



Analysis of Facilities Plan Feedback

Key Findings

1. Overall, community input shows a willingness to invest in facilities improvements through tax levy (78%), with majority support from all demographic groups.
2. Community input suggests support for the inclusion of more projects and the need for more detail and clarity moving forward.
3. Community input suggests a strong support for a broad and inclusive long-range facilities plan that includes all schools in the district.

Background

In September 2014, the Madison Metropolitan School District introduced a draft plan for facilities improvements, designed as the first phase of a long-range planning process to improve school facilities (visit mmsd.org/facilities to learn more about the plan). This first phase was designed to focus on the most immediate needs in MMSD schools: accessibility and space. After the plan was introduced, MMSD solicited input from the community in several ways:

1. An online survey with closed- and open-ended questions about the proposed facilities plan
2. Input given through other venues, including a Madison Parent Partners meeting held in October 2014 at Badger Rock Middle School; a community meeting held in October 2014 at the Goodman Community Center; and online comments posted on the MMSD facilities plan website
3. Focus groups conducted by Wood Communications

The purpose of compiling this feedback was to help the Board of Education decide whether to move forward with a referendum to finance a detailed plan. The Research & Program Evaluation Office was asked to analyze the data from the first two listed items; this report contains the results of our analysis. Wood Communications analyzed the focus group data in a separate report.

Online Survey

This online survey was created to help shape the facilities plan. The survey included 19 questions - 9 questions soliciting feedback on the plan and the potential tax levy, and 10 questions soliciting participants for focus groups and demographic information on respondents. The survey was distributed via email through MMSD newsletters and community channels, and posted on the facilities website. In addition, all MMSD parents received phone, email, and text reminders to complete the survey, and high school students received an email. The survey also was sent directly to neighborhood community centers. Survey responses were submitted over a total of three weeks, from October 1 to October 22, 2014.

Respondents

MMSD received a total of 3,081 responses to the online survey. However, only Question #1 received the maximum number of responses; Questions #2-13 averaged around 2,200 respondents. Normally, a response rate is calculated by dividing the number of responses by the number of invitations to complete the survey. However, it is difficult to estimate an exact response rate to this survey, given that there was not a set number of invitations. The denominator, or number of possible respondents, could be calculated in a variety of ways, and that the survey allowed for an individual or family to take the survey multiple times. However, we have provided a couple possibilities for calculating a response rate, which should be considered very coarse estimates:

- Per Housing Unit in MMSD Boundaries - According to ACS data, MMSD has about 100,000 occupied housing units, so about 3% of households within MMSD boundaries responded to any portion of the survey.
- Per Households of MMSD Students - About 1,600 respondents reported having children in MMSD, and MMSD's students as of October 2014 live in about 17,000 different households, so about 9% of households with MMSD students responded.

These response rates are high enough to be relatively certain about the survey results; the 2,200 responses to most questions out of 100,000 households would lead to a margin of error of about 2% with 95% confidence, and the margin of error relative to MMSD households would be similar.



The characteristics of the respondents choosing to share their demographics are below:

MMSD Residence	Don't live in MMSD	6%	Living Status	Currently without a residence	1%	
	Live in MMSD	94%			Own a home or condo	86%
Children in MMSD	No children in MMSD	27%		Rent a home or apartment	14%	
	Children in MMSD	73%		Household Income	\$100,000 or Higher	42%
MMSD Employee	Not MMSD employee	79%			\$75,000 to \$99,000	23%
	MMSD employee	21%			\$50,000 to \$74,000	21%
Race/Ethnicity	African-American	2%			\$25,000 to \$49,000	10%
	Asian	3%			Below \$25,000	4%
	Hispanic	2%	Likelihood of Voting in April	Not at all	2%	
	Two or More Races	5%			Somewhat unlikely	1%
	White	88%			Neither likely nor unlikely	1%
	American Indian/Native Alaskan	0%			Somewhat likely	8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0%		Very likely	88%		

Online survey respondents were relatively white and high-income compared to the MMSD student population. While these demographics do not represent the MMSD student population, they are consistent with typical response rates to other MMSD online surveys and represent greater than normal response from persons of color. They also indicated an overwhelmingly high likelihood of voting in April, when a referendum for the proposed facilities plan would be on the ballot.

