B. Beam Intermediate and reassignment of grade levels

Date: May 2026

# Addendum May 15th



### Observations regarding savings projections:

- It was stated in the Operations Meeting on May 4th that the SRO is funded through a grant and not Gaston County School funds. Reallocation of funds to another school is not a savings to Gaston County Schools.
- Since Beam Intermediate is a Title 1 School, a portion of the supplies, materials, and copiers is paid for by federal funds. The money and supplies will move with the students, and it is not a savings for Gaston County Schools.
- The AIG Teacher is shared with Cherryville Elementary and Ed Sadler Elementary. This position is not a savings to Gaston County Schools as the teacher will most likely be reassigned to a third school.
- Utilities savings are estimated at approximately 50 percent, as the building would still require temperature control to prevent mold growth and protect plumbing from freezing.

### Staffing Allotment Observations from Gaston County Schools Feasibility Study May 13, 2026

- 2 months additional pay for Clerical at Cherryville Elementary (~\$7067)
- Assistant Principal at Cherryville Elementary (~\$65,000)
- Subtract those numbers from the CEA estimated savings, and it is reduced to \$89,904

### Other questions raised since both feasibility studies were completed:

- What school is responsible for the utility costs for Nixon Gym, Starnes Auditorium, Rudisill Stadium, and Fraley Field? If they are included in the Beam Intermediate utilities cost, the savings will be less than stated, as those facilities will still be used by Cherryville High School.
- Will the partnership with ESS to oversee daily and long-term substitutes in GCS be renewed in 2026-2027, at an estimated cost of \$300K?
- How much did the Cropper GIS study cost, and why did it not include the estimated growth in Cherryville along with the NC DPI ADM numbers? One month's worth of data is not enough information to base future decisions on.



### **About Cherryville Education Alliance**

The Cherryville Education Alliance is a community-driven group of concerned citizens, parents, and local supporters who care deeply about the future of Cherryville schools. The Alliance is committed to working collaboratively and respectfully with Gaston County Schools to help ensure strong, sustainable educational opportunities for Cherryville students.

The group's focus is on advocating for the needs of Cherryville students, with particular support for W.B. Beam Intermediate School, which serves 4th and 5th-grade students. The Alliance seeks to share accurate information, elevate community perspectives, and promote constructive dialogue between stakeholders, all while honoring the history, identity, and pride of the Cherryville community.

Committee members include Jamie Sherrill, W.B. Beam Intermediate PTO President, Beam parent, and substitute teacher; Hannah Garrett, Beam parent and substitute teacher; Elizabeth Shuford, Beam parent, John Chavis parent and Lincoln County school teacher; Holly Skibo, Beam parent and Lincoln County school principal; Dawn Whitworth, former Gaston County teacher; Bryony Nicholson, John Chavis parent; Jeanne Alexander, concerned Cherryville Citizen; and Heather Holt, concerned Cherryville citizen.

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## Executive Summary

This community-driven feasibility study evaluates the proposed closure of W.B. Beam Intermediate School and the alternatives presented by the Gaston County Board of Education and Superintendent Houchard. The study reviews four options:

- Option A: reassigning 4th grade to Cherryville Elementary School and 5th grade to John Chavis Middle School
- Option B: the same reassignment with an option for 5th graders to attend Tryon Elementary School
- Option C: reassigning both 4th and 5th grades to Cherryville Elementary School
- Option D: maintaining the current configuration

Based on the findings of this analysis, **the clear recommendation is to maintain W.B. Beam Intermediate School**. The proposed closure provides minimal financial benefit while introducing significant risks to student stability, age-appropriate learning environments, program continuity, and long-range capacity planning within the Cherryville community.

The purpose of this study is to support fiscal responsibility while prioritizing educational quality and sustainable planning for Cherryville students.

### Key conclusions (summary)

- W.B. Beam is not underutilized. Using the 2018 study capacities and 2025 ADM, Beam operates at approximately 87% utilization (192 students on a capacity of 221).
- Closing Beam pushes Cherryville Elementary near capacity immediately. Under proposed Option A, Cherryville Elementary would increase to approximately 97% utilization (485 students on a capacity of 500) when adding residential growth estimates. Option C, moving both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade to Cherryville Elementary, would result in immediate overcrowding with utilization at 116% (579 students on a capacity of 500) in the school year 2026-27.
- The proposal changes age configuration in ways not reflected in building capacity numbers alone. Cherryville Elementary is configured for K-3, and John Chavis is configured for grades 6-8. WB Beam Intermediate was created over 20 years ago to resolve overcrowding at Cherryville Elementary as a grade 4/5 school.
- Cherryville is experiencing measurable residential growth (single-family permits and new multi-family occupancy) that should be included in 3-, 5-, and 10-year enrollment and capacity planning.
- Moving 5th grade to a middle school setting creates developmental and programmatic risks, including loss of upper-elementary identity programs such as Battle of the Books, Math Masters, and Robotics.
- Public reporting indicates the district deficit is driven primarily by systemwide staffing, non-instructional cost structures, and financial mismanagement, which cannot be solved by a single-school closure.
- 2026 Teacher and Program losses at John Chavis Middle School (Art and Spanish), as well as the Social Worker for Cherryville Schools, impact current students as well as any reassignments.

### Recommended path forward (summary)

- Pause any closure action until a complete net-savings model, receiving-school readiness plan, and transportation and safety analysis are published.
- Use districtwide criteria to evaluate efficiency and utilization consistently across the county before selecting any single school for closure consideration.
- Prioritize structural cost controls and administrative efficiency reviews before classroom-disrupting actions.
- Keep W.B. Beam open and pursue cost containment and program strengthening that maintains the upper-elementary bridge model for Cherryville.

## 1. Purpose, Scope, and Decision Under Review

This report consolidates verified facility facts, enrollment data, growth indicators, and stakeholder input into one transparent record. It is intended to complement any district analysis and to support an informed public process.

### 1.1 Decision under review

Proposed action: Close W.B. Beam Intermediate School and reassign students as follows:

- Option A: reassigning 4th grade to Cherryville Elementary School and 5th grade to John Chavis Middle School
- Option B: the same reassignment with an option for 5th graders to attend Tryon Elementary School
- Option C: reassigning both 4th and 5th grades to Cherryville Elementary School
- Option D: maintaining the current configuration

### 1.2 Feasibility dimensions used in this report

Feasibility is assessed across: capacity and utilization; facility readiness; student experience and age appropriateness; transportation and safety; financial impact and net savings; and long-range planning consistency (including residential growth).

