

The Lawrence School Board created an Elementary Facility Task Force in the spring of 2010 and directed the task force to:

“...recommend a community vision and plan for the school district’s elementary facilities that reflect the varied community and educational values and how to best reflect those values given the restraints of current and anticipated district resources.”

The Task Force first met on June 21st, 2010. Beginning in August, the group continued to meet every other Monday. Some meetings were held as a whole group and others were spent broken out into four subcommittees. These smaller groups were given the directive to delve deeper into the specifics of various issues and prepare a report for the full group to consider in reaching recommendations for the board. The four subgroups were loosely labeled Facilities, Efficiency, Neighborhood/Planning, and School/Class Size Research and History.

The following is a synopsis of the Task Force’s response to the nine specific directives given the Task Force by the board in the original “Task Force Charge.” The order is slightly different than in the original charge to reflect a logical flow. Some of the directives were researched by one subgroup and others reflect the work of multiple subgroups.

We encourage the board to read the full reports of each group, which are attached to this document. It should be noted that only this report has been approved by the whole Task Force. Nonetheless, the subgroup reports offer a great deal of context, detail and insight.

- 1. Review the history of current facilities, reflecting on when and why the community constructed these facilities. This review shall include a look at the educational programming existing at various times of construction.**

The history we have compiled takes a look at the number and nature of our community’s elementary schools for the past 70 years. It also provides some context for those schools with regard to enrollment, population, district expansion, the university, integration, school unification in Kansas, and other community factors.

What this history does not do is provide a detailed review of the educational programming taking place inside of the schools. We believe that the programming has changed dramatically through the decades as the needs and nature of students have changed. We believe that programming will continue to evolve and that facilities should be as flexible as possible so that physical space can be adapted to meet the needs of changing programming.

The buildings we have were built to reflect the best practices of the time they were built filtered by the limitation of funds that were available. Older buildings often were built without cafeterias, gyms, libraries, air conditioning, or any spaces beyond classrooms, a central office and a nurse’s office. Buildings were built within walking distance of most homes. Buildings have been modified and expanded on many occasions as enrollments changed, as programming evolved, and as funding permitted.

Our history divides our elementary schools into four phases of our community: Pre-World War II; Baby Boom, 1950 to 1968; Township Schools; and Spreading Out, 1986 to Present.

The population of Lawrence in 1870 was 8,320. By 1940, the population had grown by 70% and was still only 14,390. Four of our current schools fall into this Pre-WWII phase: Cordley, New York, Pinckney and Woodlawn.

Following the war, Lawrence experienced a time of rapid growth in the second-phase: Baby Boom, 1950 to 1968. Six of our current schools were built during this time: Deerfield, Broken Arrow, Hillcrest, Kennedy, Schwegler, and Sunset Hills. Two additional schools were built during this period but have since closed: Centennial and East Heights. By 1970, the population of Lawrence had grown to 45,698.

Our third phase, Township Schools, reflects a major change in education in Kansas that occurred in the 1960s as school district unification was implemented. Unification reduced the number of districts from 1,509 to 349 in a single year. In Lawrence, this meant the absorption of surrounding township district schools. Five schools were added in 1965 to the district as the result of unification: Wakarusa Valley, and the now closed Grant, India/Kaw Valley, and Riverside.

The final phase of our history, Spreading Out, runs from 1986 to the present. No new schools were constructed after Broken Arrow and Deerfield in 1968 until Quail Run was built in 1986. The community had continued to grow in population and it had also spread out. The population in 1960 of 32,858 fit into a town of about 8 square miles, for a density of 4,077 per square mile. As of 2009, our population was just over 92,000 in a city of 38 square miles, for a density of about 2,821 per square mile. In addition to Quail Run, Langston Hughes, Prairie Park, and Sunflower were built during this latest period.

