

**20/20 Vision Committee
Summary Report
for the
Westlake City Schools' Facilities**

January 2009

The 20/20 Vision Committee consisted of a diverse group of people who represent our Westlake community. Each person took their job very seriously and the following report details the in-depth analysis and debate that was undertaken to address the long-term future of the Westlake City Schools' facilities. While opinions may have differed, it is with confidence that everyone, regardless of affiliation, strongly agreed there is a problem with the District's facilities that needs to be addressed responsibly and as soon as possible. Below is a summary of the 20/20 Vision Committee's efforts.

Overview

The Westlake City Schools face a possible facilities crisis in the near future due to aging buildings, rising costs and overcrowding. The average age of the facilities is 47 years old. The cost of just maintaining the buildings is growing, and the large-scale systemic replacements and repairs coming in the near future could devastate the operating budget of the District. To address these issues, the District is undertaking a proactive and data-driven process to educate the community about, and find a path to meet this challenge. The District, armed with data, reports, enrollment projections and a facilities focus group recommendation of further analysis, appointed this 20/20 Vision Committee in September, 2008, to help gather information and recommendations for the Board of Education to make informed decisions moving forward. The result of that work is this report and a set of recommendations and considerations for the Board.

After a facilities focus group and a series of community meetings, a Vision 20/20 Committee was formed. The Committee was made up of a variety of community members from different segments of Westlake including parents, business leaders, students and residents with no direct connection to the District.

The 20/20 Vision Committee was organized to develop a clear, well-planned vision for providing and maintaining facilities that will support the Westlake City Schools' mission to educate for excellence. The Committee was charged with the tasks of:

- Narrowing down master plans from the Ohio Schools Facility Commission (OSFC) and Lesko studies by identifying pros and challenges of each plan
- Suggesting adjustments to the master plans that would work best for the District and Westlake community
- Requesting and examining any new data
- Hearing from developers of the studies and touring facilities
- Reviewing all consequences and finer points of each plan
- Identifying related issues for further review by the Board of Education.

Over the course of nearly three months, the Committee met six times and was given data to assist in their analyses. The result is a well-vetted, data-driven, well analyzed

recommendation for moving forward with the Westlake City Schools Facilities in the 21st Century.

The Committee developed this report, recommendations, and other considerations for the Board of Education including the top two facilities options moving forward.

Data-Driven Process

Westlake residents are savvy decision-makers and have much to offer entities such as the schools in terms of educated opinions. As such, the District provided detailed data for their consideration.

Below is a summary of the data the Committee used in the decision making process and of the discussions from their meetings, the process, the meetings and the ultimate recommendations. Supporting documentation is attached to this report. These reports included:

- **2001-02 Facility Study from the OSFC**
- **2004-05 Land Use Study by Lesko & Associates**
- **Limited Internal Data (Land Use Study 2005)**
- **Enrollment projection studies-Spring 2002 and Spring 2007**
- **2007 enrollment projection update**
- **2008 Lesko Facilities Assessment**

In addition to this historical data, committee members were provided with a wide variety of data to help start discussions about the pros and challenges of each proposed facility plan. This data included the following:

- **Facility Condition Comparison** – The condition of each building was detailed in a variety of areas including heating, roofing, electrical, windows, foundation, lighting, technology and others. The condition and specific problems for each building in these areas was described to give the Committee a detailed look at the current facility challenges. (Source: The Westlake School District)
- **Building Summary** – The Committee was also given a breakdown of the square footage, number of classrooms, capacity, enrollment, and acreage of each building and the properties. (Source: The Westlake School District)
- **Floor Plans and Site Layout** – Diagrams of the various buildings and how they are situated on their current sites allowed the Committee to visualize how construction would occur without displacing students or how additions could be built onto current facilities. This also included green space and parking configurations. (Source: Lesko & Associates)
- **Enrollment Projections Report** – Overcrowding in the buildings is a major challenge for the current facilities. The Committee was provided with enrollment

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projections to show how this problem would affect every day operations. (Source: DeJong Healy)

- **District Expense Comparison** – The utility (electric, water and gas) expenses for the District were given from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2007. (Source: The Westlake School District)
- **Expenditure Per Pupil (Cuyahoga County)** – A countywide comparison of the expenditures per pupil since 1998 was also provided to committee members. This showed the Westlake Schools near the middle of the county when it came to per pupil expenditures. (Source: The Ohio Department of Education)
- **Election History** – The election history of the Westlake Schools and the surrounding school districts was distributed so committee members could see how other districts have funded building projects and to see their success rate. (Source: The Westlake School District and Surrounding Districts)
- **Grade Configuration Comparison** – Districts from around the state that have achieved Excellent with Distinction or Excellent designations from the Department of Education were compared by the configuration of their buildings. (Source: Ohio Department of Education)
- **Option Comparison** – The Lesko team came up with a set of options for facility configurations for the District. These 13 options were available to the Committee including the four (one option was broken down into two phases) the administration recommended. Each plan was broken down according to buildings. Each plan laid out whether a building would be new, renovated or eliminated. The Committee was shown the different grade configurations and projected enrollment. They were also given the estimated new, renovated and additional square footage. Finally the cost for each building in each plan was laid out and the total millage for each option was also given to the Committee. (Source: Lesko & Associates)

The Committee was given any and all additional data requested.