## 2. Community and Historical Context

### 2.1 Why W.B. Beam exists

W.B. Beam Intermediate was established as a local solution to overcrowding in the Cherryville cluster by reusing and renovating existing buildings on the former Cherryville High School campus and adding a classroom wing. The model created an upper-elementary bridge (grades 4-5) and allowed Cherryville Elementary to operate as K-3. The original proposal by the Cherryville Education Task Force to expand Cherryville Elementary was refused.

**Please see the full Cherryville Schools history in the Appendix**

### 2.2 Community planning and Beam's original purpose (summary)

In the early 2000s, planning efforts were made to address capacity pressures at Cherryville Elementary and to advance a cost-effective solution using existing facilities. This history is relevant because Beam was created to solve overcrowding, not as a temporary structure.

### 2.3 Historical feasibility planning (2011) compared with the current approach

Notes regarding 2011 feasibility work describe a facilities condition and capital needs assessment oriented toward deferred maintenance and long-range planning rather than school closures. This provides context for how feasibility planning has evolved over time.

## 2.4 School Closure History

**Rhyme Elementary School** (Gastonia): Closed after the 2014–2015 school year

Rhyme Elementary School in **Gastonia, North Carolina closed at the end of the 2014–2015 school year (June 2015)** primarily due to **aging facilities, significant deferred maintenance needs, and long-term cost concerns**

Key reasons for the closure

### 1. Aging building with major deferred maintenance

Rhyme Elementary had been in continuous operation for roughly 60 years, making it one of the older school facilities in Gaston County. District leaders determined the building required extensive repairs and ongoing maintenance that would be costly to address long-term. Rather than investing significant capital in an aging structure, the district opted to close the school and redistribute students to other campuses.

### 2. Cost-effectiveness and facilities planning decisions

Gaston County Schools concluded that continuing to operate Rhyme was not cost-effective given its age and condition. The closure aligned with the district’s broader facilities strategy at the time, which focused on reducing reliance on older buildings and consolidating enrollment into schools that required fewer major capital improvements.

### 3. Enrollment shifts and capacity elsewhere

Enrollment trends in West Gastonia allowed Rhyme students to be reassigned to other nearby elementary schools with available capacity, making closure feasible from an operational standpoint. Attendance boundaries were redrawn following the closure, and students were reassigned to schools such as Bessemer City Central and Lingerfeldt Elementary, among others.

### 4. Site disposition after closure

After the school was closed and demolished, the former Rhyme Elementary site was later redeveloped for residential use, reinforcing the district’s conclusion that the building was no longer viable for continued educational use.

**Forest Heights Elementary School** (Gastonia): Closed after the 2015-2016 school year

Forest Heights Elementary School in Gastonia was closed at the end of the **2015–2016 school year (June 2016)** as part of a broader **districtwide facilities consolidation and modernization plan** by Gaston County Schools.

Key reasons for the closure

### 1. Aging facilities and high deferred maintenance costs

Gaston County Schools identified Forest Heights as an older campus that would have required significant capital investment to remain viable. District leaders concluded that continued maintenance was not cost-effective compared to consolidating students into newer or renovated schools.

### 2. Declining enrollment and excess capacity in the area

Enrollment in several West Gastonia elementary schools, including Forest Heights, had declined, leaving the district with more seats than students. This made it inefficient to operate multiple underutilized buildings in close proximity. Forest Heights students were redistributed to nearby elementary schools with available capacity.

### **3. Districtwide consolidation strategy paired with new construction**

The closure coincided with the construction and planning of newer elementary schools in West Gastonia. While some schools, such as Pleasant Ridge, were set to be replaced by new buildings, others, including Forest Heights, were closed outright with no replacement on the same site. The district redrew attendance boundaries to better align elementary, middle, and high school feeder patterns.

### **4. Redrawing attendance zones and feeder alignment**

District officials stated that the boundary changes following the closure were intended to create more consistent feeder patterns and improve long-term planning, even though this resulted in longer bus rides for some students.

In both cases, Rhyne and Forest Heights were closed for structural and financial reasons:

- Aging buildings requiring major investment
- Declining enrollment
- Availability of nearby schools with capacity
- District attempts to reduce operating costs
- Intentional plans to repurpose facilities rather than abandon them

#### **WB Beam Intermediate:**

- The facility is not an aging building; major renovations were completed in 2004, placing it well below the average age of Gaston County School buildings.
- Enrollment is not projected to decline based on current and approved residential housing development within the City of Cherryville. Enrollment is projected to increase over the next five to ten years.
- Reassignment of students would place significant capacity pressure on the receiving elementary school, reducing operational flexibility and increasing utilization to near or full capacity.
- The district's estimated annual cost savings of approximately \$288,320 would have a minimal impact on the overall budget deficit.
- Repurposing the facility would not preserve the projected cost savings for Gaston County Schools and would likely introduce new operational or maintenance expenses.

#### **Average age of Gaston County School Buildings: approximately 42 years**

The superintendent of Gaston County Schools stated in August 2025 that the *average age of a school building in the district is about 42 years*, while discussing the opening of a new middle school and the need for bond-funded facility upgrades.

#### **Most buildings fall in a 35 to 60-year range**

A district-wide facilities assessment prepared for Gaston County Schools reports that *the average age of most buildings in the system is between 35 and 60 years*, reflecting a large concentration of schools built in the 1960s–1980s era.

## **2.5 Recent feasibility trajectory (2023-2026)**

A compiled overview of feasibility efforts from 2023 to 2026 describes a progression from financial stress analysis to utilization modeling, then to targeted school-level feasibility discussions, and finally to public closure scenarios. This context helps distinguish problem definition from solution selection.

### 3. School Profiles and Facility Facts

The information below is drawn from the January 23, 2026, Gaston County Board of Education meeting. Enrollment and capacity data presented at that meeting indicate that five elementary schools are operating at less than 60 percent utilization, including Tryon Elementary School at 45% for the school year 2025-2026, which serves as a feeder to John Chavis Middle School. From a planning and efficiency standpoint, schools with sustained utilization below 60 percent should be evaluated for potential consolidation or closure prior to consideration of schools with higher utilization rates.