Methods

To analyze data from the closed-ended survey questions, we calculated distributions of responses to each question, looking for trends across demographic groups. For Question 11 from the online survey, we conducted a qualitative analysis using a multi-level coding schema. We used descriptive coding (summarizing in a word the basic topic of a passage of data) to categorize the topic(s) of each response or comment and evaluation coding (analyzing data that assigns merit or worth to different ideas) to assign either positive or negative feelings to each response. For other open-ended online survey questions, we analyzed word frequencies and searched for themes and trends across responses. Across all qualitative data sources, we used structural coding (to indicate which question prompted the response) and attribute coding (to account for the characteristics of respondents).

Findings

Findings from the online survey are below, organized by question.

Question #1: Overall Condition of MMSD School Facilities

What is your overall impression of the condition of MMSD's school facilities?



A total of 59% of respondents rated MMSD's facilities either somewhat or very poor, while only 33% rated MMSD's facilities either somewhat or very good.



Question #2: Reasons for Impressions of MMSD Facilities

Poor – As stated earlier, 59% of respondents rated MMSD’s facilities as either somewhat or very poor. Among respondents who felt MMSD’s facilities were somewhat or very poor, the most frequently-cited items appear in the word cloud to the right. Comments about old and outdated facilities were common, and specific issues frequently mentioned were bathrooms, heating, and air conditioning.



Good – Meanwhile, 38% of respondents rated MMSD’s facilities as either somewhat or very good. Among respondents who felt MMSD’s facilities were somewhat or very good, the most frequently-cited items appear in the word cloud to the left. Respondents who had positive feelings about MMSD’s facilities often stated that they were clean and well-maintained and, although sometimes old, largely functional. Some cited the beauty of MMSD’s old buildings as a positive.

Questions #3-4: Plan for Additional Space Needs

How well does the plan address the need for additional space?



To what extent do you support the proposal for additional space?



Overall, 65% of respondents felt that the plan addressed the need for additional space either somewhat or very effectively, and 68% expressed complete support for the proposal for additional space.

Questions #5-6: Plan for ADA Modifications

How well does the plan address the need for ADA accessibility modifications?



To what extent do you support the proposal for ADA accessibility modifications?



