

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

December 8, 2015

**Session Summary**

**CONVERSATION OBJECTIVES**

- Re-engage staff members 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 staff members that will help inform the School District in moving forward in facility planning.
- Explain what happens to tonight's 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 staff and other participants 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. The Superintendent explained that he and the School Board are hoping for an open, collaborative process with the staff and the community and that only these 3 steps have been defined:

- 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 those in attendance 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 participants 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.

She also pointed out the presence of Board members in the group and asked if they might be participants as long as they follow the ground rules. The group agreed and encouraged their participation.

### **“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 participant responses are as follows.

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

We believe:

- That all children deserve opportunities for challenging learning environments.
- That children should go to their neighborhood school.
- That parents should feel connected to and valued by the school their children attend.
- That all children have different needs.
- That the learning environment/space should contribute to student success for all students.
- That learning environments should be physically and emotionally safe.
- That technology is a basic need for our students and that up-to-date technology needs to be in the hands of students and teachers.
- That learning environments should be equitable including access to quality technology.
- That each school should have adequate resources and space (i.e., nurse, specialists, PE, etc.).
- In recognizing each schools’ uniqueness.
- That the needs of the students should be the primary criteria for the development of the budget.
- That teachers and students should have the resources they need to advance achievement.
- That spaces should be designed to be multi-purpose.
- That buildings can and should support community partnerships (e.g., 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts, hunter education, Grant Street, etc.).
- That quality education benefits the community as a whole.
- That student dignity and personal space should be valued.
- That school is a vital part of our downtown community.
- That children living in poverty need extra care.
- In taking advantage of and valuing our very diverse community.

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

- It’s in the interest of children to be in a safe and secure building.
- It’s in the interest of parents to have their kids attend neighborhood schools.
- It’s in the interest of para-professionals to have a safe and adequate place to productively work with kids.
- It’s in the interest of Special Education students and staff to have good space and enough staffing.
- It’s in the interest of students with social and emotional to have CSCT maintained.
- It’s in the interest of students and staff to have nurses available full time in buildings/.
- It’s in the interest of everyone to have comfortable buildings (i.e., warm in winter, etc.).
- It’s in the interest of students to be fed and have all basic needs met.

**What “interests”... cont.**

- It's in the interest of students to have their social and emotional needs met – not just academic.
- It's in the interest of students to learn in an environment where their individual needs can be met.
- It's in the interest of all students and staff to have access to technology.
- It's in the interest of specialists to be certified in their area and to have a consistent space.
- It's in the interest of the community to have a good gym for physical education and important to have all parts of a building safe and adequate.
- It's in the interest of all to have schools be a central part of the community.
- It's in the interest of students, families, staff and bus drivers to have safe and functional parking and loading and unloading areas.
- It's in the interest of students to have enough functional bathrooms.
- It's in the interest of staff to be able to wash/shower kids who need it – and to have a washer/dryer capability in the building.
- It's in the interest of students to have good, safe and engaging playgrounds that can be monitored.
- It's in the interest of students and teachers to have optimal numbers of students in their classes.
- It's in the interest of students not to spend hours on the bus.
- It's in the interest of students, families and staff to have designated, safe walking routes developed and emphasized.
- It's in the interest of students and educators to be able to work more collaboratively; to have better facilities; and to have specialists for each school.
- It's in the interest of the District to recognize the number of resources in the community and to expand those resources/connections and to express gratitude.
- It's in the interest of children living in poverty to have the best education possible.

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

- The community of each school
- Alternative education programs
- Specialists
- The facility space we have
- Cohesive plans for low income children
- Strong downtown school
- Neighborhood relationships with schools
- Resources/supports/programs
- Teachers
- Small class sizes
- School/community relationships

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

- Appropriate, safe science spaces
- Multi-purpose academic areas for science and art in elementary schools
- Small group learning spaces
- Safer facilities (lock down, etc.)
- Spaces that don't limit learning
- Facilities that can be maintained and cleaned
- Sufficient library and physical education spaces
- Specialists and para offices
- More physical education and athletic facilities/gyms
- Common gathering space for students before and after school
- Outside "play" space for K-12 (green)
- Contained play areas for special needs
- Safer parking
- Less but time for students
- Sufficient cafeterias
- Community trust with a bond process
- ADA access at all schools
- A new definition of "neighborhood"
- Increased staff space (bathrooms, work space)
- Lose traveling teachers
- Appropriate operational budget
- Temperature control/healthy air
- Healthy food; District control of food and transport
- Natural light
- Full-time nurses, technical support, psychologists for each building
- Technology and technology support; computer labs
- Flexible scheduling
- Small class sizes

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

- Have a quick resolution or plan for Central within 2 years and the money to support it.
- Provide more information on current conditions of buildings – perhaps a video with a summary of building issues.
- Assure FB representation of #2.
- Be able to answer – What's in it for me... for my child? And then – Here's what's going to happen and this is how it will impact learning.
- Talk to business people who have hired HSD alumni – to speak to the importance of quality education.
- Make the community aware of how better educated kids contribute to community viability.

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

- A quick and supported resolution to the Central issue
- The community understands the facility needs.