

Duluth Public Schools: Long Range Facilities Project

Since April 2006, a lot of work has been done related to the Long Range Facilities Project by Johnson Controls, the Citizens Group assisting with this project, and many people involved in the Duluth Public Schools. Assessments were conducted, in-depth reports compiled and much time and effort invested in communicating with the community and gathering important feedback related to our facilities. This includes more than 10,000 hours of expert analysis and over 120 meetings with organizations and groups including parents, community members, staff and students. In addition, we conducted twelve open community meetings and gathered information via email, fax, phone, and one-on-one conversations. We will continue to share information and gather considerations throughout this important project.

Members of the community are invited to share advice and considerations by emailing Keith Dixon at keith.dixon@duluth.k12.mn.us or sending a letter to Keith Dixon, Superintendent, Duluth Public Schools, 215 North 1st Avenue East, Duluth, MN 55802.

While what goes on inside a school building is of primary importance, the state of the building is important, too, in terms of safety, comfort and how conducive the space is to current educational programs. Developing a long range facilities plan that the majority of our community can support will ensure our children have safe, comfortable and efficient schools for the next 20-30 years.

It's important to clarify the outcomes during this phase of the process. We're working to determine the number of schools, identify where they need to be located, and create financial parameters for each of them. Once a solution is adopted, we'll develop an implementation strategy to share with the community. Tasks include discussing schools of the future and the programs we want in these buildings, spending time designing the new or remodeled schools, developing a plan for construction that keeps students and staff safe, finalizing the financial plan, and creating a transition plan for those schools and properties not used so they can return to the community for an appropriate alternative use.

A few key points regarding the Long Range Facilities project:

- The goal of previous plans was to determine which schools to close. This process will help develop a plan for all buildings in our district and will include which are good for the long run, which need updating or upgrades, and which need to be replaced. While the plan may include closing a school, that's not its primary purpose.
- We're going into the process without any preconceived notions of what the final plan should look like. We're starting with a clean slate.
- This process will be facilitated by a third party consultant with experience and expertise in developing long-range facilities plans. The consultant recommended for the project, Johnson Controls, Inc., has helped school districts in Minnesota and across the country develop facilities plans.

- The community will be involved with the development of this plan from the beginning to the end. Previous processes did not include a formal and comprehensive communication plan – this one will.
- This process will include development of a financial plan to support the long-range plan. Without financial support, we don't have a plan

Choosing an experienced firm to help:

In January 2006, local agencies were invited to submit proposals for helping the district develop a facilities plan; we received eight. In early March, members of our facilities management department and administration and representatives from the community heard presentations from three facilities consulting firms and overwhelmingly recommended Johnson Controls.

Johnson Controls has experience helping schools with facility planning, demographic research, identifying funding alternatives, and analyzing educational adequacy. They're a respected national firm with an office in Duluth and employees who live in Duluth. They've worked successfully with other Minnesota school districts on similar projects, including Mounds View, Elk River, Grand Rapids, Brainerd and Superintendent Keith Dixon's former school district, Faribault.

Of the eight firms that submitted proposals, Johnson Controls took the most comprehensive approach to the project, from assessment to development of a plan to implementation. Having one firm do the entire project ensures accountability. They also bring to the table the most resources in terms of personnel, communication, and finances. Johnson Controls will ensure all necessary data is assembled and correct to allow our staff, community and school board members to make decisions based on solid, factual information. During the first phase of the project, Johnson Controls will work with community members, district staff and other organizations to conduct an in-depth assessment of our buildings and the demographics of the Duluth area.

A group of citizens offer support:

We've also recruited a group of citizens to help facilitate and communicate the process and build community. It's important to note that during development of the plan, the district will seek ongoing input from key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, administrators, parent leadership from the PTA's and PTSA's, representatives from our Desegregation/Integration Council and the Parent Advisory Council for Special Education, among others.

