

Administrative
Recommendations
For Facilities

Presented
to
Wissahickon School District
Board of
School Directors

June 11, 2012

Background

A Board of Education in conjunction with its administrative team has a primary responsibility to plan for school facilities that address changing enrollment patterns and sustain high quality educational programs consistent with the policies of the Board of School Directors. They fulfill this responsibility through the facilities planning process. Long range educational facility planning is essential to identify the needed infrastructure to ensure success for each student. Over time school facilities change. Aging of the physical plant requires a program of maintenance, renovation and modernization. Designing new facilities and modifying existing facilities to keep current with program needs is both necessary and essential for future planning.

To that end, the Wissahickon School District Board of Directors in conjunction with the administrative team initiated two studies. The first study was designed to look at enrollment trends in the District. The Enrollment Projections Study was completed on May 24, 2010 by the Pennsylvania Economy League. The second study was the Facilities Report which was completed by Breslin/D'Huy on December 6, 2011. Each report was presented at a public meeting and televised for the community.

In addition to the studies there was a presentation completed by Mrs. Clark and Dr. Marchese on 21st Century Skills and Facilities at the March 26, 2012 Public Board Meeting. This presentation has been on our cable channel for public review since that time. The Board also held a Finance Committee Meeting on April 26, 2012 where two financial agencies, Oppenheimer and Public Financial Management gave a presentation on the financial health of the District and the potential borrowing capability of the District should a decision be made regarding future funding of building projects.

Over the past several months, the Board/administration has had two School Board Retreats. The first retreat in January included visitations of the high school, middle school and Lower Gwynedd Elementary School. The second retreat in February included touring the new Souderton Area High School facility in addition to touring a major retrofit project at Great Valley High School and construction of a new facility at Great Valley Middle School in the Great Valley School District.

Current Status/Factors to be Considered

Over the past several months the administration has been analyzing the utilization of schools in ways that are consistent with sound educational practice and reviewing the impact of facility changes on educational programs, related operating budget requirements, and on the community. Also, the administration has spent considerable time reviewing the data in both the enrollment and facilities report. The following factors have played a key role in the decision-making process.

- Educational Program, Achievement & 21st Century Preparation
- Enrollment Projections/Space Considerations
- Infrastructure/Maintenance (General Condition of Facilities)
- Cost Effectiveness: New Construction vs. Renovation
- Debt Level/Available Funding
- Community Impact

Five Essential Questions

In addition to the factors on the previous page, the administration worked through the voluminous data included in both the Enrollment Report and the Facilities Report. There were five essentials that guided us to the administrative recommendation.

These were:

- Does the enrollment trend in Wissahickon School District over the next 5-10 years appear to be declining and if so, how do we accommodate for decline?
- Are our buildings equipped to accommodate for 21st Century Learning skills necessary to train our graduates for the future?
- What is our current level of debt and borrowing capacity?
- How environmentally sound are our current facilities? How technologically equipped are they? What is the status of safety features in each building?
- How do we assess "community" support for the facilities recommendations?

Factors that influenced the Administrative Recommendation

As the administration continued their work during the spring of 2012 several facts were clearly evident. Note: These are not in any priority order.

- The high school has gone through a significant number of add-ons creating problems in the building. D and I Hall corridors at Wissahickon High School are below grade and have had significant flooding problems over the past several years.
- Enrollment in the secondary buildings are also on a smaller scale decline with approximately 100 less students in the middle school compared to the last 10 years and 50 less students in the last 5 years at the high school. This trend will continue as the elementary student's progress through our system.
- An area of impact with regard to the middle school is that the existing pool is approximately 40 years old. The high cost of repairs and the difficulty in maintaining ventilation and air quality is and has been extremely problematic.
- The ages of the elementary and secondary schools will require extensive facilities work necessary to keep them functional in meeting 21st Century teaching and learning standards. Reference: Facilities Report by Breslin, D'Huy – December 2011.
- The lack of an auditorium at the middle school has been problematic for many years. The only large space in the building is the gymnasium and that venue is completely inefficient for performance. Therefore, the only large area in the District for the many performances is the high school auditorium thus, the heavy usage by the middle school and elementary buildings has had a substantial impact on the high school facility for both usage and scheduling.
- Enrollment in the District is and has been declining in the elementary level. Since the 2001-2002 school year until now, enrollment has decreased by approximately 156 students. In looking at the capacity of our existing elementary buildings, this will yield an excess capacity of 592 students. In addition, live births in the community have continued to decline.

- Attendance boundaries are not commensurate with elementary school locale, thus creating inefficiencies in the transportation of elementary school students.
- Traffic pattern concerns continue to be a problem of major significance on the Houston Road campus at the high school, middle school and Lower Gwynedd Elementary School.

Administrative Recommendation

Given the above factors and the analysis of information derived from the Facilities Report, Enrollment Report and research on 21st Century skills and facilities, the administration recommends the following:

▪ **Secondary School Program**

- Construction of a new high school facility on a site proximate to the existing high school so as not to disturb any athletic fields and with a traffic pattern that provides a safer environment than the existing facility.
- Inclusion of a pool/natatorium at this site.
- Retention of the existing round gym, incorporated into the design specifications.
- Conversion of the existing middle school pool into an auditorium.

▪ **Elementary School Program**

- Close Mattison Avenue Elementary School at the conclusion of the 2012-13 school year.
- Plan for future elementary school consolidation consistent with projected enrollment trends.
- Evaluate elementary school facility upgrades consistent with consolidation/enrollment trends.

▪ **Facilities Plan Community Input Group**

- Immediately establish a Community Input Group to provide stakeholder perspectives relative to the enrollment and facility feasibility studies and the future impact on the Wissahickon School District.
- The Facilities Plan Community Input Group will be comprised of up to 20 members of various stakeholder groups which represent the Wissahickon School District community.
- Applications for participation on the committee should be submitted to Mr. Wade Coleman, Board Secretary through June 30th. Applications must include a resume.
- Committee will be appointed in July 2012.