

## **New Western Middle School Will Benefit Students and Community**



At the core of the Long Range Facilities Plan is a commitment to providing the best educational facilities for our students now and well into the future, while ensuring maximum value for taxpayers. The new Western Middle School, located on the Wheeler North site, is the only site in the city that can deliver on both of these goals. A new middle school on the Wheeler North site (between 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue West and 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue West off of Grand Avenue, just north of the existing softball fields) will provide our students with a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education, while creating a new hub for community activities in the western half of our city. The new middle school will total approximately 200,000 square feet and serve up to 1,200 students.

### **City of Duluth, Engineers, Education Experts and Community Members Worked Together to Recommend Wheeler North**

Over the course of 4 months, Duluth Public Schools worked in partnership with the City of Duluth's planning office, Johnson Controls, Inc., Duluth-based LHB, Inc. architects and engineers and local Duluth general contractors to evaluate 3 potential sites for the new western Middle school. Evaluations were based on an extensive list of criteria, including site size and location, proximity to students and neighborhood access, development costs, property acquisition, utility needs, environmental factors and above all, the site's ability to support the best possible education for Duluth's students.

### **Education Benefits of Wheeler North Site Exceed All Other Potential Sites**

After months of thorough evaluation, expert analysis and community input, the School Board selected Wheeler North as the best possible location for a Western Middle School.

#### **Wheeler North Site Will Increase Access and Walkability for Students and Families**

The Wheeler North site is the most central location of any potential sites, by geography and student population density. This will decrease the time it takes for parents and students to get to the school, increasing family participation in school events and freeing up valuable time for homework and family activities. Up to 150 students will potentially walk to the Wheeler North site – far more than for any other site.

#### **Wheeler North Will Enhance Learning Opportunities and Community Interaction**

In addition to its proximity to students, the Wheeler North site is within 1 mile of over 200 acres of City park land, including community sports venues and walking trails. Not only will students have access to superior hands-on learning opportunities (Wheeler North is the only site able to provide this level of access to natural habitats), the surrounding community will benefit from the enhanced recreational resources the school will provide. The result will be a thriving community dynamic in and around the new middle school.

#### **New School Will Feature State-of-the-Art Education Resources**

Building a brand new school on the Wheeler North site will provide students on the western side of Duluth access to the same state-of-the-art learning environment found at other new schools throughout the District. Students attending the new western middle school will benefit from bigger, better classrooms, modern science labs, computer access, specialized learning resources and unique recreational opportunities that can only be provided in a new school building. Patchwork upgrades to existing facilities such as Central High School or Morgan Park would fall far short of the modern learning advantages the new western middle school will provide.

#### **New School Will Provide Safe, Healthy Environment for Teaching and Learning**

We know that a safe, healthy environment plays a critical role in student achievement. The new western middle school will provide a comfortable, secure learning environment for all students and teachers. Following LEED® Certification guidelines, the new school will maximize natural indoor lighting, optimize indoor air quality and circulation and maximize outdoor amenities. Investments in modern security features will ensure students and teachers are able to focus on what's most important – getting the best possible education.

## **Wheeler North Will Reduce Costs for Taxpayers**

The Wheeler North site is the most central of all possible locations for a new Western Middle School, situated at the heart of its student population. Not only does this site provide the best access for students and the surrounding community, it also guarantees a better value for taxpayers.

### ***Wheeler North Will Decrease Student Bus Time and Save on Transportation Costs***

Wheeler North students will spend an average of 50 minutes per day traveling by bus to and from school. By comparison, these same students going to Central would spend an average of 70 minutes per day on the bus. Because Wheeler North is located in the center of the student population it serves, students will save transportation time, resulting in more hours during the school year for activities, homework and family time. Many more students will be able to walk to Wheeler North – about 150, as opposed to only 50 walkers at Morgan Park and no walkers at Central. Looking at future expenditures for both sites, Wheeler North would require 2 – 3 fewer bus routes than the Central site, saving the District and taxpayers approximately \$120,000 per year.

### ***Wheeler North Will Reduce Development Costs and Save Taxpayer Dollars***

All potential sites for a Western Middle School will require significant development costs. Both the Wheeler North and Central sites require a significant investment – however, investments in the Wheeler North site will provide maximum value to taxpayers, while ensuring the best education benefits for students and access for the surrounding community. In fact, development on the Wheeler North site will cost taxpayers approximately \$3.1 million less than the investment needed for the Central site.

## **Mitigation Steps Will Ensure Surrounding Habitat and Wetlands are Protected**

The environment surrounding the new Western Middle School will offer students and neighbors unique learning and recreational opportunities. Duluth Public Schools is committed to identifying all potential environmental impacts related to construction of a new school on this site and will work with the proper regulatory agencies to ensure steps are taken to mitigate and compensate for any impacts.

As a first step, an Environmental Assessment Worksheet is being developed to identify potential environmental considerations prior to construction on the site. This EAW will be submitted for review by the City of Duluth Planning Commission so that appropriate mitigation steps are identified and discussed by the community. Duluth Public Schools is committed to preserving the natural habitat surrounding the new Western Middle School for students and neighbors to enjoy for generations to come.

## **School Access Points and Traffic Patterns**

Vehicle access to the Wheeler North site is planned at two locations. The main entry to the new Western Middle School will come from the south and connect to West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Grand Avenue, a major artery that runs west to east through the City. Vehicles from other areas of the District can access West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Grand Avenue from 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue West and 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, both of which have exit ramps off Interstate 35. This new entrance will create safe neighborhood access to the Western Middle School and provide additional neighborhood access to West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. The secondary neighborhood and emergency entrance will be a new road at the northeast corner of the site.

Pedestrian access to the Wheeler North site will be available from the south via new sidewalks off of West 3<sup>rd</sup> Street/Grand Avenue and from the east via new sidewalks connecting to Wellington and Vernon.

## **Next Steps for the New Western Middle School**

Construction on the new western middle school at North Wheeler is scheduled to begin in April 2010 and be completed by August 2012. Students on the western side of the city can expect to attend their new middle school beginning in the fall of 2012. Information and updates on the progress of the new western middle school, including design schematics and construction progress, will be available at [www.ChooseDuluthSchools.com](http://www.ChooseDuluthSchools.com).