2. Update and review the current physical condition of existing facilities.

The facilities committee put a great deal of effort into compiling an extensive list of the condition of each of our 15 elementary schools. Members toured each of the schools and worked with district and building staff as well as our consulting architects at Gould Evans Architects. The board will find their exhaustive report attached and should find it useful in deciding how to proceed with efforts to make needed capital improvements in our elementary schools.

Near term facilities management and long term planning is dependent on accurate information for the elementary schools included in this report, which total roughly 660,000 total square feet with a building replacement value of more than \$150 million. Based on age and condition the current value of many of these buildings is well below replacement value, but all are largely serviceable.

When the assessment turns to allocation of square footage and preferred classroom qualities like adequate daylight and support space of acceptable quantity and condition for the entire operation of an elementary schools – teaching, administration, professional educational support and operational staff -- only a few of the 15 Lawrence elementary schools individually meet standards this committee would find representing a best case for the buildings in the district.

There are instances of high quality spaces but also a significant number of deficiencies in allocation of space, original and current building systems' operation, resulting quality of space and overall building condition. And the notable exceptions are not limited to the most recent investments in new construction or to the conditions of the oldest buildings in the district. These public resources are a very mixed composition of workable spaces based on age, condition, past maintenance and reinvestment and current useable instructional and support spaces. Again, equity in facilities from Kennedy to Cordley to Langston Hughes and at all points in this community is important for the delivery of education and is a concern for the Task Force. Consistent with this goal the attached detailed report points to both current advantages and the need for significant reinvestment in many of these buildings.

In addition to the lack of equity based on age and upkeep that exists among and within individual schools, other facility related concerns include (but are not limited to): available quality of lighting, thermal comfort, indoor air quality, degree of personal space control, availability of electrical outlets, availability of storage space, square footage per classroom, space for part time vs. full time staff, quantity and quality of space available for specials/full and part time support staff, quantity and quality of general support spaces (library, gymnasium, cafeteria, etc.), availability of space for ½ day vs. full day kindergarten, and sinks in classrooms.

Such a lack of equity can result in community, parent, teacher/staff and student discontent. In addition, it typically translates into a higher Operations & Maintenance cost related to equipment upkeep and replacement, general facility maintenance, and the associated man-hours.

One detail contained in the attached report that we want to make specific note of is our concern regarding the district's use of portables. It is the general opinion of the Task Force that all portables should be eliminated entirely. This step alone will require a serious look at reinvestment at multiple schools. Along with being a compromise in equitable instructional and support space, an entire generation of portables still in use is evidence of a lack of effective capital planning which this current process needs to remedy.

We believe the attached report will serve as a strong foundation to move forward in meeting the capital and educational needs of our elementary schools.

3. Review educational research with regard to elementary school size and class size and the appropriate staffing for an elementary school.

The strong consensus of the Task Force is that a number of factors *other than* school size or class size are significantly more important to student success in our elementary schools. These other factors include the implementation of research-based best practices in classroom instruction, the delivery of effective instruction and behavior management by teachers who are passionate about what they do and who have appropriate training and support, the diversity of students being served (e.g., students with disabilities, English Language Learners, SES status), and overall resources to meet the learning needs of each and every student.

School Size Research

School size, while important, is not as essential to student achievement as are a number of other factors, primarily those related to quality teaching and effective teacher/student relationships.

The research on school size primarily looks at districts with much larger school populations than USD 497. According to the size definitions used by most of the research we reviewed, Lawrence schools fall into the small-to-medium school range (300 to 500 students). The District does not have any schools that would be considered large by research definitions (800-plus students).

To the extent that school size affects student achievement, the research generally indicates that the students who benefit the most from smaller schools are those with special needs or challenges—e.g., students with disabilities, low SES and ELL students. With respect to the research, however, “small” is a somewhat relative term. Schools with student populations around 300 children can successfully provide an effective blend of efficiency and academic benefit, particularly for students with special needs or challenges.

Class Size

Class size alone is not as important to student achievement as other factors such as quality teaching and effective teacher/student relationships. Research results on the relationship of class size to student achievement are inconsistent and do not lead to a universal or absolute number of students per classroom.

