Worthington Public Schools’ Space Utilization and Educational Planning

Conducted by ATS&R

The superintendent of the Worthington Public schools, under the direction of the School Board, has established a planning task force to assess the current space utilization challenges facing the district due largely to increases in the student population. The charge of the task force is to, “review all data related to current facility uses and potential uses and develop a set of ‘best case scenarios’ that ensure the cost efficient and education effectiveness of all school facilities.” Task force membership is in excess of thirty members including representatives from the school board, school administration, faculty and staff, businesses and community members at-large. The task force will come together in a series of meetings planned and designed to lead toward the development of a set of recommendations that will be forwarded to the School Board for its review and action as deemed appropriate. Contained within this document are the outcomes of a variety of activities taskforce members participated in throughout the planning process.

Meeting One-

In an effort to ensure that taskforce members’ expectations were met by the facilitation team, participants were asked to state what they hoped might be an outcome of the planning process. Below are those expectations.

Expectations of the Planning Taskforce Members

- Be informed and stay in the loop
- Collaborate and come up with ideas and solutions
- Understand the process of reaching a conclusion
- Get the word out into the community
- See what the issues are
- See what the public response to facilities might be
- Hear from the community
- Figure out how to develop a consensus around our needs
- Understand what timelines we might face
- See where we might ‘go’ regarding our facilities
- Cost of possible facilities
- Where are we going?
- What are our needs?
- Do we really need new facilities?
- What are our space crises?
- Become better informed
- How can we collaborate?
- Learn about the needs and options
- What are the needs of future generations?
- See what is best for us
Broader view of community/school interrelationships

Following this exercise, the task force was asked to identify, from the long list of expectations, key themes that might help them to focus their work in upcoming meetings.

Key Themes from Task Force Expectations

- People want the ‘facts’
- People want to be informed
- Communications is important
- Cost of facilities and the impact on ‘me’
- Answer the questions of ‘are our space issues real’
- Community wants to know whether space issues are truly ‘needed’
- Consider timelines
- How do alternatives affect educational growth

Facilitators’ Comments - It would appear that for the outcomes developed by the taskforce to be successfully implemented; they must be effectively communicated, ‘fact-based’ and include economic ramifications.

The task force was asked to look at what they perceived to be school and community assets; qualities that would assist them in their efforts to move forward in planning new facilities. The list of assets was generated through the use of small group discussions and large group presentations. The task force was divided into six (6) working groups for this activity. Below is the list of strengths. Strengths follow by a number in parentheses indicate that more than one group identified it as an attribute.

Perceptions of School/Community Strengths

- The overall quality of our education
- The quality of our teachers and staff (5)
- The quality of our administrators (2)
- The work of our school board (2)
- The variety of our programs offered to our students (5)
- Current investment in our school facilities
- Growing student population (4)
- Our diversity (4)
- Extra-curricular and co-curricular programs
- Community’s overall support of its schools (2)
- Quality of life in Worthington
- Fine arts programs
- Shared partnerships with businesses, community service organizations and the post-secondary
- Fiscal management
- Beautiful, well designed elementary school (2)
- Recognized quality of services for a diverse population
- Existing facilities are well maintained (2)
- Availability and utilization of technology (2)
- Strong agricultural community
Growing community (2)  
Good economic development  
Positive school community relations  
Positive changes in our open enrollment  
A community of forward thinkers

Facilitators’ Comments - The most often cited positive attributes were the i) quality of teachers and staff and ii) the educational opportunities provided to students. The growing student population and the changing nature of the student population were also cited as strengths.

At the same time task force members were asked to identify the strengths found within the school/community, they were also asked to identify weaknesses. Below is the list of weaknesses.

Perceptions of School/Community Weaknesses

- Unstable nature of our economy
- The level of our existing debt
- Lack of trust stemming from the current use of West (4)
- Lack of adequate space in our schools (2)
- Lack of housing in the community (2)
- Disengagement of our community in this issue (3)
- Reliance on one major business as an economic generator (2)
- Public’s perception of current mandated tests
- Growing population
- Needs of our diversity (2)
- Long-term viability of sustaining our growth
- Our poverty level is increasing (2)
- The average income of households in our community is low (2)
- Age-grouping currently in place in our middle school
- Seemingly ineffective communications between and among our diverse populations (i.e. srs./youth....)
- Condition of administration building
- Task force committee does not represent the community
- Rapid nature of changes in our community’s demographics
- Lack of knowledge of the ‘facts’
- History of the past projects
- Existing operating levy

Facilitators’ Comments - When compared to the list of strengths, there did not appear to be a strong ‘consensus’ set of ‘negative attributes’ that evolved out of the small group discussions. The one negative that generated the most discussion was the on-going utilization of West School; which was viewed as having a negative impact on the level of trust within the community. Other concerns which elicited multiple responses were related to the economic ‘health’ of the community and growing diversity.