Elementary School	Capacity	2025-25 Elementary School Enrollment and Utilization									
		KG	1	2	3	4	5	Current Enrollment	Current Utilization	Trend	
Bessemer City Primary	502	134	137	135				406	81%	0.5	
Bessemer City Central Elem	490				169	113	110	392	80%	-29.5	
Brookside Elementary	528	74	97	82	94	86	80	513	97%	0.257142857	
Carr Elementary	743	106	101	113	101	144	99	664	89%	2.342857143	
Catawba Heights Elementary	411	35	44	44	43	41	31	238	58%	-0.857142857	
Chapel Grove Elementary	528	84	55	62	62	41	62	366	69%	-4.342857143	
Cherryville Elementary	500	89	98	96	83			366	73%	-2	
W B Beam Intermediate School	221					100	91	191	86%	-9	
Costner Elementary	489	62	56	78	77	77	64	414	85%	2.057142857	
Gardner Park Elementary	665	78	88	100	115	92	71	544	82%	-0.228571429	
H H Beam Elementary	723	88	103	110	95	86	99	581	80%	-0.314285714	
Lingerfeldt Elementary	547	71	70	83	83	58	73	438	80%	-0.742857143	
Lowell Elementary	567	48	52	58	70	58	53	339	60%	1.571428571	
McAdenville Elementary	215	42	22	29	32	35	30	190	88%	-0.514285714	
New Hope Elementary	528	91	86	100	97	101	95	570	108%	1.771428571	
North Belmont Elementary	411	59	55	53	58	59	69	353	86%	1.914285714	
J B Page Primary School	339	169	204					373	110%	35	
Belmont Central Elementary	619			142	198	181	175	696	112%	8.2	
Pinewood Elementary	606	87	71	79	77	95	85	494	82%	1.714285714	
Pleasant Ridge Elementary	800	143	131	154	167	157	145	897	112%	2.885714286	
Ida Rankin Elementary School	665	80	84	91	95	73	90	513	77%	0.6	
Robinson Elementary	535	67	76	50	74	71	55	393	73%	-1.457142857	
Edward D Sadler Jr Elementary School	508	59	81	51	63	48	56	358	70%	-2.914285714	
Sherwood Elementary	743	99	89	88	92	73	88	529	71%	-2.828571429	
Springfield Primary	536	112	115	97				324	60%	-7.5	
Kiser Elementary	592				85	120	123	328	55%	19	
Tryon Elementary	626	49	57	45	54	49	65	319	51%	1.857142857	
W A Bess Elementary School	665	106	112	117	123	116	103	677	102%	0.085714286	
Woodhill Elementary	587	97	95	106	94	84	85	561	96%	-3	
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,889</b>	<b>2,129</b>	<b>2,179</b>	<b>2,163</b>	<b>2,301</b>	<b>2,158</b>	<b>2,097</b>	<b>13,027</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>-2.428571429</b>	

School	Current Utilization
Catawba Heights Elementary	58%
Lowell Elementary	60%
Springfield Primary	60%
Kiser Elementary	55%
Tryon Elementary	51%

### 2025-26 Utilization Forecast vs 2025-26 Actual: Elementary

School Name		Forecasted 2025-26	Actual 2025-26
Tryon Elementary	Enrollment	299	280
	Utilization	48%	45%

Gaston County Schools Utilization Forecast						
Elementary Schools	School Name	Capacity		Forecasted 2025-26	Actual 2025-26	Difference
	New Hope Elementary	Enrollment	528		587	999
Utilization				111%	113%	-2%
North Belmont Elementary	Enrollment	411		345	343	-2
	Utilization			84%	83%	0%
JB Page Primary School	Enrollment	339		341	334	-7
	Utilization			101%	99%	-2%
Belmont Central Elementary	Enrollment	619		740	716	-24
	Utilization			120%	116%	-4%
Pinewood Elementary	Enrollment	606		491	481	-10
	Utilization			81%	79%	-2%
Pleasant Ridge Elementary	Enrollment	800		896	769	-127
	Utilization			112%	96%	-16%
Ida Rankin Elementary School	Enrollment	665		504	508	4
	Utilization			76%	76%	1%
Robinson Elementary	Enrollment	535		400	443	43
	Utilization			75%	83%	8%
Edward D Sadler Jr Elementary	Enrollment	508		351	348	-3
	Utilization			69%	69%	-1%
Sherwood Elementary	Enrollment	743		518	539	21
	Utilization			70%	73%	3%
Springfield Primary	Enrollment	536		330	323	-7
	Utilization			62%	60%	-1%
Kiser Elementary	Enrollment	592		306	324	18
	Utilization			52%	55%	3%
Tryon Elementary	Enrollment	626		299	280	-19
	Utilization			48%	45%	-3%
W A Bess Elementary	Enrollment	665		706	699	-7
	Utilization			106%	105%	-1%
Woodhill Elementary	Enrollment	587		578	513	-65
	Utilization			98%	87%	-11%
Elementary Schools Totals:	Enrollment	15,889		13,085	12,860	-225
	Utilization			82%	81%	-1%

opperGIS

### 3.1 Facility summary (2018 Long Range Facility Study)

Facility facts below are taken from the 2018 Long Range Facility Study summary sheets for the three schools in the proposed reassignment scenario.

School	Grades (2018)	Capacity (2018)	Building size (sq ft)	Year built / major work	Capital needs range
W.B. Beam Intermediate	4-5	221	31,956	1948, 1951, 1961, 2004	\$1-3M
Cherryville Elementary	K-3	500	66,473	1956, 1963, 1975, 1996	\$2-4M
John Chavis Middle	6-8	619	68,366	1951, 1954, 1964, 1994,	\$4-6M

Note: Capital needs ranges are planning-level estimates from the 2018 study and should be updated with current assessments if used for decision-making.

