

**ADMINISTRATORS LISTENING SESSION – FOCUSED CONVERSATION ABOUT  
HELENA PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACILITIES  
AND THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS THEY SUPPORT**

December 8, 2015

**Session Summary**

**CONVERSATION OBJECTIVES**

- Re-engage Administrators in thinking about the District’s facilities and the educational goals they support.
- Establish a productive conversation climate regardless of points of view.
- Provide some context for discussion.
- Collect information from Administrators that will help inform the School District in moving forward in facility planning.
- Explain what happens to input and encourage community interest and engagement as the process goes forward.

**COMPLETED AGENDA ITEMS**

**Introduction to the Session:**

**Welcome from the Superintendent**

Superintendent Kent Kultgen welcomed the District’s Administrators to the session and explained that he would like to re-start the conversation about facilities and how they support educational goals. He referred to information attached to the agenda that provided demographic data and a map showing the location of Helena Public Schools. Superintendent Kultgen explained that he and the Board of Trustees are hoping for an open, collaborative process with the community and staff and that only 3 steps have been defined at this point as follows:

- Recent conversation with City and County elected officials;
- Six community and 2 staff facilitated listening sessions (completed the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November and taking place this week);
- A statistically valid survey in January 2016 to affirm what was heard in the listening sessions and help determine next steps.

The Superintendent thanked the Administrative Team for coming and turned the meeting over to the facilitator.

**Role of the Facilitator, etc.**

The facilitator explained her role as process manager for the listening sessions and asked the Administrators to honor the following discussion ground rules to encourage productive and civil conversation in the meeting:

- Be open and candid – but without a “blunt instrument”.
- Respect that others have different points of view; to learn – keep an open mind.
- Manage your own communication – contribute to the productivity of the conversation.
- Recognize realities – individually and collectively.

### **“Important Questions”**

The facilitator explained that she was using a discussion tool called “Important Questions” to focus the conversation and that all participant responses would be recorded. Those questions and Administrator responses are as follows.

#### **“Warm up” – What do you want from the meeting today?**

- Some knowledge about the facilities process
- Increased understanding about where we are and where we are going with facilities
- Opportunity to revamp schools so the environment is improves, meets needs, and kids like schools (i.e., situation with cafeterias, etc.)
- Hear what other Administrators have to say

#### **What guiding principles are important to you as we talk about facilities and educational goals?**

We believe:

- That optimum learning is promoted through adequate, functional, flexible, well-planned space.
- That technology is a critical part of education in today’s world.
- In removing limits for opportunities.
- We believe that students and staff deserve safe and secure space.
- In fiscal responsibility.
- That schools are a community resource.
- That it’s critical to build trust among factions of the community.
- In being transparent.
- In honoring as many community interests as possible.
- That the District needs a long-term solution for facilities issues.
- That addressing the issues of one or two schools first (i.e., refurbishing; building new; repurposing, etc.) provides an opportunity for the community to see success and progress connected to educational goals and various interests.
- In working with the City and County for future improvements.

#### **What “interests” need to be recognized as the District plans for facilities improvement?**

- It’s in the interest of students to have a positive learning environment.
- It’s in the interest of students to have it recognized that they are different today – in needs, learning styles, and activities.
- It’s in the interest of students to be able to experience higher level learning... 21<sup>st</sup> century learning.
- It’s in the interest of students to experience hands-on learning.
- It’s in the interest of students to be technologically educated and equipped when they leave Helena Public Schools.
- It’s in the interest of students and staff to have healthy, safe, ADA accessible school environments (i.e., nurses able to adequately serve all schools; specialists able to meet the needs of students at all schools)

**What “interests”... cont.**

- It's in the interest of students and staff to not have facilities that hinder educational opportunities or extra-curricular activities.
- It's in the interest of the District to have the community aware of building/facilities issues.
- It's in the interest of the District to repair its relationship and disconnect with the community and with staff members.
- It's in the interest of the District to have daily positive interactions with and within schools.
- It's in the interest of local businesses and healthcare organizations to have students who can experience career and vocational education.
- It's in the interest of the District and the community to recognize that these are all “our kids”.
- It's in the interest of the District to solve transportation issues so children are not “going everywhere”.
- It's in the interest of the community to resolve issues that exist between factions in the area – city and county; state workers versus District workers, etc.
- It's in the interest of the community to have the District aware of the historic and nostalgic culture of the larger Helena community.
- It's in the interest of the larger Helena community and governments to have the School District acknowledge the needs of future land planning and predicted populations.

**What do you want to gain when planning for facilities improvement?**

- Space to deal with new challenges (academic and behavioral)
- Trust
- Community support
- Understanding of facility equity that is needed and what it's going to take to get there
- Safe learning environment – physical and emotional
- A funding platform that allows us to be responsive to educational needs of all students
- Collaborative community effort
- Everyone can answer positivity – What's in it for me?
- Improved facilities
- Permission to let go of some facilities
- A more informed community
- Larger audience
- Deliberate Marketing plan
- Connections with the community – with and without kids in school
- Honest, deliberate communication
- Effective strategies for a positive bond
- Flexibility in how we deliver instruction
- Awareness and understanding of changing models of delivery

**What do you not want to lose when planning for improved facilities?**

- Sense of community/collaborative culture
- High expectations for learning
- High levels of engagement
- Community support for schools
- Trust
- Staff because of poor working conditions
- Common sense when putting something forward (learn from the jail, fairgrounds, parks, recreation center, failed school bond, etc.)
- Mill levies
- Connections with the community – with and without kids in school
- Expertise rules over emotion

**How would you describe a useful process that engages the community?**

- Have a visible process (remove the “decision already made” impression)
- Engage all community groups: Emergency; Family Services; Probation; State departments; City/County governments
- Provide models (i.e., virtual tours)
- Develop understanding of what is “gained” and what it takes to get there
- Identify gaps
- Help people find what’s in it for them and for their children
- Create a constant process – should not be “an event”

**How would you describe a useful process that engages the school community?**

- Have a visible process
- Engage all school groups
- Define the “why”
- Provide models of educational adequacy/innovative (and the work space to support it)
- Virtual tours
- Identify gaps
- Create a constant process – should not be “an event”
- Help staff find what’s in it for their students

**What would success look like in the end?**

- “School as a hub (healthcare, technology, etc.)
- A constant process
- People of all communities more knowledgeable and supportive of the overall vision
- Communities feel heard and not pitted against each other
- What is created is in the best interest of student