Conventional wisdom is that smaller class size is better for student learning. The empirical evidence, however, does not universally support this assertion and is challenging to interpret. Class size must be considered within the context of educational practices. Reducing class sizes from, for example, 25 students to 15 students, has minimal effects on student achievement. However, smaller and more reasonably sized classrooms are more conducive to the implementation of quality educational practices.

The vast majority of elementary classrooms in the District fall within the range of 15 to 25 students. The school-wide average of class sizes throughout the District ranges from 17.6 students at Wakarusa Valley to 24.3 students at Hillcrest. Going forward, the Board should be mindful that the optimum class size is dependent on the composition of students in the classroom; therefore, as with school size, certain student populations may benefit from classes trending toward the lower end of the ranges set out in current District policy (13 to 17 students in kindergarten through 3rd grade; 18 to 26 students in 4th through 6th grade). Also, the Board should strive to ensure that resources flow to individual classrooms according to the needs of the District’s students.

Best Practices

If school and class size are not the most important inputs to raise student achievement, then what interventions really matter? Research supports a number of other considerations.

- Attracting, developing, and retaining high quality teachers
- Improving teacher quality and clarity in the classroom
- Strengthening teacher-student relationships

- Streamlining cooperative learning practices across the District
- Employing multi-tiered teaching and instructional interventions

More details including specific suggestions and research citations are available in the attached report of the School/Class size subcommittee.

4. Review operating costs of various buildings and non-financial factors that the board should consider in determining the most efficient use of facilities. (originally number 5)

This is intended to only analyze operating costs and identify inefficiencies that may exist now and in the future. We realize that costs are not the only factor to consider, but given the current economic environment, they are extremely important to understand as the Task Force discusses what is both best and possible for our community.

Initially we looked at the cost of operating each elementary school, including teacher (certified staff), support, and administrative salaries, as well as costs of utilities, maintenance, and supplies. Although the capital outlay for school buildings is a legitimate cost of providing public education, we have left consideration of this to the larger task force. The capital outlay budget is managed from a district wide perspective and the allocation to a particular building can be confusing.

We used the firm pupil count as of September 20, 2010 to review the per school costs based on estimates for 2010-2011 with the elementary population being grades K-5.

Payroll is approximately 95% of the operating costs of the elementary schools. From our review, during the last few years of the budgeting process, the non-wage expenses for all elementary schools have already been scrutinized and do not represent a significant opportunity for further efficiency.

We reviewed both actual and average costs by position and expense item. In the end, we decided to use the average, rather than actual costs, so we would not discriminate against those schools with more experienced staffs. Also, we separated those costs associated with special funding sources (ESL, etc.) because those expenses follow the child to the school they attend. We observed that in some instances, these funding sources may help fill teacher gaps and bolster the pupil teacher ratio, however overall they are not a significant efficiency opportunity.

Once we identified the cost to operate each existing school, we divided the total cost by the number of pupils to show the average cost per pupil at each school. The range was \$3,616 per pupil at a school with greater than 500 students to \$5,886 per pupil at a school with enrollment less than 200. This variation was consistent across the district.

In addition, we reviewed a model of schools that illustrated the cost per pupil in one, two, three, four, and five section schools. Admittedly, there are currently no five section schools in Lawrence, however, we wanted to understand and compare how the cost per pupil changed with various sized schools. In this model, the cost per pupil was:

One section	\$5,259
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Two sections	\$4,199
Three sections	\$3,882
Four sections	\$3,616
Five sections	\$3,437

Conclusion: Larger schools are more cost effective than smaller schools.

Our next task was to determine what most affected this cost variation.

Classroom efficiency:

We reviewed how class size affects teacher staffing and the associated costs. The district has established a 25 to 1 pupil teacher ratio. When individual schools have too many students in a class, enough to cause the hiring of another teacher to split the class, that represents a cost that would have been avoided had the extra students attended another school which had class sizes that could have absorbed the students without adding personnel.

