

**Central and East Lawrence Elementary School Consolidation Working Group  
December 19, 2011, Meeting Minutes**

*Notes: Shannon Criss, Hillcrest parent, is attending meetings in an unofficial capacity until the school board has the opportunity, on January 9, to act on her appointment to replace Edith Paredes, who is unable to continue to serve as a member of the advisory committee.*

*The school board on December 12 appointed Kennedy parent representatives Shonda Anderson and Samantha Cady as replacement members to the Consolidation Working Group, with appreciation to Stella Murphy and Amy Scrivner for their service.*

**Minutes Review:** Pinckney added to the December 5, 2011, minutes the final bulleted point listed under its proposal presentation: “The Pinckney group reiterated that its proposal elements stem from the criteria and process it used to assess the six schools under consideration.”

**New York Proposal Presentation:** Josh Davis, Chris Lempa, Mike Myers and Natasha Naramore presented the New York proposal (See website), including revised map handouts (Addenda 1 and 2).

Questions/Discussion:

- New York’s group included three scenarios without preference. The scenarios were named for discussion purposes only.
- The group revised the proposal’s original New York site map after parent feedback indicated more playground space was needed.
- In discussing a proposed expansion on the New York site, members questioned whether existing streets could handle increased traffic with a 3-section school. Myers said that the city recently completed a project refurbishing the brick streets.
- The original data distributed to the group about New York’s lot size was incorrect. The New York site is 3.36 acres (4 acres from curb to curb).
- Members shared concerns that the New York site is not centrally located and is a great distance from some of the student population that an expanded school would serve.
- New York representatives said that it was difficult to find viable sites for a consolidated school. Since the city owns the land in the Haskell Square proposal at 19<sup>th</sup> and Haskell, they believed it could be acquired. Myers said that developers plan to demolish the existing retail strip across the street, build apartments there and move the retail uses closer to the street. He added that he liked the idea of building a new school there, because it would fundamentally change the character of the area in a positive way.

- Working Group members expressed concerns with the 19<sup>th</sup> and Haskell site, including safety, noise and air quality issues with the grain elevator located nearby, the high traffic intersection, especially with KU basketball game traffic, and some of the existing retail offerings, such as liquor stores, being located near a school.
- Cordley and Kennedy representatives reported that their school communities do not support the 19<sup>th</sup> and Haskell site for a consolidated school.

**Cordley Proposal Presentation:** Kelly Jones, Chuck Epp, Sally Kelsey and Mark Kalusha presented the Kennedy proposal (See website), including a PowerPoint presentation (Addendum 3) and new handouts (Addenda 4 and 5).

Questions/Discussion:

- Members shared that individuals in the community are questioning the rationale of closing existing schools to gain operational savings, while spending significantly more money to build new facilities. They think the public may more fully support renovations/additions to existing schools.
- Members have concerns with consolidating on the Cordley site, because Cordley would require more costly improvements than some of the other elementary facilities. A suggestion was made to expand Cordley to the north to eliminate the need for an elevator.
- Members shared concerns with site access at Cordley and gridlock during school arrival and dismissal times. Epp said that one of the architectural plans completed for Cordley includes two student drop-off areas, one off Kentucky Street and another off 18<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Questions about Early Childhood Report:** A member asked about the early childhood program's limited capacity. Principal Cris Anderson said that while there is a greater need for early childhood education in the community, the program is limited by funding availability. Current state funding would support six early childhood classrooms, but in order to accommodate 255 K-5 students at Kennedy, the school offers only five early childhood classrooms, serving 130 preschoolers. Anderson said that there is evidence to support that the early childhood program improves student achievement, so expanding the program would be in the community's best interest.

**Questions about Enrollment Projections:** Superintendent Rick Doll invited Working Group members to attend the school board meeting at 7 p.m. on Monday, January 9, at the school district's office, 110 McDonald Dr., to hear a report from Rob Schwarz, principal planner with RSP & Associates. Schwarz will discuss data, as well as the methodology used to compile it.

Members pointed out the district's unexpected increase in enrollment this year, and that the latest projections for future growth outpace numbers used last year by the Elementary Task Force.