## 4. Enrollment, Capacity, and Utilization

### 4.1 ADM enrollment snapshot (2025)

School	Grades included	ADM (2025)	Capacity (2018)	Utilization
W.B. Beam Intermediate	4-5	192	221	86.90%
Cherryville Elementary	K-3	380	500	76.00%
John Chavis Middle	6-8	414	619	66.90%

### 4.2 Utilization impact under the proposed closure scenario

ADM/Projections		Year 0		Year 1	Year 5	Year 10		
Elementary School	Capacity	Current Enrollment (ADM)	% Filled	2026-27	2029	2034	5 Yr Growth	10 Yr Growth
Cherryville Elementary	500	383	77%	380	397	381	3.655%	-0.52%
WB Beam Intermediate	221	192	87%	199	209	211	8.854%	9.90%
		575		579	606	592		
Middle School								
John Chavis	619	423	68%	424	447	482	5.674%	13.95%

The proposed reassignment (Option A) pushes Cherryville Elementary from 77.0% utilization to 97% utilization immediately, while Beam is currently at 88% utilized. This indicates that Beam does not exceed capacity and that the proposal concentrates enrollment pressure at the elementary campus. Option C pushes Cherryville Elementary to 116% of capacity in year 1.

## 5. Planned and Emerging Residential Growth in Cherryville

Housing and development indicators suggest continued growth in the Cherryville area. Feasibility analysis should include moderate growth scenarios to avoid near-term overcrowding in receiving schools.

### 5.1 Housing indicators provided

- Single-family permits: 45 (2024), 54 (2025), 41 (through April 2026).
- Rutherford Crossing: 124 residential apartment units currently occupied.
- Calico Creek subdivision: additional homes under construction and continued build-out.

**Please see Cherryville Growth Impact on Schools in the Appendix**

### 5.2 Planning implications

Because the closure scenario places Cherryville Elementary near capacity immediately, even modest enrollment growth could require portables, boundary changes, or grade reconfiguration within a short planning horizon. The district should publish 3-, 5-, and 10-year enrollment scenarios for the Cherryville cluster before any closure vote.

**Please see Projection using ADM data with the moderate student yield assumptions (students per occupied unit) in the Appendix:**

- Single-family home: **0.45**
- Townhome: **0.30**
- Apartment: **0.20**
- Duplex unit: **0.30**

## 6. Receiving School Readiness and Age Appropriateness

### 6.1 Cherryville Elementary readiness for 4th grade

Cherryville Elementary is configured as K-3. Adding 4th grade requires a readiness plan that addresses classroom inventory, intervention and EC space, cafeteria and arrival/dismissal capacity, recess and playground needs, and staffing allocations.

**A capital needs assessment for Cherryville Elementary is included in the Appendix. It was sent to Board member Dot Cherry on April 29<sup>th</sup>, per request at the April 20<sup>th</sup> School Board meeting.**

### 6.2 John Chavis Middle readiness for 5th grade

John Chavis is configured for grades 6-8. Moving 5th grade into a middle school environment requires age-appropriate scheduling, supervision plans, separation from older grades where needed, and preservation of upper-elementary programming and identity.

**A capital needs assessment for John Chavis Middle School is included in the appendix. It was sent to board member Dot Cherry on April 29<sup>th</sup>, per request at the April 20<sup>th</sup> School Board Meeting. It was amended in May.**

## 7. Student Experience, School Culture, and Program Continuity

Beyond physical capacity, feasibility must evaluate whether students have access to the events, clubs, and enrichment that support belonging and academic confidence in upper-elementary years.

## 7.1 Upper-elementary identity programs at Beam (examples)

- Battle of the Books
- Math Masters
- Robotics

Community feedback indicates that moving the 5th grade away from Beam risks loss of these programs and disruption to the upper-elementary identity and transition model.

## 8. Transportation, Safety, and Supervision

A closure recommendation should not proceed without a route-level transportation analysis that includes ride times, bus capacity, mixed-age rider impacts, traffic patterns at receiving schools, and required safety staffing.

Transportation options for 5<sup>th</sup> graders wishing to attend Tryon Elementary should also be presented if Option B is considered.

## 9. Financial Context and Net Savings Requirements

### 9.1 District fiscal context (publicly reported)

Public district communications describe a mid-year shortfall that required \$10 million in emergency county funding to cover payroll and operating expenses through the end of the fiscal year. District communications also cite a \$7.2 million reduction in Low Wealth Supplemental Funds, inflationary cost increases, and the end of ESSER funding in September 2024 as key drivers.

### 9.2 Deficit drivers described in public reporting (categories)

Public reporting attributes portions of the deficit to the following categories:

- Non-instructional positions (unidentified count): \$5.4 million
- Mental health positions (30): \$1.9 million
- Classroom teacher positions (41): \$2.7 million
- Enhancement teacher positions (9.5): \$700,000

### 9.3 Net savings model requirements for any closure proposal

Any closure analysis should publish a net savings model that includes, at a minimum:

- One-time transition costs (moving, furniture, IT, setup).
- Receiving-school readiness costs (renovations, portables, staffing changes).
- Transportation changes and safety staffing needs.
- Ongoing costs for the Beam facility if it is mothballed or repurposed (security, minimal utilities, maintenance).

The feasibility study slide presented on May 4, 2026, by Superintendent Houchard, shows savings of \$288,342. However, calculations by the Cherryville Education Alliance and other Cherryville citizens estimate the savings are only \$161,971.

<b>Gaston County School Estimates</b>		<b>Cherryville Education Alliance Estimates</b>	
Personnel Savings	\$ 195,750.00	Personnel Savings	\$ 120,675.00
SRO, EC Teacher, AIG, Clerical		Excludes SRO and AIG	
Supplies, Materials, Copiers	\$ 10,000.00	Supplies, Materials, Copiers	\$ -
Utilities	<u>\$ 82,592.00</u>	Utilities	<u>\$ 41,296.00</u>
Total	\$ 288,342.00	Total	\$ 161,971.00

Observations regarding savings projections:

- It was stated in the Operations Meeting on May 4th that the SRO is funded through a grant and not Gaston County School funds. How is this a savings to Gaston County Schools? Or is it a reallocation of funds to another school?
- Since Beam Intermediate is a Title 1 School, a portion of the supplies, materials, and copiers is paid for by federal funds. This money will move with the students, and it is not true savings for Gaston County schools.
- The AIG Teacher is shared with Cherryville Elementary and Ed Sadler Elementary. If that position is reassigned, it is not true savings to Gaston County.
- Utilities savings are estimated at approximately 50 percent, as the building would still require temperature control to prevent mold growth and protect plumbing from freezing.
- If the EC Teacher is eliminated, how will an understaffed middle school and a near-capacity elementary school serve the EC students who are reassigned?
- Does the funding for special populations (EC/AIG) come from different sources than Gaston County, and will these services be adequately funded for reassigned 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders?
- The Cherryville area Social Worker was also cut for 2026-27. What is the plan for our students in need? Where will those funds come from?

