

## **Westerville City School District Board of Education Work Session Summary**

*December 3, 2018*

The Westerville City School District Board of Education met in a work session from 6 p.m. to approximately 9:30 p.m. on Monday, December 3, 2018, at the Early Learning Center, 936 Eastwind Drive, Westerville. The meeting focused on facilities needs, instructional program opportunities, and developing a 10-year facilities master plan for the district.

Board members discussed the most recent research and feedback collected during ongoing community and staff engagement efforts. They agreed that the concept of enhancing safety and security at all schools continues to receive widespread support.

Facility needs at the middle and elementary school levels remained the focus of much of the Board's conversation. Board members noted that if they moved forward with building a new middle school in the southern end of the district, community members would need to know up front the effect on other middle schools.

An earlier concept regarding the possible use of Blendon as a site where other students would attend while their school was being renovated (e.g., "swing space"), and later as a location for innovative instructional programming, was not well received by community and staff members. This scenario assumed the construction of a new middle school in the southern end of the district. Board members directed the administration to explore other options to address middle school space needs, which could include an expansion of Blendon Middle School or operating five traditional middle schools.

Board members agreed that, given elementary capacity concerns, constructing an elementary school at the south end of the district remains a viable option. As the district's special education population has grown over the years, compliance with class size requirements has reduced the functional capacity of buildings in which special education units are located. This is because special education classrooms have lower mandated pupil-teacher ratios than traditional classrooms. Whereas one elementary teacher could educate 24 students in a general education classroom, it requires four classrooms and four teachers to educate 24 special education students in sections requiring a ratio of no more than six students per teacher.

To illustrate their point, Board members cited the capacities of Alcott Elementary (600 students) and Fouse Elementary (675 students). These are identical buildings with the same number of classrooms. Fouse, which does not have special education sections, has an enrollment of 633 students. Alcott, which does have special education sections, has an enrollment of 554 students. Both schools are nearing their respective capacities, given how their classroom space is used.

In addition to the concept of building a new elementary school, Board members asked the administration to explore the possible expansion and revitalization of magnet program opportunities for students at the elementary and middle school levels. Board members are interested in learning if this approach has the potential to alleviate crowded conditions in schools, with a goal being to minimize the disruption to present attendance boundaries while avoiding other potential unintended consequences.

The Board also discussed other possible ways to add capacity to existing facilities, such as expanding Longfellow Elementary and Blendon Middle. They noted, however, that throughout the community engagement process, participants have said they prefer smaller schools. There also has been support for expanding the district's All-Day Kindergarten Program. Some of the options being considered increase the district's operating

budget, so the challenge will be finding the balance between what the community desires and what it may feasibly support operationally. Most options under consideration would also require modifications to elementary and middle school attendance boundaries, while high school boundaries would remain as they are. Board members asked the administration to continue working on facilities and operating cost estimates for additional options now under consideration.

Board members indicated they believe there is community support for addressing the district's most urgent infrastructure needs and making significant renovations to some of its oldest buildings, which include Annehurst, Whittier, Hawthorne, Emerson and Longfellow elementary schools. Based upon community input, Board members also discussed possible renovations to Hanby Elementary. Members of the administration concurred, indicating that while exploring the construction of new facilities or expanding others, the district also needs to maintain its current fleet of schools over the next 10 years.

Board members discussed the original recommendation to demolish the old Central College Elementary building and retain the property. A few classrooms are being used by the county's Head Start program and many of the students enrolled in that program ultimately will be enrolled in the district's schools. Data indicate that students who enroll in Head Start perform better in school, so the Board would like to retain this relationship with the program if possible. Board members asked if there was a need to retain the property or if it could be sold to generate funds to pay for other identified facilities projects. This option will be considered after reviewing legal requirements for property disposition.

Board members noted that more community members are becoming aware of and support the district's facilities plans, but it is slightly early to seek voter support for additional funding. As a result, the Board will not consider placing an issue on the ballot this spring and will continue to engage the community to determine the best time to seek funding for its facilities needs and ongoing operating expenses.