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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jeffco Board decides fate of schools

Members of the Jefferson County Board of Education have decided to close Russell Elementary in Arvada after listening to hours of comment from the community Thursday night. Three other schools that were on the proposed closure list — Pleasant View Elementary, O'Connell and Wheat Ridge middle schools — will remain open. Students from Russell Elementary will be going to a newly created K-8 school located in the Arvada Middle School.

“This has been an incredibly difficult process for our community. There just weren't any good choices. We still have to face the hard task of dealing with our capacity issues,” said board president, Dave Thomas.

Hundreds of people filled the board room and more than 60 community members, including students, went before the board to express opinions.

“We saw how much our community cares about their schools and that is a wonderful outcome from this long and very emotional dialogue,” said Thomas.

Along with voting to close Russell Elementary, the board also approved a motion to close, sell, (when appropriate) or demolish all temporary buildings at school sites that are at 92 percent enrollment capacity or less. In addition, board members approved moving the Arvada West preschool to Fitzmorris Elementary and moving Swanson preschool to Secrest Elementary. Those changes help eliminate cottages and temporary buildings. By implementing all of the changes, the district is saving approximately \$1.27 million a year. The cost to implement all of the options will be up to \$2.1 million in one-time capital investment costs. The district plans to sell Russell Elementary, which carries a substantial real estate value that has yet to be determined.

The facilities review process began in March 2009 with the convening of the Facilities Usage Committee; a 30-member group made up of community members and district staff. They worked for eight months and produced a list of recommended options to the board. A series of public hearings were held in the fall to gather community input on the proposed options.

Board members say this isn't the end of the facilities usage work.

“We are committed to continuing this process that not only addresses the number of empty seats in the district, but also helps us in our ongoing budget crisis,” Thomas said.

Jeffco will be making \$40 million in cuts over the next two years. If the district had not built financial reserves, which will be spent down over the next two years, Jeffco would be facing \$100 million in reductions over the next two years.