## 10. Structural Efficiency Considerations (Administrative Footprint)

Community correspondence and comparative research raise questions about district structural overhead, including the number of non-instructional buildings relative to peer districts. These factors are often examined in consolidation discussions and administrative cost ratio reviews. Gaston County Schools operate five (5) non-instructional buildings per Superintendent Houchard's statement in the May 4<sup>th</sup> Operations Meeting. Both Cabarrus and Johnston County schools have one central administrative office with more students.

The following page includes a comparison chart by student enrollment for Gaston County Schools, Cabarrus County Schools, and Johnston County Schools, including each district's approximate statewide rank by enrollment among North Carolina LEAs.

## Comparison by Enrollment (most recent publicly available data, 2025–2026)

District	Approx. Enrollment	Statewide Rank by Enrollment*
Johnston County Public Schools	~37,000 students	~9th–10th largest
Cabarrus County Schools	~32,000 students	~10th–11th largest
Gaston County Schools	~30,000–31,000 students	~11th–12th largest

\*Ranks are based on statewide enrollment comparisons using NC DPI/US News/Public School Review datasets and “largest district” listings.

### 10.1 Key points raised in community correspondence

- Peer districts such as Cabarrus and Johnston typically operate with one central office building, not five.
- Each additional administrative building carries recurring costs (utilities, maintenance, capital repair, staffing, security).

### 10.2 Community position (principle)

Before closing an instructional facility that is well utilized and central to a community, the district should document what structural efficiencies have been evaluated and implemented at the administrative and facilities-management level.

## 11. Stakeholder Input and Public Record

This section summarizes community testimony and written correspondence as part of the feasibility record. Summaries focus on feasibility-relevant issues: age appropriateness, safety, program continuity, transparency, and long-range planning.

### 11.1 Community Petition

On April 26, an online petition was initiated on Change.org to document community support and input regarding the proposed school closure.

**The Issue:** Petition to Keep W.B. Beam Intermediate School Open /Cherryville Education Alliance

We respectfully ask the Gaston County Board of Education to keep W.B. Beam Intermediate School open. Beam provides an age-appropriate learning environment for Cherryville students and plays an important role in student success, school capacity, and future growth planning. We request that Beam be removed from consideration for closure.

**All petition signatures, comments, and supporting materials are documented in a separate booklet.**

### 11.2 Student testimony (summary)

A 4th-grade student at W.B. Beam, Eli Christy, spoke during public expression on April 20<sup>th</sup> and raised concerns about the age appropriateness of placing 5th graders at a middle school campus, mixed-age transportation, bullying risk, and loss of upper-elementary events and clubs.

### **11.3 Parent testimony (summary)**

Dr. Tyler Beam, a Cherryville parent with children at both John Chavis and W.B. Beam, spoke on April 20<sup>th</sup> and emphasized the role Beam plays in relieving overcrowding, raised concerns about fiscal accountability and transparency, and asked that the feasibility study be conducted by qualified parties with clearly published parameters and long-range growth analysis.

### **11.4 Municipal testimony (summary)**

Mayor Wade Stroupe, who spoke on behalf of the City of Cherryville during the March and April school board meetings, reiterated support for Beam to remain open, expressed concern about the lack of timely outreach and clarity, and requested full due diligence with fact-based analysis and an open public process.

### **11.5 Written correspondence (summary)**

Written communications from community members to the Board, administration, and county commissioners requested clarity on the financial rationale for closing Beam, given the deficit scale, asked for transparency regarding non-instructional cost categories, and raised concerns about receiving-school staffing and program impacts. The correspondence also requested that administrative efficiency and districtwide alternatives be evaluated before student displacement. Communication was also sent questioning the discrepancy in the slides presented at the Operations meeting on May 4<sup>th</sup> regarding enrollment figures.

## **12. Property, Public Assets, and Disposition Considerations**

County parcel records provided indicate that the Board of Education owns the Beam, Cherryville Elementary, John Chavis, and Cherryville High School properties. Closure feasibility should state whether the plan is to mothball, repurpose, lease, or dispose of the Beam site, and what costs or revenues would follow.

## **13. Alternatives to Closure**

Community-driven alternatives that can support fiscal goals while protecting student stability include:

- Cost containment and staffing alignment through attrition in other parts of the county while keeping Beam open.
- Partial repurpose of space for tutoring, intervention, or family support services without displacing students.
- A time-limited moratorium on closure action until the district publishes complete net savings, readiness, transportation, and growth analyses.

## 14. Findings and Community Recommendation

### 14.1 Findings

- Beam is well utilized and is not excess capacity based on available ADM and capacity data, as well as a young school building compared to other Gaston County Schools.
- The closure scenario concentrates enrollment pressure at Cherryville Elementary and requires a grade configuration change at both receiving schools.
- Cherryville growth indicators increase the risk of near-term overcrowding if the elementary campus is pushed close to capacity now.
- Program loss, teacher cuts, and age appropriateness concerns represent real educational impacts that are not captured by facility utilization metrics.
- Reported deficit drivers are largely systemwide staffing, non-instructional cost structures, and financial mismanagement, which are not resolved by a single-school closure.

### 14.2 Recommendation

Based on the information currently available, this report recommends against closing W.B. Beam Intermediate at this time. If the district continues to consider closure, it should first publish: (1) a receiving-school readiness plan with costs and timelines, (2) a route-level transportation and safety analysis, (3) a net savings model including one-time and ongoing costs, and (4) 3-, 5-, and 10-year growth and enrollment scenarios for the Cherryville cluster, including residential growth projections.

## 15. Information Requests Before Any Closure Vote

To support a transparent, fact-based public process, the following information should be published before any vote on closure or reassignment.

### 15.1 Study governance and methodology

- Name of the study lead(s) and the party conducting the feasibility work (district staff or consultant).
- Qualifications and relevant experience of the study lead(s).
- Written parameters, criteria, and assumptions used in the study.
- Districtwide application of criteria, including whether other schools are being evaluated using the same standards.