Committee Discussion Summary

The Committee met six times to discuss the possibility of new and/or renovated facilities for the Westlake City Schools and the various pros and challenges of the proposed facilities plans.

The first meeting consisted of an introduction of the mission and goals of the Committee and an introduction to the different types of data that was available. This included district finances like the annual maintenance costs that continue to grow, and the lack of permanent improvement funds to help maintain facilities. This meeting also reviewed the facilities plan recommendations and enrollment data. The steps the District has taken over

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the past year were also reviewed. These included building tours, OSFC replication study, telephone and online surveying of the community, and community forums.

The second meeting allowed for more in-depth discussion from the Committee. The group focused on adequate classroom space, music programs, athletics, and the arts and STEM programs as high educational priorities. These areas were noted as important in addition to core classroom space. The ability for space to be adaptable for future needs and the flexibility of different spaces was also discussed. Grade configuration was also a high priority when the Committee began discussing the different options. Moving the grade configuration more consistent with teacher licensure was seen as a possible positive option.

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (“SWOT”) analysis was then conducted in small groups for each facility option. The Committee listed the cost (as both a pro and challenge) for all the options, the flexibility of space, the loss or preservation of “neighborhood schools,” safety, and grade configuration when looking at each option.

The third meeting built on the discussions and data provided in the previous meetings and went more in-depth on the specifics of the narrowed plans. In this meeting the Committee started to narrow down the options they saw as being best suited for the District. The District also provided the millage amounts for each plan so the Committee had a better idea of what a ballot issue would require. Grade configuration and different options of funding the project (income tax) were part of the discussion.

In this meeting, Lesko & Associates were available for questions on the different plans. The Committee asked about what was included in the estimated costs, any energy savings with new buildings, size of buildings, and the availability of using spaces for multiple uses. The Committee also explored the advantages to following OSFC standards, timelines, and the benefits of new versus renovated and vice versa.

Small groups were asked to rank the options they felt were the best and Options A and B were clearly the top two options for the Committee.

Option A is a single phase project that would build a new high school, renovate and add on to the middle school, build a new 4-6 intermediate school and build two new elementary schools. The elementary schools would be configured pre-K through 1 and 2 through 3.

Option B is a single phase project that would include a new high school, renovate and add onto the middle school, and build a new 4-6 intermediate school and three new elementary schools. The elementary schools would be configured with two being K through 3 and one pre-K through 3.

With the plans narrowed down to two, the Committee discussed what additional information they needed during the fourth meeting. This discussion included anticipated changes for the student population and the academic impact. It also covered anticipated staff changes, grade level configurations, how to utilize the different locations for facilities

and transportation considerations. The Committee also emphasized the need to reach out to the community and tell the “story” about the condition of the facilities and the District will also need to have an explanation as to how the facilities ended up in the condition they are.

During the fifth meeting the District reported on feedback from the teachers on the two plans, the Committee had identified. While there wasn’t any significant disagreement with the plans there was some concern with the change in grade configuration change could be difficult. The Committee then completed a final SWOT analysis of only the two plans they identified.

The sixth meeting was a review of the final recommendations, clarifications of other considerations, and the tying of any loose ends from the previous meetings.

Facility Plan Recommendation

Based on all the information, discussion, consideration and study, the 20/20 Vision Committee’s recommends to the Board of Education adopt two possible options for building configurations:

- **Option A¹ – Five building grade-level configuration clustering grade levels (9-12, 7-8, 4-6, 2-3, and pre-K-1)**
- **Option B² – Six building regional elementary configuration (grade levels: 9-12, 7-8, 4-6, 2 schools as K-3, and 1 elementary as pre-K-3)**

Both plans move the 4th graders to a new intermediate school, call for a new high school and a renovated middle school with additions. The difference between the plans is in the elementary grade configuration. Therefore there was consensus on much of the plan.

Below is a description of the strengths and opportunities, and the weaknesses and threats of the final two facilities plans that were part of the Committee’s decision making process.

While there are threats and weaknesses that are listed, the Committee felt that the strengths and opportunities far outweighed those challenges. The Committee felt strongly that these two options are best for our schools and our community’s future.

