

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Lawrence Board of Education (Board) created the Lawrence Elementary School Facility Vision Task Force (Task Force) on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and directed it 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 represents a diverse cross-section of our community. Whether considering place of residence, length of time in our community, political views, age or ethnic background, the months of work by the Task Force revealed our many differences. However, even clearer than our differences was the shared and uniting belief that bound us together. To a person, the focus was on our community’s children and a desire to do what is right for their long-term interests.

Even though we were united by this belief, our divisions frequently represented the differences of opinions in our community as to what exactly is the right thing for our community’s children. Each member brought values borne of his or her own background and experiences. We spent the necessary time to articulate the values and goals that should be considered and recognized that each of us would give those shared values different weight.

The consensus we reached reflects the different weight each member gives to those values. Far from being a weakness, we believe this variety of opinions has allowed us to reach a consensus on recommendations that reflects an amalgamation of our community’s values.

The Task Force wishes to thank the Board for the opportunity to provide such an important service to our community. We cannot say it was easy or always enjoyable but we know that it was time well spent. We are pleased to report our findings and recommendations and urge the Board to implement them with thoughtfulness and all deliberate speed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

After eight months of review, consideration and discussion, the strong consensus of the Task Force is to recommend that:

1. The district should put forward a bond for the community’s approval sufficient to remedy the deficiencies and needs in our elementary facilities identified in this report and to implement our community vision for the elementary schools in the future.
2. This bond shall be sufficient to accommodate consolidation of six central and east elementary schools into four elementary schools or possibly three. The six schools are Sunset Hill, Hillcrest, Pinckney, Cordley, Kennedy and New York. There was stronger consensus for combining the six schools into four schools rather than three, with the focus of discussion being a combination of Sunset Hill and Hillcrest in central Lawrence and Kennedy and New York in east Lawrence. However, the Task Force recognizes that the Board should consider many different variables including, but not limited to, budget realities, site conditions, cost of construction,

fundamentally sound approaches to sustainability and social equity, a focus on community, and with a more substantial academic plan for the district addressing programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL) in making a final recommendation. To that end, the Task Force urges the Board to apply the 12 criteria below in analyzing the consolidation scenarios as they are fully developed.

It is strongly suggested that the Board establish a working group of affected stakeholders (community members, teachers, principals, administrators) who will begin immediately to engage in the process of consolidating their unique educational and social communities to determine which schools are most appropriate for consolidation based upon the criteria set forth below. In addition, the need to thoroughly investigate and accurately document the current school district holdings, the physical condition, current value and potential cost of repair or replacement will need to be part of this exercise.

3. Because of the pending budget cuts and the capacity remaining after the movement of the sixth graders to middle school, the Board should close one elementary school for the 2011-2012 school year. If the Board accepts this recommendation, the consensus of the Task Force was that Wakarusa Valley should be closed.

The Task Force did a great deal of research, study and fact-finding in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the complex issues presented by our district's elementary facilities. Following this gathering of information, the Task Force refined many recommendations, goals and thoughts down to 12 basic criteria or goals that we used in reaching consensus and which we believe should be used going forward . These are:

The district should

- Fully utilize elementary school locations before constructing new schools at new locations,
- Plan for a capacity of approximately 300 to 500 students at all elementary schools,
- Plan for equity in terms of learning environments across the district,
- Plan for all-day kindergarten at all schools in the future,
- Eliminate all portables at elementary schools,
- Plan for flexibility to accommodate changes to programs in the future,
- Plan for investment to address aging facilities,
- Deploy services in a differentiated manner such that all schools receive the services and programs they need,
- Strive to create and maintain schools that embody such a community that every school is a community school,
- Ensure that as many children as possible are able to walk or bike to school if they choose to do so,
- Incorporate best practices that research suggests have a greater impact on student achievement than school and class size,
- Plan to provide minimum 720 square foot classrooms for grades 1-5 and 900 square foot classrooms for Kindergarten in existing schools.

## BACKGROUND

After the Board had created the Task Force, 24 community members representing various geographic and political views in our community were appointed to form a group with a wide diversity of personal and professional experiences. Board members Scott Morgan and Rich Minder served as co-chairs. Superintendent Doll served as an ex-officio member of the Task Force. Mike Neal, KU Assistant Dean of Education Administration, served as the principal facilitator with the assistance of John Wilkins and Steve Clark, principals of the architectural firm, Gould Evans, LLC.

The Task Force first met on June 21, 2010 and met a total of 15 times over the next eight months. Beginning in August, the group continued to meet almost 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 1. Facilities, 2. Efficiency, 3. Neighborhood and Planning, and 4. School/Class Size Research and History. Many of the subgroups also met separately on their own as they undertook their various tasks.

The Task Force had a deep appreciation of the importance of the task given it by the community in general, and the Board in particular. This was reflected in the amount of data gathered, research reviewed and questions asked. Many of the earlier meetings were filled with presentations on various issues regarding public education such as finance and best practices. All elementary facilities were visited.

After months of review and work as a whole group and in subcommittees, the Task Force compiled a thorough and extensive report in response to nine specific directives listed by the Board in its original charge to the Task Force. This report is attached and broken into the four reports compiled by the subcommittees. **The Board and community are urged to review this full report to have a thorough understanding of the Task Force's findings and recommendations.**

Although the Task Force reached a strong consensus on the recommendations in this report, it recognizes that there was not unanimity. Various members opposed one or more of the recommendations. Some members thought two or more schools should be closed. Some thought that no school should be closed or that some school other than Wakarusa Valley should be closed. It should be noted though that many, but not all, of the members who held alternative preferences in the end, endorsed as a fair and helpful compromise the recommendation we have put forward.

The Task Force also wants to recognize the sacrifices that it is recommending, especially in those communities directly affected. This is particularly true for the Wakarusa Valley community. This is a real and strong community that will suffer a genuine loss. We in no way wish to demean this loss. However, the Task Force believes that all 10,000 students in the district, including the students of Wakarusa Valley, will ultimately benefit by our recommendations.