School populations fluctuate over time, frequently resulting in smaller school populations. This inefficiency could be addressed with changing attendance boundaries or consolidating schools. We looked at the capacity of the schools both individually and in the aggregate. Some schools do better than others, but that may vary from one year to another, making it virtually impossible to avoid frequent boundary changes. We also recognized that larger schools may have an easier time “right sizing” classes than smaller schools, but that may not always be the case.

Finally, we looked at the efficiency for the entire district of elementary schools for 2010-2011, where there are 15 schools with students in K-6 and 224 elementary teachers for 5,185 students. With a 25 to 1 pupil teacher ratio, that many students at 100% would require 207 teachers. This difference of 17 teachers, using average cost per teacher of \$53,024, would offer a \$ 901,408 savings, or 7.7% of the total expense for teachers

Conclusion: Given that 100% capacity is an impractical and/or an impossible goal, the district currently is doing a very good job of allocating the teachers. However, the district could save approximately \$110,000 annually for each percentage point increase.

Specials expenses:

The number of sections in a particular school had some efficiency considerations related to specials (art, music, and physical education). The ratio of specials to classes served suggests that one provider can serve up to 21 sections. If the school has fewer sections, then the provider must travel between schools, costing the district for travel and time lost from direct service to students. Although we did not identify an actual cost to schools with less than 21 sections, we considered it to be more efficient the closer we get to that guideline. With a K-5 configuration, the schools sections are as follows:

One section	6 classes
Two sections	12 classes
Three sections	18 classes
Four sections	24 classes

Conclusion: Three sections schools or larger are a more efficient use of the specials resources than one and two section schools.

Administrative expenses:

Every school has a principal, a media librarian, a head custodian and a secretary/administrative assistant, which are eliminated when two schools are consolidated. Although there are some other personnel expenses that increase with larger elementary schools, i.e. assistant secretary, assistant custodian, and a library assistant, as well as savings related to utilities and maintenance, the average cost per student is lower in the larger schools compared to the smaller ones.

We looked at both actual average expenses by building for 2010-2011, as well as a model created to compare schools with varying numbers of section. The model had the advantage of showing us potential savings with larger schools that currently do not exist in our district. The model illustrates that a two section school, assuming 100% classroom capacity is \$ 4,199 per student, compared to \$5,259 per student in a one section school. If two one section schools were consolidated into a two section school, the annual savings would be \$279,607.

Incidentally, the cost per student at three and four section schools is \$3,882 and \$3,616 respectively, indicating additional savings, but at a decreasing rate. Also, these numbers assume average costs for personnel, so actual savings would vary according to which schools were actually consolidated.

Conclusion: Since the cost of teacher and services increase with the number of pupils, the cost per pupil variation relates primarily to the cost of the principal, the media librarian, the school secretary and the custodian. Therefore, considering the consolidation of smaller schools represents the greatest opportunity for cost savings than either classroom capacity or non-wage expenses. Also, there may be some financial benefit with increasing the efficiency of the class sizes as related to the 25-1 guideline, but significant savings may require adjusting the school boundaries.

Additionally, streamlining the enrollment to get more schools closer to 100% capacity, without exceeding capacity, would be another way to determine schools that would be likely candidates for consolidation. New students to a school could be directed to schools with lower enrollments for that grade to help even out the enrollment.

5. Review and articulate the meaning or meanings of “neighborhood school.” (originally number 6)

The context of any discussion of our schools is one of relationships. Neighborhood schools have long been how families and “communities within communities” feel connected to their school. While neighborhood schools are typically associated with geographic areas, we support a broader concept, that of community schools. Community schools expand on the idea of a neighborhood school by creating a broader safety net for children and families. It includes a traditional neighborhood school but recognizes that many of our schools have a strong sense of community even though they may not be made up of a particular geographic area.