Members:

Charlie Bell
Bob Brooks
Jim Caesar
Chuck Campbell
Maria Danz
Ron DeGrio

M. George Downs
Ann Glumac
Linda Grover
Dave Gunderson
Mary Hautajarvi
Sally Hedtke
Rick Holmstrom
Cheryl Hynes
Stan Kaitfors
Pam Kramer
Jana Krause
Mimi Larson
Mark McShane
Sue Mills Moriarty
Pearl Munic
Erik Nelson
Al Netland
Lara Nygaard
Craig Olson
Jodi Peterson
Robert Powless
Greg Sandbulte
John Scott
William Spehar
Loly Stoffel
Melissa Taylor
Frank Wanner
Claudie Washington
Roger Wedin

District Members

Keith Dixon
Bill Hanson
Katie Kaufman
Kerry Leider
Greg Maus
Nancy Nilsen
Dave Spooner

Sharing information and taking feedback:

Johnson Controls spent the first week in May 2006 gathering information from principals, teachers, administrators, students, parent leadership from the PTA's and PTSA's, representatives from the district's Desegregation/Integration Council and the

Parent Advisory Council for Special Education, among others. They also conducted a session with community members representing a cross section of business people, young adults and senior citizens, people of color, labor and management, parents, people from East Duluth, West Duluth, Central Hillside, and others. Since then they've also met with Early Childhood parents and staff. Talking with these groups and others helped us develop preliminary criteria regarding what's important to people in our schools:

Doing the Right Things:

- Protect the health and safety of students and staff
- Protect all school occupants during emergency situations
- Assure healthy indoor learning environments
- Comply with all applicable codes and regulations
- Provide high performance learning environments
- Keep class sizes small
- Provide state-of-the-art laboratory and vocational facilities in the schools
- Provide basic technology capabilities in all classrooms (e.g., internet, video, e-boards, wireless)
- Provide state-of-the-art athletic facilities for a variety of activities
- Improve facility infrastructure
- Design facilities that are easy to operate and maintain
- Improve the energy efficiency of the facilities and equipment
- Provide flexibility to easily update technology in the future
- Improve the reliability of technology systems and infrastructure
- Design facilities that can be easily modified and/or expanded in the future

For the Right Reasons:

- Increase community usage and collaboration
- Increase collaboration between schools and the city of Duluth
- Design facilities for increased community use
- Integrate early childhood education into the schools
- Increase collaboration between schools and community organizations/businesses
- Include community services in each school (e.g., fitness center, clinic, library)
- Provide facilities that address the needs of all students
- Provide adequate building access to students with special needs
- Design all learning spaces for integration of students with special needs
- Design facilities to respond to a variety of learning styles/approaches
- Support the increased use of assistive technology in the classroom
- Provide facility and educational equity across the district
- Provide program equity between schools across the district
- Locate schools in a manner that encourages diversity and integration
- Assure adequate input from under represented community groups
- Assure that all facility decisions are made in a fair/equitable manner

The Right Way:

- Maintain effective financial stewardship
- Assure that all projects are completed in a fiscally responsible way
- Secure adequate funding for capital investments
- Assure high levels of facility performance after construction/renovation
- Complete facility projects on budget/schedule
- Secure high levels of community support
- Create a compelling vision that the whole community can embrace
- Maintain high levels of communication with all key stakeholder groups
- Increase community acceptance of change across the district

Johnson Controls conducted in-depth, professional assessments of all buildings and properties owned by the Duluth School District. Assessments began in late June 2006.

Assessments include, but are not limited to:

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS, which would include classroom size, environmental controls, storage; learning aids and technology such as PCs, TVs, whiteboards, e-boards, outlets, distance learning; spatial relationships including circulation, way-finding and signage; program support related to general education, labs, vocational, athletics, music, art, media, work prep area, among others; building capacity for programs, administration, restrooms, dining, etc.

HEALTH & SAFETY: Visibility from street, neighboring homes & businesses, lighting; Fenced playgrounds with visual observation & safe equipment; Safe vehicle operation: drop-offs, bus loading, student crossings; Designated visitor entrance with controlled locking for all doors; Electronic access control & CCTV monitoring systems; Student circulation space with adequate supervision; Code compliance; communication systems; natural lighting, acoustics and others.