Option A listed strengths and opportunities:

- Best value, innovation and long term strategy
- Advantages to the grade level configuration that would be established
- Synergy of instruction, aligning of certification, consistent/equitable instruction can be developed

¹ Option A is labeled Option 1A in the supporting materials

² Option B is labeled Option 3 in the supporting materials

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- Economic benefits of plan. There are cost savings in actual construction and maintenance costs of only five buildings
- Operational efficiencies (administrative, cafeterias)
- Age appropriate equipment (playgrounds)
- Properties available for other use
- New buildings increase desirability of living, doing business in and attracting families to Westlake
- Brings the District in line with surrounding districts and allows Westlake to compete.
- Offers more opportunities for collaboration among teachers
- Offers a world class education with new technology, labs
- Reduces duplication by investing more in grade-level buildings

Option A listed weaknesses and threats:

- Possible higher transportation costs
- Plan is costly and will be a challenge to sell to the community
- Possible increased traffic congestion
- Questions about what happens with current property and facilities. Some property will need to be used for athletic facilities
- Interruption of athletics and extracurricular activities during construction
- Project LINK (early drop off and late pick up for working parents) may be disrupted and will have to be addressed
- Students will have to use transition schools more and it may be a challenge to adjust
- Previous maintenance history. Does that impact voters looking at this plan as something they would support?
- Loss of neighborhood schools
- Lost smaller building environment
- We're doing great already, is this plan really necessary?
- All buildings will age at the same time
- Nostalgia, emotional connection to buildings

Option B listed strengths and opportunities:

- Design for the 21st century – ability to have equipment and environment so students prepared properly
- Smaller learning communities and community pride
- More flexibility and efficiency for the future
- Continue being a partner in the community, showing commitment to sustainability, good stewards of our environment
- Reduced administrative costs
- Leadership issue with older students working with younger students

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- Other organizations might find use for unused buildings
- Promised continued involvement in community
- Wider community involvement with three buildings spread throughout the community
- Ability to have multipurpose athletic facilities
- Schools play huge role in defining community – better educational opportunities, allows community to achieve excellence, as well as schools
- Familiar concept/proven success
- Improvement on the status quo
- More efficient (utilities etc)
- Targets needs for a world-class school system
- Renting/income opportunities
- Leadership opportunities remain for primary students
- Students develop long-term, in-depth relationships
- Operational savings
- Green building opportunities

Option B stated weaknesses and threats:

- Duplication of staff
- Perception that it allows for full-day kindergarten, but a higher cost associated with it
- Increased transportation for students
- Personnel shifting
- Redistricting
- Fear of change from the community and staff
- High cost to the taxpayers all at once
- Permanent improvement levy – haven't maintained buildings in the past
- People don't understand the magnitude of the problem
- With the closing of Dover there is a sense of loss
- Collaboration still a hurdle in K-3
- Don't know how schools impact the community for residents with no children in schools
- More expensive option

Additional Considerations

The Committee felt strongly that there were also a number of topics the Board of Education needed to consider while moving forward in the process.

Community Education Plan

The Committee urges that the Board and District staff engage the community and educate them to the existing facilities problems and issues.

Permanent Improvement Revenue Stream

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Any bond issue must include a way to maintain the buildings long term through a permanent improvement stream.

Building Spaces

- It is critically important to keep the following as top priorities: core academic spaces, interactive technology in classrooms, flexibility for expanded technology use labs/wireless, athletic areas, music areas.
- Also important is the flexibility of space, inclusion of spaces for the arts as a whole, and considerations for specialized learning (large group/STEM/etc.).
- In general, conference rooms, meeting rooms and small group learning areas would be nice to consider, but not as critical.

Enrollment Numbers

Assure the buildings are built to house each of the largest projected classes, as provided from the most recent enrollment projection study performed by DeJong and Healy.

Athletic Fields

Plans must include provisions to at least replace outdoor fields if they are eliminated during construction for football/soccer/lacrosse/baseball/softball and have a transition plan so there is minimal interruption to athletic events.

Timing

Despite a challenging economy, the Committee felt strongly that the District must put this issue on the ballot as soon as practicable and before the next operating issue. The Committee strongly feels that the issue must be addressed as a whole.

Partnerships

The Committee advises the District to partner/look into partnering with other community entities such as area hospitals in order to demonstrate the best utilization of community resources, to support community needs and to reduce costs.

The District should also consider working with the City as a partner to address City recreation needs as part of the plan which includes the utilization of unused/vacated land.

Programming

Should the Board determine that a grade-level configuration will be implemented then the Committee advises the District to utilize an effective process to determine the right grade-level set up by obtaining staff input and comparing with other grade-level configured districts. The Committee also recommends to the District that all elementary buildings must be able to house all-day kindergarten.

The members of The Vision 20/20 Committee, while diverse in its makeup, were chosen to represent the makeup of the Westlake community. The summary and recommendations

included in this report are representative of the committee's in-depth discussions of a wide variety of data and conversations of the administration, architecture firms and other committee members. Many more topics were discussed and can be reviewed on the website or through the summary notes provided.

Attachments

Members of the 20/20 Committee
Agendas
Meeting Notes
Enrollment projection studies-Spring 2002 and Spring 2007
2007 Enrollment Projection update
2008 Lesko Facilities Assessment
Facility Condition Comparison
Building Summary
Floor Plans and Site Layout
Enrollment Projections Report
District Expense Comparison
Expenditure Per Pupil (Cuyahoga County)
Election History
Grade Configuration Comparison
Option Comparison