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## Fitzgerald School Board approves plan to re-open Schofield Elementary

*Re-opening Schofield Elementary creates opportunity to realign grades for better results*

WARREN, Mich. — **Fitzgerald Public Schools** will re-open Schofield Elementary this fall under a plan approved unanimously by the School Board Thursday night. The plan also includes reconfiguring each elementary school by grade. This will allow the district to address its shortage of classroom space and boost student achievement.

“Fitzgerald Public Schools is growing and we are seeing more young families enrolling their children in our elementary schools each year,” **said Elizabeth Smith, Fitzgerald School Board president**. “As more families come to Fitzgerald, we are committed to maintaining quality and ensuring all students have the opportunity to learn in a nurturing environment.”

The plan involves re-opening Schofield Elementary School and turning each elementary building into a school focused on one developmental stage. The district will place preschool and kindergarten in an early childhood center at Schofield Elementary. Grades 1-3 will be at Westview, and the upper elementary grades of 4 and 5 will be at Mound Park.

Earlier this school year, the Fitzgerald board asked **Superintendent Barbara VanSweden** to research ways to add more space for elementary students. Fitzgerald is one of only two districts in Macomb County to add students this school year, and nearly all of the new students were in the elementary grades. Most notably, the largest growth was in kindergarten, where there were 30 more students than expected and a class section had to be added.

For the year ahead, Fitzgerald anticipates an additional 25 kindergartners, and projections indicate this level of enrollment will hold steady. The problem was that the district’s two elementary buildings don’t have room for two more sections per grade as these students advance through their education.

In researching the options, VanSweden turned to Schofield Elementary as a viable and economical way to meet the need by next school year. The building was closed three years ago amid budget cuts and is still in good condition. Re-opening Schofield also created the opportunity to shift the district’s elementary grades. With three elementary buildings, the school district could place students in buildings according to their grade, not according to where they live in the district.

“We are doing a great job here at Fitzgerald, yet we are always looking for more ways to improve.” **VanSweden** said. “We have known for quite some time that this grade configuration works well in districts like ours. We are small and our buildings are close together. For districts like ours, there can be gains in achievement and in overall sense of community.”

This approach allows everything in a building, from curriculum to teacher professional development, to be focused around one developmental stage. Administrators and staff can focus all lesson planning, technology, media center material, staff development, academic interventions, behavior strategies, and special projects around one developmental stage. Teachers grow from being part of a bigger team, and the kids grow from being together throughout their entire education.

“The impact it can have on student learning is highly promising,” **VanSweden** said. “Just as important, this structure has a major impact on school cohesiveness. Our children and their families will get to know one another from the first day onward through graduation. Districts that have taken this approach tell me the bonds create a sense of community that is beyond measure.”

For more information about the re-opening of Schofield Elementary and the grade reconfiguration, visit [fitz.k12.mi.us/reopen-schofield-elementary](http://fitz.k12.mi.us/reopen-schofield-elementary).

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