FACILITY INFRASTRUCTURE: Lots/walks/fields, parking & playground capacity; Walls, roofing, windows, doors; Ventilation, heating, cooling, plumbing, comfort, energy efficiency; LAN/WAN, communications and others.

STUDENT NEEDS including Special Education, Gifted and Talented Program, Early Childhood and Community Education.

COMMUNITY USE: Pre-school and latchkey children; Daycare and counseling; Health services; Community sports and recreation; Cultural art and exhibitions; Civic and private organization meetings; Adult education; Wellness centers Library and media centers; Vocational & technical education.

FACILITY & EDUCATION EQUITY: Neighborhood proximity; Transportation options; Diversity and integration ; Educational programs; Facility condition; Facility amenities (A/C); Facility resources for education, athletics, arts and music, among others.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP including Operating costs, Transportation costs, Staffing & administration costs, Capital improvement costs, Future expansion costs, Acquisition & disposition, Life cycle cost analysis, Funding sources and others.

Working With The Community: Beginning in June 2006, members of the Citizens Group and Duluth Public Schools staff began meeting with community groups and organizations to share information and gather feedback. Information was also continuously shared through the district website, in the media, in newsletters and other communication venues. Members of the public shared feedback through meetings, emails, letters and phone calls, among other communication venues.

THE FOUR REPORTS: Over the summer of 2006, Johnson Controls Inc. worked with hundreds of professionals to study demographics, assess our buildings and properties, and study the educational adequacy of our school spaces. Those reports were shared with the public in December 2006 through the media, district website, community meetings, and a mailing to residents. They are available to the public on our website or by calling 218-336-8735.

Demographic Report
Building Assessment Report
Market Value Report
Educational Adequacy Report

Again, members of the public were invited to share their thoughts and advice through meetings, emails, letters and phone calls.

THREE OPTIONS FOR A LONG RANGE FACILITIES PLAN: The results of the four reports and the feedback received from the public were used to create three options for a long-range facilities plan. The three options, Red, White and Blue, were shared with the public in March 2007 via the media, district website, community meetings and a mailing to taxpayers, among other communication venues.

By implementing any of the options, the district and community can create cost effective, quality educational spaces for students while reducing the impact of the project on taxpayers. For example, the \$257 million cost for the Red Plan can be reduced by over 50% through energy and cost savings of up to \$5.5 million annually; selling unused land and properties for approximately \$20 million; and utilizing grants, rebates and other alternative funding opportunities. The remaining cost (about \$100 million) is paid by property taxes. For example, a home valued at \$125,100 (the median value of a home in Duluth) would pay \$8 to \$10 a month.

More important, through these solutions we will have an opportunity to make improvements that will provide state of the art learning labs, high performance classrooms, and safe and healthy environments where our students and staff can live

and grow together. We can create a culture that gives our students a compelling sense of future and hope.

We have a great public school tradition in Duluth, with strong loyalties to our neighborhoods, our alma maters and our memories. For many people, their symbol of Duluth is their school. We're proud of every school and their accomplishments. By making hard choices we can continue to build on our successes and create an even brighter future for our school district and community.

Again, members of the public were invited to share their thoughts and advice through meetings, emails, letters and phone calls, among other communication venues.

A SOLUTION: In May 2007, after more than 10,000 hours of expert analysis, nearly 100 meetings with organizations and groups, ten open community meetings, information appearing over 100 times in local media including television, radio, newspaper, newsletters, websites, and eblogs, information gathered via email, fax, phone, and one-on-one conversations, and after studying the results of a professional public opinion survey, The Citizens Group and the Duluth School administration recommended the Red Option as the Long Range Facilities Plan for the Duluth Public Schools.

Again, members of the public were invited to share their thoughts and advice through meetings, emails, letters and phone calls, among other communication venues.

SCHOOL BOARD APPROVAL: During its regular meeting June 19, 2007, the Duluth School Board approved the Red Option as the Long Range Facilities Plan.

