

**Facility Utilization Process**  
**Board of Education Work Session Update: September 22, 2009**

**Background**

At several Board meetings last year, **Board of Education members discussed values regarding existing facilities** and how smaller enrollments, especially in elementary schools, might be managed.

Some of the dominant themes in these discussions included the importance of:

- neighborhood schools that will be easily available to the community;
- focusing on students' education including improving their skills and knowledge;
- assuring equity in learning opportunities through high quality, safe facilities that enhance learning;
- basing decisions about school closure on impact on neighborhoods and community, the true cost of savings, and the possibility of repurposing or combining programs;
- minimizing transportation costs;
- accommodating innovations and developing continuity among existing programs;
- families experiencing support and acceptance through school population;
- contiguous boundary decisions; and,
- using existing Executive Limitation policies to guide processes.

Following discussion with the Board of Education, the district designed a Facility Utilization Process to develop recommendations for more efficient use of schools and to help balance enrollment across schools.

**PSD is studying efficient use of schools and ways to balance enrollment due to the following trends and situations occurring in the district:**

- PSD has uneven growth and some schools have more space available than in previous years;
- budget realities are requiring districts to look for more efficient ways to operate schools;
- grade level changes resulted in lower elementary school enrollments; and
- more families are exercising school choice, causing imbalances in enrollment that are difficult to adjust for with boundary changes given school of choice; and transportation does not provide bussing to choice students creating inequities of opportunity.

**To design a process**, the district reviewed processes used in other districts (Denver, Littleton, Colorado Springs). The district heard at budget meetings that participants desired assurance that facilities are used efficiently, and possibly close schools.

**With this in mind, the district conducted several studies.**

- A **Facility Study** examined building utilization and considered different scenarios in recommending optimal efficiencies. The facility committee's charge was to first consider placing programs in existing facilities. Then, the committee was asked to consider several scenarios that included the placement of Lab School for Creative Learning, placement of a K-12 Expeditionary Learning School, suggestions for closure to achieve efficiencies, and the consideration of a site for a 400 student specialty high school.

- **Focus groups** considered the issues around closing, combining and/or repurposing schools.
- A **Transportation Study** considered the feasibility of offering bussing in zones to offer choice in zones.

These studies built upon a **Small Schools Study** that designed a formula to fund the programs at smaller schools, as well as included a process to work with a community to evaluate small schools for consolidation.

**When considering the optimal efficiency of facilities, the Facility Study identified the following school facilities for possible consolidation or closure** – Moore, Stove Prairie, Red Feather, Riffenburgh, Lopez Elementary Schools and Cache La Poudre Middle School, Barton, Fullana, Washington (Lab school), and Mountain View (Polaris) based on different scenarios. The resulting efficiencies were based solely on the consideration of facility issues, administrative and program cost efficiencies.

The **Transportation Study** defines clear recommendations for how transportation could be provided in zones for an additional cost, and other recommendations required for these changes to be implemented.

**Focus group summaries** explained how district groups responded to a scenario considering closing, combining and/or repurposing schools.

**Executive Limitations (EL) require the district to act prudently** and to assure district stakeholders have a clear understanding of how educational services are to be provided. In 2006, one of these schools was identified as a candidate for closure. Otherwise, the other schools have not been publically identified before as candidates for closure. Without context, this announcement could create a high degree of uncertainty, thereby violating EL 2.1.7.

**The options the committee has created have identified schools that need to be studied in a more detailed way before serious consideration is made of a closure recommendation.** The identification of many schools for closure consideration may be judged imprudent to create the impression the district is considering closing so many schools.

As a result, the district has defined the committee work required in light of Board of Education EL 2.0 “the superintendent shall neither cause nor allow any organizational circumstances or action that is...imprudent” and EL 2.1 “Fail to establish a clear understanding of what may be expected, when it may be expected, and what may not be expected from the educational and other products and services offered.”

