

Wausau School District

May 25, 2012

Facilities Utilization Task Force work concludes

One of the Shared Key Interests guiding the Wausau School District is:

Provide safe, secure, flexible, inviting, and well-maintained environments that nurture student well-being and enhance teaching and learning.

To address this Interest, the District convened a Facilities Utilization Task Force (FUTF) in December 2011. The diverse group of parents, teachers, community members, School Board members, and District administrators was led by architect Dean Beeninga of ATS&R Planners/Architects/ Engineers.

Over the next several months the FUTF met six times to address immediate and future issues facing the District including enrollment changes, adequate and appropriate instructional spaces, capital improvements to existing facilities, technology connectivity, integration, and expansion, and growth in District charter schools.

To prepare for these meetings, each WSD school developed a Site Team that shared a snapshot of their school's top educational and facility needs. Beeninga conducted site visits at each school and met with Site Teams to compile the information they shared. All of this became background for the FUTF.

The Task Force work began by reviewing site information, enrollment data and projections, changes in demographics, and current effective facilities and 21st Century learning needs research. This work showed that though the District had been on a downward trend in student population over the past few years, it was poised to increase by approximately 5% or more in the next decade. Planning to accommodate these students in 21st century learning environments would need to be addressed for long term student success.

The Task Force also discovered the District has some immediate needs. Elementary school enrollment imbalances have caused some students to attend schools outside their own neighborhoods. The District has some aging buildings, which require higher operational costs. Additionally, safety and security challenges were also noted.

Task Force members sifted through the data and began to formulate possible options for addressing the District's facility issues. Though members of the Task Force would be the first to say they did not have all the information, time, or expertise they needed to make final recommendations to the Board of Education, their work did lead to several options they felt should be studied further by the District to deal proactively with ongoing facility needs.

The leading options presented by the Task Force to the Board of Education Operations Committee on May 21, 2012, included:

OPTION I

- Study elementary school boundaries and bring recommendations to the Board of Education for more appropriately balancing school enrollments.
- Study closing the A.C. Kiefer Educational Center and developing a plan for alternate placement of the District's 4-year-old kindergarten and early childhood programs. (This option is largely supported because of the need to infuse over \$2 million into A.C. Kiefer to deal with basic infrastructure needs. This cash outlay would not provide more effective instructional space needs the facility is currently unable to meet.)
- Study the option of closing the one-section Hewitt-Texas Elementary School and constructing a new larger elementary school strategically situated to stabilize student enrollments across the District.
- Study an addition to Stettin Elementary School to accommodate student population growth in that area of the District.

OPTION II

- Study the possibility of realigning District grade levels as follows: 4K-4th grade—elementary; 5th grade through 8th grade—middle school; and 9th grade through 12th grade—high school.
- Adding additions to John Muir and Horace Mann Middle Schools.

Any of these Options or their components will need to be studied during a second phase to understand the financial, educational, and operational impacts of possible decisions. Final decisions about any of these Options, or modifications to them, will be made by the Board of Education following extensive study and communication with both District and community stakeholders. The District will require adequate time to purposefully plan, prepare, and transition through any changes.

A great deal of work will take place across the District during the 2012-2013 school year, as teams conduct in-depth studies of these issues. All of this work will be grounded in the Shared Key Interests and the Wausau School District Mission to advance student learning, achievement, and success.