IMPLEMENTING THE LONG RANGE FACILITIES PLAN: Next Steps as of June 2007

- Prepare a Review & Comment document and submit it to the Minnesota Department of Education as required by MS 123B.70 and 123B.71.
- Continue working with the school board and the community on possible boundary adjustments for the eastern and western middle schools and high schools.
- Develop specific implementation plans including, but not limited to: construction phasing schedules, specific project budgets, and student transition plans.
- Commence with detailed designs for specific projects, prepare construction plans & specifications, and complete all necessary pre-construction work.
- Commence the process for disposition of the following non-school sites:
 1. Arrowhead Property
 2. Chester Property
 3. Garfield Storage
 4. Hartley Property

5. Facilities Management

- At the appropriate times as defined by the construction phasing schedule, commence with school closing proceedings in accordance with MS 123B.51 and the Policies of the District and any other applicable requirements, for the following locations.
 1. Laura MacArthur Elementary (school to be replaced with a new school at same location)
 2. Lester Park Elementary (school to be replaced with a new school at same location)
 3. Lincoln Park School (school to be consolidated with Piedmont in a new school to be constructed at new location)
 4. Nettleton Elementary (school to be consolidated with Grant at existing Grant site)
 5. Piedmont Elementary (school to be consolidated with Lincoln Park in a new school to be constructed at new location)
 6. Rockridge Elementary (school to be consolidated with Lester Park in a new school to be constructed at existing Lester Park site)
 7. Morgan Park Middle School
 8. Woodland Middle School
 9. Central High School (unless used as a middle school)
- Commence with identification and negotiation of land to be acquired as identified in the Red Option. Options to purchase land may be secured where necessary to protect the District's interests.
- Develop new transportation plans for use during implementation of the Long-range Facilities Plan and for projected use upon completion of the Long-range Facilities Plan.
- Commence any other appropriate action to implement this Long-range Facilities Plan.

NOVEMBER 2007: MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION APPROVES THE MAJORITY OF THE PLAN

After a thorough and detailed evaluation of the long-range facilities plan, the Minnesota Department of Education issued a favorable review of the majority of the proposal. The decision does not include the portion of the proposal to construct two new schools on sites yet to be chosen (Lincoln/Piedmont and the new western middle school). We understand and appreciate the Department's desire to wait until specific sites are identified before issuing a final review and comment for these two projects.

The Department does not take the responsibility of review and comment lightly; their decision to issue a favorable review reaffirmed the work of the volunteer Citizens Group, staff, Johnson Controls, school board, and all the residents of Duluth who took part in the planning process.

Frequently Asked Questions:

What is the earliest construction could begin on the long-range facilities plan?

Updating of newer schools like Lowell, Stowe and Lakewood could begin as early as spring/summer of 2008.

When will students start to be significantly impacted by construction?

The earliest major changes such as building new schools or consolidating schools would occur is the fall of 2009 and the entire long range facilities plan will take from 5-6 years to implement. Changes to high schools will occur toward the end of the project.

When will the discussion about programming in the new schools take place?

It's already started within the district through staff committees studying the elementary, middle and high school days. We'll run a process similar to that used for the Long Range Facilities Plan to generate community discussion and input regarding programs.

How can the community get involved in that discussion?

As with the Long Range Facilities planning process, we'll share information through the media, our website, community meetings, mailings, newsletters and other communication venues. People will be encouraged to share their advice and considerations via community meetings, email, phone, fax and regular mail, among others. The process will begin this fall.

Will the district purchase property around any of the existing school sites under the red plan? Yes, it's possible property acquisition may occur around some of our sites, and there are property allocation dollars in the plan. As design consultants are brought on board, they'll assist in evaluating the different facility and site needs. There has been no determination as to what direction the properties will be expanded at any site at this time. We expect implementation and construction plans to be completed this fall.

When will the public be able to access detailed cost analysis for the work being done at each school? Architects and engineering consultants will begin work on schematic and detailed designs this winter. As bids are received by the district for individual construction projects, all bids will be read publicly. People will be able to see where every dollar is spent and when it is spent. Johnson Controls will assure total scope of work as described in solutions report is delivered.

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