Following two brief presentations, the first related to the process used by the facilitators to conduct its space analysis and the second related to the changing nature of education, task force members were provided with the opportunity to ask any question that they might have; questions that might influence their ability to successfully complete their responsibility. Below is the set of those questions.
Questions to be answered:

- What changes have taken place in education over the past 50 years - how does it look different?
- Are there options that might help us to address our space issues other than brick and mortar?
- How does our education system interact with our community in relationship to recreational needs?
- What do our administrators and teachers see as critical needs for changes in our facilities?
- How to we plan for, and accommodate, the unknown?
- What is the vision for the future?

Facilitators’ Comments- These questions appear to suggest that more information will need to be gathered as this process moves forward. Thoughts and ideas of faculty and staff are important as is the need to develop a greater sense of what education might look like in the future and how that might influence facility design and utilization.
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On Monday, October 8th, the second meeting of the district’s facility planning team was held in the high school media center. The meeting began at 6:30 p.m. and ended at approximately 9:00 p.m. Below are notes from this meeting as well as notes from a series of meetings conducted by the committee facilitators in interviews with students and teachers conducted prior to the meeting.

Meeting Two-

Committee members were provided an in-depth analysis of their current facility utilization by committee facilitators. This analysis included a careful review of how each school was scheduled throughout the day, and the subsequent impact on room utilization. In addition, the analysis provided committee members with data related to the efficiency of room utilization as compared to other similarly sized school districts. Finally, information was provided to the committee regarding classroom and site sizes in relation to state recommended guidelines. (Note: The presentation given to the committee members containing this information can be found on the District’s web site.)

Following the presentation of this information, committee members were asked to talk about what they had ‘heard.’ This was done in a small group setting. (Note: There were seven (7) groups formed for this exercise, each containing from three (3) to five (5) people.) Each group was asked to identify up to five (5) ‘takeaways’ from the information presented. They were also asked to identify what, if any, implications they might have on school facilities. Below is a consolidation of the thoughts and ideas developed by each small group. Results were reported out to the committee as a whole at the end of the meeting.

‘Takeaways’ from the Comprehensive Facility Review Presentation

- Using our current scheduling model, we are at our buildings’ capacities.
- Our existing facilities are at the ‘low end’ of recommended state guidelines relative to classroom sizes. (4)*
- Given the current enrollment trends and projections, within three (3) years we will be facing significant space issues. (3)
- The stairwells at the senior high school create congestion problems during passing time and are slightly below current recommended safety guidelines.
- When additions were added onto the senior high school and the middle school,

Implications for Our Facilities

- There are ways to improve the efficient use of our existing space.
- We will need to add more space in our buildings if keeping our class sizes low remains a priority.
- We can add some students to our buildings if we improve the efficiency in the use of our buildings.
- How much longer can we continue to be creative in how we schedule and use our buildings? When will begin to lose programs for our students?
- As a district, we may have to decide on our priorities: continuing to offer a variety of
core instructional areas such as gymnasiums, music and cafeteria were not expanded to accommodate enrollment growth. (3)

- The efficient use of space (such as locating teachers in central work areas) can lead to inefficient use of teacher time.
- The current use of our classrooms is heavily impacted by the number of ‘special’ classes that we now offer. (i.e. special education, ELL etc.)
- We are currently being very efficient in the way that we schedule and use our existing facilities. (2)
- Guidelines related to the recommended size of classrooms, stairways etc. change.
- There is a direct correlation between the size of the classroom and the class size (students in a class). Classrooms that are smaller in size and less than state guidelines are less capable of accommodating increases in the number of students in the room. (2)
- When talking about our facility utilization, we must take into consideration what ‘21st Century’ education will look like. (2)
- We must think about what our projected enrollments will be when planning any facility changes.
- In thinking ahead, we must consider the suggested building capacities against our reality of what the community wants and feels we need. (2)
- Some specialized spaces in our high school are underutilized when compared to the ‘regular’ classrooms such as math, social studies etc.
- We presently have excessive site size at both the middle school and elementary school and less than adequate size at the senior high school.
- The status quo is not a sufficient plan for our senior high school.
- Some subject areas such as math, science, band and choir currently have insufficient courses at WHS or focus on core subjects as a means of improving room utilization efficiencies.