Doll added that, typically, student enrollment declines slightly during the course of the school year. (Addenda 6 and 7: district enrollment reports from 9/20/11 and 11/30/11).

**Process Discussion:** In discussing “next steps,” members shared the following suggestions and concerns:

- Let’s talk about general issues as a whole group versus using small groups for discussion.
- If small groups are used, where do Pinckney representatives belong?
- There will likely be a range of conclusions versus one conclusion, including a possible recommendation that consolidation is not the best solution.
- Representatives knew the group’s charge when they agreed to serve; we need to finish our work.
- We’ve learned a lot from four months of discussions and data examination, our opinions about the group’s original charge may have changed.
- The situation in the school district is different than it was a year ago when the Elementary Task Force met. Enrollment patterns are different; the enrollment picture has changed.
- We’ve put a lot of work into our proposals, let’s complete the loop and identify common themes. What are the “takeaways”?
- We’re providing good scenarios for the board to consider, even if we don’t recommend consolidation.
- Small group discussion could encourage others to speak and allow all voices to be heard.
- Let’s help our east-side schools and alleviate Kennedy’s concerns with its facility.
- Kennedy loves its school. We didn’t defend keeping our school open, because it didn’t fit the charge. We proposed consolidation to get additional resources for our students.
- Let’s discuss how to get all of the buildings the resources they need to offer an equitable education.
- The questions raised about a central Lawrence consolidation are compelling; consolidation on the east side may be more palatable.
- Is there a district goal in terms of projected savings from consolidation? (Doll said that the school board had not set a savings goal. He noted that operational savings from the Wakarusa Valley school closure were in the \$450,000-\$460,000 range.)
- The Elementary Task Force scenarios identified projected savings; those are on the website for review.
- None of the proposed scenarios can move forward without additions and/or renovations.
- Doll said that it is possible to close a school without new construction. The Elementary Task Force also looked at shifting boundaries. The Working Group’s proposals tend to keep whole school populations together. The Task Force assumed a bond issue would be needed to build more capacity.
- Empty buildings are a concern in a time of austerity.
- It doesn’t seem right to target those whose groups proposed closing their own schools; every group should discuss what it would take to close their school.
- One common theme has been strengthening the urban core.
- We need to make investments in our schools on the east side.
- We should review the elementary school criteria that we said are important to us and use that list to guide decision making.
- Our discussions have evolved into a turf war.
- Bond issues for maintenance and small improvements are 65% more likely to pass than bond issues for new construction.

- The community would support renovating existing schools, but not when it's tied to closing schools.
- The need for a bond issue is a common theme. Let's discuss what jeopardizes it and what improves the possibility of its success?

#### **Common Themes:**

- Ensure every building has the resources to provide an equitable education.
- Strengthen the core.
- A bond issue is essential to improving elementary school facilities.

#### **Agenda Development Discussion:**

- Discuss the Working Group's timeline. Should we/can we add more meetings?
- Are we voting on the six proposals or coming up with new proposals? We shouldn't limit new idea generation.
- Should we define the key criteria (walkability, strengthening the core, ESL services...) that we will use to evaluate the proposals?
- Should we review the proposals on our own as homework and come to the next meeting prepared to identify common themes?
- Create "What if...?" statements in order to debate all of the options.
- We should decide what to do with Woodlawn. Are they involved in the scenarios?
- Walk through each scenario functionally by following the numbers and tracking the data. Is it do-able? Where do the kids go?
- Should we ask RSP & Associates to evaluate the Sunset Hill proposal?

#### **Data Requests/Next Meeting Agenda:**

- Clarification about the district's intent for expanding the ESL program (cluster vs. neighborhood sites) in the future. Doll said we will continue to operate cluster sites, because the district doesn't have the resources to only offer ESL services in neighborhood sites. Cluster sites will be in place for at least five years; it's impossible to project what the program might look like in ten years. The recommendations of the Working Group will help determine how the district proceeds.
- Updated enrollment data for elementary schools (Addenda 6 and 7)
- Common themes/key criteria
- Ask each school group – "If your school were to close, what would you need?"
- Discuss Woodlawn's role
- Discuss scenarios

**Meeting Schedule:** January 2, 16 and 30.