### 15.2 Long-range planning inputs

- Cherryville cluster enrollment projections at 3-, 5-, and 10-year horizons.
- Inclusion of known residential growth indicators (permits, new multi-family occupancy, and active subdivisions).
- Feeder pattern review, including available capacity at nearby schools where applicable.

### 15.3 Receiving-school readiness and student supports

- Receiving-school readiness checklist with costs and timelines (classroom space, EC space, intervention space, cafeteria, traffic flow).
- Plan for age-appropriate placement of 5th grade if housed on a middle school campus, including supervision and scheduling.
- Program continuity plan showing how upper-elementary programs (Battle of the Books, Math Masters, Robotics) will be preserved for 5th grade.

#### **15.4 Transportation and safety**

- Route-level transportation analysis (ride times, route counts, bus capacity, and mixed-age rider impacts).
- Safety plan for arrivals/dismissals at receiving schools, including any staffing or traffic control needs.

#### **15.5 Net financial impact and asset disposition**

- Net savings model that includes one-time transition costs and ongoing operational costs at receiving schools.
- Clarification of non-instructional cost categories contributing to the deficit and corrective actions planned.
- Plan for the Beam facility after closure (mothball, repurpose, lease, or dispose), including costs and timelines



## Appendix

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### Appendix A. Source documents included in this community study

- Cherryville Schools History and Timeline
- 2018 Long Range Facility Study summary sheets: W.B. Beam Intermediate, Cherryville Elementary, John Chavis Middle.
- ADM and residential growth enrollment projections through 2034-35
- Cherryville Growth – Impact on Schools
- Residential Growth Delivery Assumptions Through 2034-35
- Cherryville Elementary School Capacity Needs April 2026
- John Chavis Middle School Capacity Needs April 2026, amended May 2026
- The Gaston Gazette summary information on deficit drivers and staffing categories:  
<https://www.gastongazette.com/story/news/education/2026/04/07/gaston-school-leaders-requested-10-million-from-the-county-where-did-it-go/89451188007/>
- Change.org Save WB Beam Verified Signatures and Comments

### Appendix B. Parcel links (provided)

- Cherryville High School parcel: <https://gastonnc.devnetwedge.com/parcel/view/129057/2027#SalesHistory2>
- W.B. Beam Intermediate parcel: <https://gastonnc.devnetwedge.com/parcel/view/129364/2027>
- Cherryville Elementary parcel: <https://gastonnc.devnetwedge.com/parcel/view/130795/2027>
- John Chavis Middle parcel: <https://gastonnc.devnetwedge.com/parcel/view/130956/2027>

## CHERRYVILLE SCHOOLS – HISTORY AND TIMELINE

- 1892** **The Academy. 2-story** wooden structure. Grades 1-11. This structure was demolished in 1915, upon the opening of the **Cherryville School**.
- 1900** A special subscription/tuition was started to guarantee payments to Cherryville school educators. This being in addition to the funds supplied by Gaston County.
- 1903** The Cherryville voters approve a self-imposed tax for the maintenance of a graded school.
- 1908** The High School grades were first made a State-sanctioned High School under the leadership of Mr. J.W. Strassell, the school master (principal).
- 1915** Cherryville city school, '**The Academy**', achieved its legal status by a special charter granted by the General Assembly of North Carolina.
- 1915** **Cherryville School. Housing grades 1-11.** A new 3-story brick school is constructed upon five acres on East First Street between Pink and Depot Streets. The land was purchased from Mr. Joseph Black. 19 classrooms, an auditorium, and a music room. It burned during Christmas in 1919, leaving only the brick façade. The school was reconstructed using the standing brick as a guide. In 1936, **Elementary No I** became the high school as the high school students were moved to a large, newly constructed brick building on East First Street.
- 1925** **Elementary No II** 11 Classrooms; 2 offices and auditorium. Land bought from T. Carlyle Summer Sr., later named '**West Elementary**'.
- 1927** All Cherryville elementary school grades became accredited.
- 1927** Black Rock School District, north of Cherryville, was consolidated with Cherryville City Schools. Included The Black School, Panhandle School, Grey Rock. Later, Hallman School was closed and merged into the Cherryville system.
- 1927** **The first modern gymnasium** was completed (later replaced by Nixon Gym).
- 1936** **The Cherryville High School Building** was constructed on East First Street, a few hundred feet east of the Cherryville School Building, under the leadership of Superintendent Hunter Huss, a native of Cherryville. It was demolished in the 1980's.
- 1942** 12<sup>th</sup> Grade is added to the high school program.
- 1943** The nine-month school was added, increasing school days from 160 to 180.
- 1949** **High School Auditorium.** Constructed for \$125,000. A priority for Superintendent Foster Starne's tenure was the construction of a state-of-the-art auditorium. A venue fitting the widely recognized Cherryville High School Band's concert music performances, drama presentations, and all public gatherings. Named "**Starnes Auditorium**", postmortem for Dr. Starnes.
- 1949** **Vocational Wing.** Added to the Cherryville High Building for \$50,000, housing home economics, agriculture, and shop curriculum.