- We need to know more about how technology might influence our space utilization challenges.
- We must keep in mind that our specialized courses and variety of options helps us to ‘attract’ students through open enrollment.
- We need to know more about how technology might influence our space utilization challenges.
- In all that we do, we must be considerate of costs to the community.
- The affordability of possible solutions may be impacted by the need to meet current state guidelines related to classroom size etc.
- The diversity of our student population mandates that we keep class sizes low.

- There remains strong community support for continuing to have small class sizes.
- We need time to plan for our future if our enrollment trends continue to grow.
space for their programs at WHS. (2)

- We must still take a careful look at programs such as early childhood, community education, special education and the integration collaborative when assessing our facility needs for the future.

*Notes the number of small groups that had the same or similar takeaway.

**Facilitators’ Comments-** Based upon the most frequently cited ‘takeaways’ from the GEMS analysis there appears to be a clear understanding that the majority of classrooms at both the middle school and senior high school are below accepted state guidelines. There is an equally strong recognition noted in the ‘implications’ that both class size (related to the number of students in a section/class) as well as course offerings are important attributes of the district that should remain as priorities. There also appears to be a consensus that growing enrollments are creating a ‘crunch’ in each building and that past school expansion to accommodate enrollment growth did not taken into consideration the need to expand not only classroom space, but core areas such as gymnasiums, cafeterias, restrooms and specialized rooms such as science labs (at WHS) and activity rooms (for elementary students). Several groups, when considering ‘implications’ for the future, noted that whatever solution(s) were generated, it needed to take into consideration the economic impact on the community. Moving forward, communications to build understanding, both internally with faculty and staff and externally with the community at large will be critical.

As noted, the facilitators spent time prior to the meeting, interviewing students, faculty and staff from Prairie Elementary, the Worthington Middle School and Worthington High School. The purpose of those meetings was to gather additional information for the task force members to consider. Below are highlights of some of the comments made by students from each building when asked to identify all the good things about their buildings as well as things they felt were less than adequate. They were also asked to share their thoughts about technology and how it is being used. Finally, they were asked to put on their ‘creative hats’ and share their ideas about what changes in their school might look like. (Note: From four (4) to six (6) students were in each group.)

**What They Said: Prairie Elementary Students**

### Building Assets

- The cafeteria is large and serves good food.
- The playground has four (4) separate play areas.
- The hallways are spacious and open.
- We have a large gym for us to use.
- The drop off areas for our parents is good and safe.

### Building Deficiencies

- We don’t like having to share our lockers in our classrooms with other students.
- We could use more laptops in our classrooms.

**New Ideas-** 1. We would like to have a place where we can come together and play games such as chess during lunch time. 2. We need more ‘activity’ rooms where we can do hands on things such as taking ‘stuff’ apart and putting it back together. 3. We could use more room for science labs to do
experiments. 4. It would be nice if we could replace our books with Nooks and/or Kindles; it would save a lot of space in our lockers and rooms. 5. The hallways are long; we could have moveable floors!

What They Said: Worthington Middle School Students

Building Assets
✓ We like that our grades are physically located in close proximity to reduce the need to walk far within the building.
✓ Our locker bays are secure.
✓ Every classroom has a Smart Board and our teachers are making good use of them.
✓ Our computers are fast.

Building Deficiencies
✓ Our lunchroom is too small to accommodate everyone comfortably.
✓ After school, when everyone getting ready to leave the building at the same time, the hallways are overcrowded and congested.
✓ Our locker bays are too congested.
✓ We do not have enough computer lab space; especially during the time we’re taking state required tests.

New Ideas- 1. Find a way to increase the size of our lunchroom.

What They Said: Worthington High School Students

Building Assets
✓ Our school is centrally located within our community.
✓ The ‘lobby’ space outside of the gym and adjacent to the office is a great place to gather with friends and to just ‘talk.’
✓ The student ‘flow’ throughout the building is good.
✓ We now have air conditioning in our classroom areas.
✓ The front of our school looks nice.
✓ Our gymnasium is full of history and has ‘character.’

Building Deficiencies
✓ We don’t have practice rooms for either band or orchestra students.
✓ We have too few science labs.
✓ Our lunch lines are too long.
✓ Our computer labs are not always accessible and require a long ‘lead’ time for our teachers to be able to use them.
✓ Our existing stairwells become bottlenecks during hall passing time.
✓ We do not have enough space for our math and English classes.
✓ We do not have enough gymnasium space to accommodate all activities during the winter season.
✓ Our media center is well planned and open to students. It provides a place to access technology, work in small groups or independently. It is open both before and after school.

✓ Most of our classrooms have Smart Boards. They are well used by our teachers.