In order to communicate with the Board of Education about the impact of schools’ perceiving they may be closed that would fail to take into account the executive limitations, **the district has provided this information to the Board at a work session.** Steps are planned to explain the fact that school closure information is contained in a Facility Study, and that the options the committee has created need to be studied in a more detailed way before any considerations of a closure recommendation moves ahead. Further, school communities will be advised that the Facility Study did not take into account multiple factors that must be considered, such as neighborhood/community needs, transportation, education programs, and geographic isolation.

The design of the Facility Utilization Process envisions a committee that would produce recommendations for consideration.

In order to consider outcomes of the different studies and to develop a design for school facilities that takes into account neighborhood/community needs, educational programming, transportation, issues of geography, and other considerations, the district has created several options for a Facility Design Feasibility Committee to develop plans for enactment.

### **Facility Design Feasibility Study**

The Facility Design Feasibility Committee will:

- Find a location for Lab School for Creative Learning that will result in the enactment of the district recommendation in 2006 to close the Washington School facility.
- Study the feasibility of placing the Lab School in an existing school site and not a stand-alone site like Barton due to the increased cost to the district of operating an exceptionally small school that is not geographically isolated. In addition to Moore, and Riffenburgh, consider the Cache La Poudre schools given the Lab School's interest in moving to a K-8 configuration. When the Lab school is relocated, the Washington site would be offered for sale.
- Move Early Childhood Programs out of Fullana and Barton early childhood locations. Consider placements at Moore, Bauder, Riffenburgh and other elementary schools that may be affected by boundary considerations. Temporarily close Fullana and Barton for different programming considerations to be determined.
- Through inclusion of early childhood programs in smaller schools, PSD can develop opportunities for further consolidation of programs to support families with other community programs.
- Study the feasibility of moving Red Feather Elementary students to Livermore Elementary.
- Study the long-term feasibility of combining either Lopez Elementary or Riffenburgh Elementary with other existing schools within the next three or four years to provide a site for a small specialty high school that would not offer extracurricular athletics.

### **Basis for Feasibility Design Study**

The district has attempted to relocate Lab school to Bauder based on the high cost of remodeling the building to meet Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements. With fewer than 105 students, Lab receives a small school formula adjustment equivalent to more than 40% of the student base for the student weighted formula per student. While a small school might become available based upon other changes, if Lab were to relocate to a stand alone school, the school would only add to the high cost of the program to the district.

### **School size where poverty is a factor for children can be a positive influence on increasing achievement.**

“For low economic-status children and youth, a supportive educational atmosphere has an overwhelmingly positive effect. It can improve their

attitudes, help them learn more effectively, and transform their lives...A positive, supportive atmosphere contributes directly to a student's improvement in school attendance, academic achievement, and a positive attitude toward school and life" (in Kids Left Behind, Barr & Parret, 2007, p.212).

Districts that are able to align community services to coordinate the delivery of health and child advocacy services in these small schools enhance the educational environment for improved educational opportunities.

When the grade configuration recommendation was proposed in 2006, the enrollment trends in **the district suggested a small high school of 400-500 would help meet the secondary schools need for seats.** The Facility Study identified two sites for consideration. The sites identified are school sites located in a part of the district that is accessible to large numbers of students, and has a school design that might be adaptable for a specialized program.

### **Small School Study and Recommendations**

The Small School Study conducted in 2007-08 provided a formula for understanding the costs of offering similar programs at all schools. At the time of the study, assumptions were made to provide a rational funding formula for all elementary schools with the exception of PSD's three Mountain Schools.

The formula was designed based on the costs of junior highs prior to schools becoming middle schools. This portion of the study needs to be reconsidered. The study takes into account that differentiated resources are required based on school characteristics. When elementary schools become smaller, the resources generated on a per student basis become inadequate to deliver the core curriculum. The Small School Study envisioned a size of school that can no longer offer the programs a neighborhood school desires. This requires that a limit be placed on the adjustment. This needs to be done to assure the integrity of school funding. This limitation has been addressed partially when the formula was adopted by the district by limiting the adjustment to schools already in the district. Other limitations are needed to limit the cost of schools and to keep the costs of schools manageable.

**Given the need to continue to find efficiencies, the district will review the formula for small schools, including Mountain Schools, independently of the Facility Feasibility Committee.**