- 1951** Under the leadership of Superintendent Starnes, CHS met the requirements to become a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.
- 1955** An “**Annex**”. 3 classrooms with brick façade were constructed to the west of Starnes Auditorium for the purpose of providing additional commerce (business) classes at the high school level. Today, it is a part of the **Beam Intermediate School Campus**.
- 1955** A modern auditorium was constructed for Elementary No II, also known as “**West Elementary School**”.
- 1956** **East Elementary School (now Cherryville Elementary)**. 12 classrooms, auditorium, library, cafeteria. Opened in the fall of 1956. Land purchased from J. Moses C. Stroup Family.
- 1956** **Elementary No I Renovation** The original Cherryville School, built in 1915, was renovated to increase capacity and was renamed **Cherryville Junior High**.
- 1957** **High School Gymnasium**. Constructed on land between the high school baseball and football fields. Named “Joe R. Nixon Gymnasium” in honor of a previous teacher, principal, and superintendent of Cherryville City Schools.
- 1957** **Cherryville City Schools** total enrollment is 1,470. 51 faculty members.
- 1961** A modern cafeteria, a separate structure, was built for the Cherryville High School students. Today it is a part of the **Beam Intermediate School Campus**.
- 1961** **Instrumental Music Building** was constructed adjoining the rear of Starnes Auditorium. This add-on meeting requirements for a full-size band room, private offices for practice, storage for instruments, band equipment, and instruments.
- 1963** **Rudisill Memorial [Football] Stadium** is constructed with donated funds from the citizens of Cherryville. Cost of \$78,000.
- 1967** **Cherryville City Schools** fully integrated into Gaston County Schools. To facilitate a comprehensive school plan, **East School** housed Grades 1-2, **South School (now John Chavis School)** grades 3-4, and **West School** 5-6. **Junior High** on East First Street and later on Ridge Avenue. **High School**, grades 10-12, remained at its location on East First Street.
- 1967** **Cherryville Junior High School**, a modern structure, was completed to house students, grades 7-9, on Ridge Avenue. The 22-acre site was purchased in 1965 from J. Sid Carpenter and the heirs of Dr. Robert Morrison. Construction costs exceeded \$700,000.
- 1981** **Cherryville Junior Senior High School**, a second, circular addition was built onto the Cherryville Junior High, to house the Junior High and Senior High classes.
- 2005** **Starnes Auditorium**, the old high school **Annex** and **Cafeteria**, were all converted to accommodate 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades into **W. Blaine Beam Intermediate School**.

# CHERRYVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

700 EAST ACADEMY STREET

Building Size:	66,473 Sq.Ft.
Capacity:	500
Grade Level:	K-3
Year Built:	1956, '63, '75, '96
Site Size:	17 Acres
Capital Needs:	\$2-4M



## HISTORY

Cherryville Elementary is a K-3 school located on East Academy Street in Cherryville. The school opened in 1956 as Cherryville East Elementary housing grades 1-6. In 1966 the school housed only grades 1 and 2 and in 1973 Kindergarten and grade 3 were added. Several building projects have expanded the school and with the district's reorganization to grades 6-8 middle schools/9-12 high schools, Cherryville East became Cherryville Elementary housing grades K-5. To accommodate growth, W. Blaine Beam Intermediate School opened in 2004 housing grades 4 and 5; thus allowing Cherryville Elementary to house grades K-3.

## SITE PLAN



## PROJECT NEEDS

- Carpentry
- Electrical
- Furniture
- HVAC
- Life Safety
- Paving/Site Work
- Plumbing
- Roofing
- Other

# W.B. BEAM INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

401 EAST FIRST STREET

Building Size:	31,956 Sq.Ft.
Capacity:	221
Grade Level:	4-5
Year Built:	1948, '51, '61, '04
Site Size:	12.9 Acres
Capital Needs:	\$1-3M



## HISTORY

Located on East First Street in Cherryville, William Blaine Beam Intermediate houses grades 4 and 5. The school opened in 2004 on the campus of the former Cherryville High School. Three classrooms, Starnes Auditorium and band room, administration areas and cafeteria that were part of the former high school were renovated along with a new classroom wing, comprise this school. The school also has access to Nixon Gym which is part of the former high school and continues to be used by the current high school. The school is named for late Cherryville resident William Blaine Beam who served on the Cherryville Board of Education for 12 years, and he worked to obtain the land where the current Cherryville High was built.

## SITE PLAN



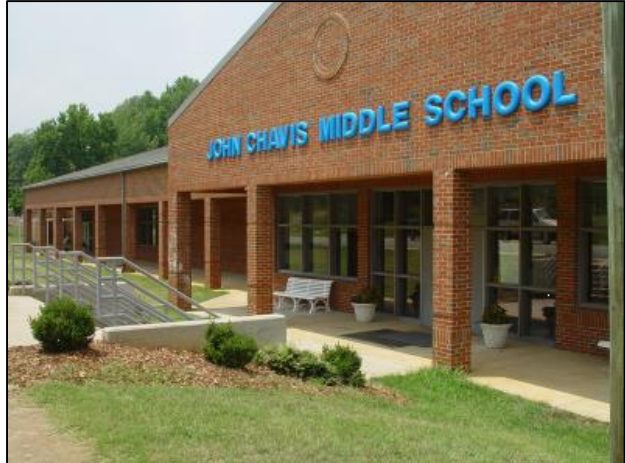
## PROJECT NEEDS

- Auditoriums
- Carpentry
- Electrical
- Furniture
- Life Safety
- Paving/Site Work
- Plumbing
- Roofing

# JOHN CHAVIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

103 SOUTH CHAVIS DRIVE

Building Size:	68,366 Sq.Ft.
Capacity:	619
Grade Level:	6-8
Year Built:	1951, '54, '64, '94 '98
Site Size:	10.7 Acres
Capital Needs:	\$4-6M



## HISTORY

John Chavis is a grades 6-8 middle school located on South Chavis Drive in Cherryville. The original school was John Chavis High serving African American students in grades 1-11. The school was named for John Chavis, a pre-Civil War free black educator and Presbyterian minister in the southern US. The main building burned in 1964; rebuilding was completed the same year. With the integration of Cherryville schools in 1966, the school became Cherryville South Elementary housing grades 3 and 4. In 1973, grade 3 was moved to Cherryville East Elementary, the old West School was closed and grades 5 and 6 were added to Cherryville South. As part of the district's move to grades 6-8 middle schools/9-12 high schools, in 1997 the school was reorganized and renamed John Chavis Middle housing grades 6-8.

## SITE PLAN



## PROJECT NEEDS

- Auditoriums
- Carpentry
- Electrical
- HVAC
- Life Safety
- Paving/Site Work
- Plumbing
- Other



## Cherryville, NC - Impact of Present and Future Growth

Recently, there have been many discussions concerning the possibility of shutting down W. Blaine Beam Intermediate School, which would result in the relocation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade to Cherryville Elementary, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade to John Chavis Middle School.

While the City of Cherryville believes there are many reasons this would not be a wise move, the most concerning is the present and future growth in Cherryville. Numbers may be down this year in student enrollment; however, there is very distinct and real growth in Cherryville as a whole.