Community schools are characterized by strong relationships among teachers, students, parents, administrators and the surrounding neighborhood. Community schools are responsive to the needs of children and families that make up that community and support relationships that are dependable and adaptable.

Community schools are not necessarily geographically bound and values relationships over geographic space.

The school district should strive to create and maintain schools that embody such a community so that every school is a community school.

We found significant guidance from the Coalition for Community Schools’ publication “Making the Difference.” This publication lists five conditions it believes are necessary to create an environment where “all children can learn at high levels.”

The Conditions for Learning

1. The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
2. Students are motivated and engaged in learning — both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
3. The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
4. There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff.
5. Community engagement, together with school efforts, promote a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.

We believe that to support the concept of Community Schools, the board should:

- create and maintain schools where every individual associated with that school can discern their meaningful place within that community;
- deploy resources in a differentiated manner such that all schools receive the services and programs they need to ensure that every child lives up to his or her full potential (i.e. some schools may need different class size ratios or specialized programs to be successful);

- offer a mix of services for students and their families and support the growth of partnerships with internal and external stakeholders; and
- implement enhanced educational opportunities within individual schools to create communities which support other district values such as economic efficiency (by leveling out enrollment) and enhancement of cross cultural experiences.

We recognize that change is inevitable in a dynamic and changing community such as Lawrence. It is important that the district manages change in a manner to best guarantee the success of the process to the benefit of students. The rate of change should be calibrated so that relationships benefiting children and families are recognized, enhanced and preserved. School communities must be brought into the planning process as full partners.

We believe that giving families more choice in the school their child attends may have the ability to enhance efficiency and effectiveness if greater opportunities are offered in low enrollment schools. Choice should be used in tandem with boundary changes to level out enrollment. However, care must be taken to avoid unintended consequences such as disconnecting from a neighborhood or increased segregation by economic status or family level of involvement.

- 6. Review research with regard to the role elementary schools play in community design. (originally number 4) and**
- 7. Review current district planning practices and recommend changes to facilitate better coordination with city and county planning practices. Particular emphasis should be placed on how the district could guide growth.**

The school district and the City of Lawrence should collaborate in the planning and development process to ensure the most effective use of school district resources in the future. To that end, the school district and the City should:

- plan future school sites by undertaking detailed area planning in sectors of at least one square mile based on future school encatchment areas, with schools being centrally located within those areas;
- encourage planning of more compact, walkable neighborhoods;
- encourage planning of neighborhoods with a mix of housing types, to encourage neighborhoods with a wider range of ages and family situations to avoid situations where whole neighborhoods empty of children over a short time frame;
- encourage developers to donate land for future schools and/or consider land swaps with developers to achieve optimal school siting; and
- increase sharing of resources in providing parks, recreational facilities, public meeting spaces, and, in the future, possibly library facilities.

Many of these suggestions are also part of our response to the directive regarding the construction of a new facility found later in this document.

8. Develop a recommended elementary facility for future new construction intended to replace an existing facility or facilities. (originally number 9)

This recommendation is a synthesis of the work of all four subcommittees. To be a success, a replacement facility should respect the community or communities of the schools affected. It should be efficient and take into consideration the research on school and class size. As a practical matter, the new building should reflect the findings of the facility review subcommittee.

Depending on the community being served, the facility should be built to hold an enrollment of 300 to 500 students with the flexibility to accommodate changes in the needs and number of students. The community or communities to be served by the facility should be brought in at the beginning of planning that facility.

9. Develop factors to be considered before constructing an additional elementary facility to meet the educational programming when such construction is warranted. (originally number 8)

The response to this directive includes those listed above in our findings to number 8 but also includes a few more factors that should be considered.

The district should collaborate with the City of Lawrence to ensure that city zoning, planning, and public works decisions encourage full utilization of school facilities; and construct new elementary school facilities at new locations only at such time as enrollment growth projections indicate that the capacity of all elementary facilities will be reached within 5 years.