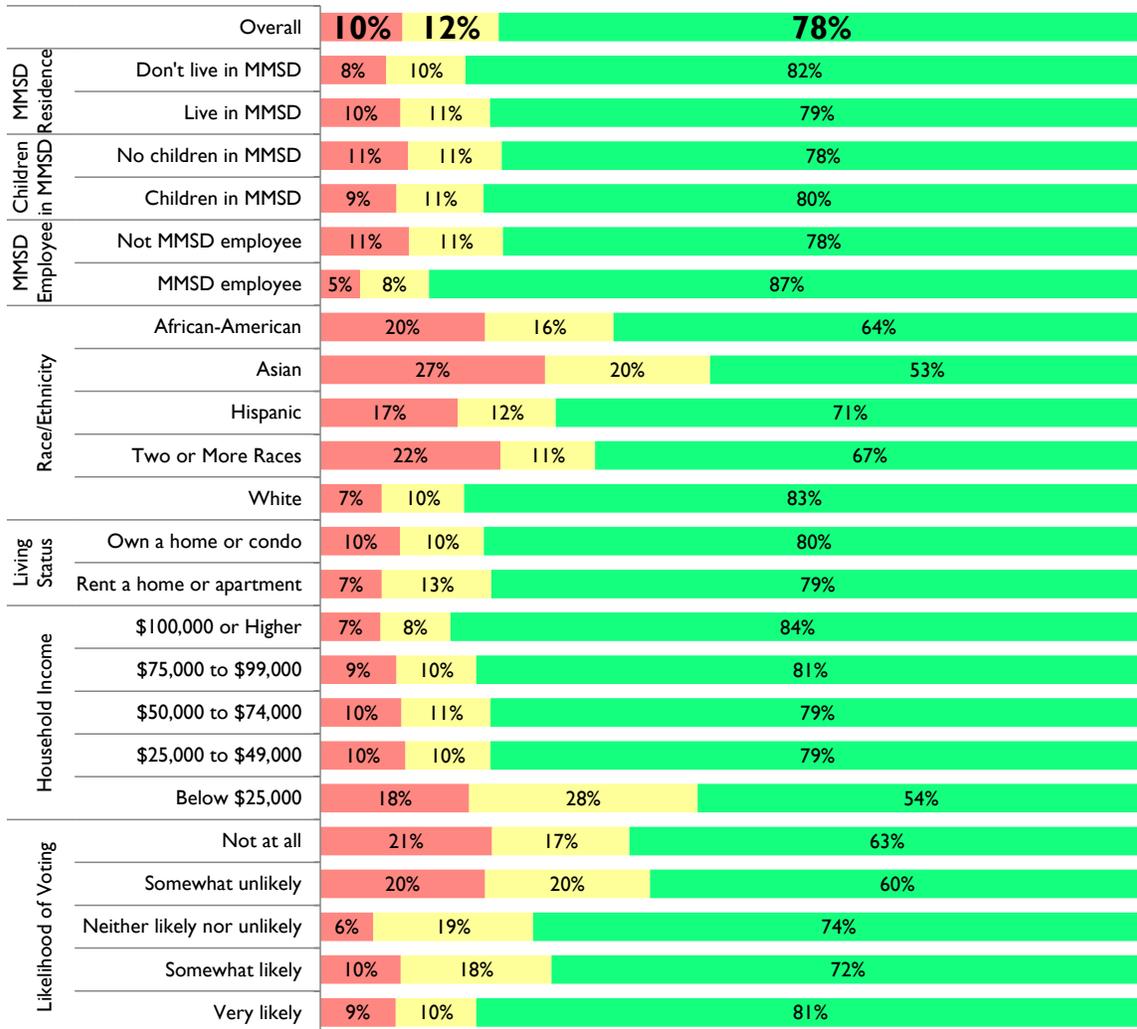
Eighty percent of respondents felt the plan addressed the need for ADA accessibility modifications either somewhat or very effectively and 75% expressed complete support for the proposal for ADA accessibility modifications.

It is worth noting that the majority of respondents for both Question #3 and Question #5 felt that the current plan only somewhat effectively addresses the need for additional space/ADA accessibility modifications. This finding suggests either that respondents believe the draft plan would benefit from more detail and clarity moving forward or that respondents need to understand how these short-term plans fit into larger long-term plans.



Questions #7-8: Levy Support

To address the needs of the schools identified in this plan, would you support the MMSD in increasing the tax levy by approximately \$50 per year on the average home for a period of 5 years?



■ No ■ Undecided ■ Yes

Native American, Pacific Islander, and currently without a residence do not appear because of low respondent counts

In total, 78% of respondents supported a tax levy increase. The respondents with the highest levels of support were MMSD employees, white, and with household incomes of \$100,000 or more. Support was lowest among non-voters, persons of color and the lowest-income respondents; however, relatively few individuals identified with these groups. Because the number of respondents was low, it is difficult to know whether the level of support among these groups is truly representative; therefore, any results or actions taken because of them should be taken with caution.

When asked what other information they needed to decide if they supported the plan, respondents most frequently cited the need for additional detail about the plan, including specific uses of funds and cost breakdowns, how other schools would fit into future plans, and whether the district had considered building new schools or redrawing attendance boundaries. Respondents generally stated a desire to know more about long-range plans, how schools were selected, and timelines. For example, one commenter stated: "Do these plans for expansion really cover the current needs of the school? Or will they only settle the issue momentarily? We need a plan that will work for the next 5-10 years." Many respondents also questioned the lack of any improvements at high schools and wondered when other schools might expect to receive upgrades.



Question #1: Questions or Comments about the Facilities Plan

In total, there were 1,078 responses to the online survey prompt for any questions or comments about the facilities plan. Responses to the online survey question about questions or comments covered a wide variety of topics and issues, but the five most common themes in order were *Detail*, *Space/crowding/boundaries*, *Referendum and support*, *Cost*, and *Accessibility/ADA*.