There have been several residential developments approved over the past two years, and they are in various stages of development:

- Calico Creek is approved for 504 homes. This development had 28 permits issued in 2024, 14 permits in 2025, and 10 permits in the first quarter of 2026. With occupancy of first residents into this development occurring in the Fall of 2025, today there are approximately 34 homes occupied, with many more under construction.
- Arcadia is approved for 386 single-family homes and 104 townhomes for a total of 490 residences. This development has recently received final plat approval for the first 99 homes, and development is scheduled to begin in September 2026.
- Rutherford Crossing Apartments was given a certificate of occupancy, and tenants began to move in during March of 2026. The complex has 124 units presently being occupied and has plans for an additional 50-unit expansion to be built in the next couple of years.
- There are 8 duplexes planned and approved, providing another 16 residential units.
- Another single-family home development was approved earlier this year (yet to be named, Black Rock Road, Cherryville). Construction dates are to be announced, but 64 single-family homes are planned for this development.

### Building Permits Issued in Cherryville, NC

**2024:** 46 new construction permits issued - Single Family Homes, and Duplexes.

**2025:** 54 new construction permits issued - Single Family Homes

**2026:** 41 new construction permits issued so far this year - Single Family Homes

Based on the above statistics, not to mention the other general growth (retail, restaurant, etc.) which Cherryville is experiencing, the City of Cherryville feels it would not be prudent and extremely short-sighted to close Beam Intermediate.

In 2005, Beam Intermediate was developed to alleviate the extreme overcrowding at Cherryville Elementary. Twenty years later, in consideration of the present growth in Cherryville, the City of Cherryville respectfully asks that the Gaston County Board of Education reconsider these discussions and discontinue any process and action to close Beam Intermediate.

This information was compiled and presented on behalf of the City of Cherryville by:

Mayor Wade H. Stroupe, Jr. and City Manager Brian Dalton

*City of Cherryville*

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**Delivery Schedule Assumptions for Residential Growth**

School Year	Calico Creek SFH	Arcadia SFH	Arcadia Townhomes	Rutherford Apts	Rutherford Expansion Apts	Duplex Units	Black Rock Rd SFH
2024-25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2025-26	34	0	0	124	0	0	0
2026-27	60	16	4	0	0	0	0
2027-28	70	39	11	0	25	16	16
2028-29	70	55	15	0	25	0	16
2029-30	70	63	17	0	0	0	16
2030-31	60	63	17	0	0	0	16
2031-32	50	55	15	0	0	0	0
2032-33	40	47	13	0	0	0	0
2033-34	30	32	8	0	0	0	0
2034-35	20	16	4	0	0	0	0

Moderate Scenario  
current ADM by grade plus the approved housing pipeline

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
2024-25	90	98	97	87	99	93	132	141	141	125	132	115	103
2025-26	92	101	100	89	102	95	136	145	145	128	136	118	106
2026-27	95	103	102	92	104	98	139	148	148	131	139	121	108
2027-28	99	108	107	96	109	102	145	155	155	137	145	127	113
2028-29	103	113	112	100	114	107	152	162	162	144	152	132	118
2029-30	108	118	116	104	119	112	158	169	169	150	158	138	124
2030-31	112	122	121	108	123	116	165	176	176	156	165	143	128
2031-32	115	126	124	112	127	119	169	181	181	160	169	147	132
2032-33	118	129	127	114	130	122	173	185	185	164	173	151	135
2033-34	120	131	129	116	132	124	176	188	188	166	176	153	137
2034-35	121	132	130	117	133	125	177	190	190	168	177	155	138

	Cherryville Elementary (K-3)	Beam Intermediate (4-5)	John Chavis Middle (6-8)	Cherryville High (9-12)	Total K-12	Cherryville Elementary (K-3) Util %	Beam Intermediate (4-5) Util %	John Chavis Middle (6-8) Util %	Cherryville High (9-12) Util %
2024-25	372	192	414	475	1453	74.4	86.9	66.9	67.2
2025-26	382	197	426	488	1493	76.4	89.1	68.8	69
2026-27	392	202	435	499	1528	78.4	91.4	70.3	70.6
2027-28	410	211	455	522	1598	82	95.5	73.5	73.8
2028-29	428	221	476	546	1671	85.6	100	76.9	77.2
2029-30	446	231	496	570	1743	89.2	104.5	80.1	80.6
2030-31	463	239	517	592	1811	92.6	108.1	83.5	83.7
2031-32	477	246	531	608	1862	95.4	111.3	85.8	86
2032-33	488	252	543	623	1906	97.6	114	87.7	88.1
2033-34	496	256	552	632	1936	99.2	115.8	89.2	89.4
2034-35	500	258	557	638	1953	100	116.7		

## Cherryville Elementary Capital Needs

1. Security improvements
  - a. Security cameras that work
  - b. Exterior doors that lock
  - c. Intercom system that works properly
2. Plumbing issues
  - a. No Hot water in classrooms or bathrooms
  - b. Water fountains need updating/water bottle dispensing capabilities
    - i. Currently closed due to safety concerns
    - ii. Been this way for 2 years
3. HVAC Issues
  - a. Halls hot in Spring/Summer, Cold in Winter
  - b. Poor air quality
4. Updates needed
  - a. Teachers' lounge bathroom
  - b. Floors throughout building
    - i. Old filthy carpet in some areas
  - c. New smart boards
    - i. Can not use county provided lessons because the boards do not work.
5. Desks are needed
  - a. Some classes operate without enough
6. Courtyard and Nature Trail need to be cleaned up
  - a. Downed trees on trail
  - b. Graffiti on bench on trail with hate speech
  - c. Courtyard has fish pond that is registered as a protected space in NC
    - i. Needs maintenance
7. Playground needs updating
  - a. New equipment
  - b. New basketball goals

## John Chavis Middle School Capital Needs

1. Broken A/C
  - a. Currently there is a portable A/C trailer hooked up to the school.
  - b. Portable A/C unit went out on April 30th
2. Plumbing
  - a. Bathrooms are constantly shut down due to pipe issues
  - b. Water fountains broken
  - c. Water filters need replacing
3. Security Cameras do not work properly
4. Field drainage beside school
  - a. Every time it rains, water puddles significantly
5. Ceiling tiles in multipurpose room fell due to excess rain and water damage on April 30th
6. Cafeteria is insufficient if 5th grade merges
  - a. Will they have to eat in the classroom?
7. If 5th grade is merged, will a playground be built for them to have recess?