✓ We lack an adequate number of students’ restrooms and their locations are not readily accessible to students in all parts of the building.

✓ Most of our problems with congestion and classroom space occur in the two-story addition.

New Ideas- 1. We need to expand our gymnasium space, science lab space and student restrooms. 2. We need to pay more attention to how students learn (their differences) and create more space for individualized (private) learning and small group activities. 3. We need greater access to computers. 4. Consideration should be given to expanding the use of Nooks and Kindles and creating one-two computer ratios. 5. Consideration should be given to adding another wing onto our school.

The facilitators also spent time prior to the meeting, interviewing faculty and staff from Prairie Elementary, the Worthington Middle School and Worthington High School. The purpose of those meetings was to gather additional information for the task force members to consider. Below are highlights of some of the comments made by staff from each building when asked to identify all the good things about their buildings as well as things they felt were less than adequate. They were also asked to share their thoughts about technology and how it is being used.

What They Said: Prairie Elementary Staff

Building Assets

✓ The building is fresh and bright. We’re fortunate to have such a nice building to work and teach in.

Building Deficiencies

✓ As the student population has grown, teachers in special programs such as RTI have had to move their instruction into large ‘activity’ areas outside of classrooms or in smaller rooms not designed for instruction.

✓ We could more space for student activities.

What They Said: Worthington Middle School Staff

Building Assets

✓ Our computers are fast.

✓ The separation of grades within our
building works well.

✓ Every classroom has a Smart Board and our teachers are making good use of them.

✓ Some rooms that are now being used for classrooms were not originally designed for that purpose. They lack in appropriate size and functionality.

✓ We do not have enough computer lab space; especially during the time we’re taking state required tests.

✓ We lack sufficient space immediately adjacent to our classrooms to conduct small group learning activities with our students.

✓ There is an inadequate amount of physical education space. Our health room is too small.

New Ideas- 1. Find a way to increase the size of our ‘core’ areas such as our lunchroom, gymnasium, restrooms, cafeteria and special needs classrooms.

What They Said: Worthington High School Staff

Building Assets

✓ We have good space for some of our course electives in industrial tech and ag.

✓ Our technology works well within our buildings.

✓ Our faculty has worked well together to maximize the use of our space such as the creation of the teacher ‘hub’.

Building Deficiencies

✓ We currently have six (6) science teachers assigned to five (5) science rooms and only one (1) science lab to serve this discipline.

✓ Our current gymnasium space sometimes has three (3) classes in a two (2) classroom space.

✓ We cannot efficiently get the one (1) mobile computer lab onto the second floor of the classroom wing because the elevator is not dependable.

✓ As we continue to gain in enrollment, the current gym, locker rooms, media center and cafeteria are all too small to accommodate that growth.

✓ Because of the need to schedule students/classes into a limited number of classrooms, some teachers do not have appropriate space for class preparation. (i.e. one teacher noted that he preps at a
There is no space in the current locker rooms for coaches to change. Storage space for uniforms and equipment is also inadequate.

We do not have sufficient or adequate space for related service providers. (i.e. appropriate testing areas for special education assessments.)

Current student lockers are too small and many are not properly operating. Students are sharing locker space.

Current restrooms need to be refurbished.

We do not have enough space for our math and English classes.

New Ideas - 1. We need to expand opportunities for students/staff to become engaged in the use of technology driven interactive instruction. (i.e. internet/television) 2. We need to find ways to provide adequate space for science labs, computers (technology) and core areas such as cafeteria, music and gyms.

Facilitators’ Comments - When examining the thoughts and ideas expressed by students and by faculty and staff in their respective buildings, there are a number of common threads that can be identified. For example, even though there is consistent agreement, and a common thread, between students and staff at Prairie Elementary School that it’s a really nice place to work and learn, both agree that the building provides less than adequate space for activity or project based instruction. Similarly, at the middle school, both the students as well as the faculty appear to be in agreement that the current arrangement of keeping students within close proximity of their age mates is a positive asset. On the other hand, common threads of deficiencies identified by both groups included the lack of adequate space in core areas such as the lunchroom and gymnasium thereby reducing the opportunities for students to gather and interact with one another. Also, the lack of sufficient access to computer labs was also a common thread between students and staff. At the senior high school, one overarching thread appears to be in the sheer imbalance between building assets and inadequacies. The students did cite building ‘amenities’ such as location and the presence of good places for students to gather. However, the strongest common threads between the students and faculty centered on building deficiencies, citing areas such as the, i) lack of adequate science lab space, ii) the location and number of student restrooms, and the iii) lack of access to computer labs.