The table below shows the frequency of the most common themes by count and by percent of total coded themes:

Detail	Space/crowding/boundaries	Referendum and Support	Cost	Accessibility/ADA
168 (21%)	134 (17%)	131 (17%)	73 (9%)	61 (8%)

- Comments about *Detail* were very similar to responses to the question about other information respondents would need to decide if they supported the plan, discussed in the “Questions #7-8” section above. Comments focused on how long the work would take, why these schools were chosen, and why no high schools were included in the plan. Respondents also asked whether staffing levels would be affected, how renovations would be prioritized (particularly if funding declined over time), and how these modifications would prepare the district for long-term growth. Many commenters asked things like “How do you have the improvements ranked in terms of need, importance, urgency over other schools? Which schools will get done first?” Others thought it was “hard to fully appreciate the plan with the numbers without seeing/knowing things in even more detail.”
- *Space/crowding/boundaries* indicated support for expanding learning spaces, concerns about whether the proposed capacity additions were really enough, and comments both for and against redrawing attendance boundaries and building new schools. For example, responses under this code included “I believe boundary lines should be redrawn to balance enrollment and low income students” and “This plan is probably easier to pass than redrawing district lines. I have been in those fights and they are awful.” Respondents expressed concerns that proposed capacity additions were only a “band aid” and wondered “how they are going to plan not only for current space issues, but plan for future space problems as well?” Others stated that additional classrooms would not fix other capacity-related issues like crowded lunchrooms and hallways, and some wondered if “it may also be time to consider opening a new school or two.”
- Comments under *Referendum and support* generally focused on respondents’ support or opposition to the plan, as well as advice on how to garner support for the referendum. Stated support was much more common than opposition, including many urging MMSD to invest even more. For example, respondents hoped MMSD would “get the money you need!” and wanted to “Go big...Upgrade the schools so we are all proud of the facilities,” as well as “Frame the pro-tax arguments in the proper light, and engage the parents to carry the message.” Others said “good luck,” describing the plan as “long overdue,” a “no-brainer,” and “badly needed.”
- *Cost*-related comments often questioned the price of specific items in the plan (particularly the plan for Mendota) and funding structures. Comments like “The costs really seem high for the improvements outlined” and “Not well explained why Mendota needs 3.8 million for an elevator” are representative. Other commenters said things like “I read all the community posts, and I too agree that the costs seem high. Have you considered bids from different construction companies? I guess I want to know that I'm getting the most bang for my buck.” Some believed that “the cost of the plans will far exceed the needs... and taxpayers are weary!”
- Finally, *Accessibility/ADA* comments were a mix of respondents expressing their support for accessibility improvements and suggesting other ADA-related projects, with comments like “It is absolutely critical that every child, staff person and employee have access to all parts of the learning environment” and “I am pleased to see MMSD addressing critical facilities issues in both the areas of overcrowding and disability-access. The latter in particular is long overdue, though both are important.” However, not everyone agreed that all facilities should be ADA-compliant; many suggested things like “I don't think it's the most effective use of limited resources to make all schools fully accessible.”

We also coded comments as having a positive or negative tone when appropriate. Overall, only about 17% of comments with a noticeable tone were positive, with most of the positive comments relating to support for the plan and/or a



referendum. Meanwhile, the negative comments (83% of comments overall) still indicated support for improving MMSD's facilities, with most negativity being focused on current facilities the respondents felt were inadequate. Descriptions of certain facilities as "embarrassing" and "overcrowded" were common among the negative comments.

Finally, three specific projects received more comments than any others. More than 300 responses, or about 30%, discussed the East High theater. Many used identical phrasing and sentences, including 83 that were word-for-word identical to other responses. Respondents believed the theater is an unacceptable venue for events for many reasons, including safety and aesthetics, and said it was "a disgrace to have our talented students perform in such a space and uncomfortable for parents and community members to partake in events." Respondents discussing East's theater were, on average, more likely to vote, more likely to have a household income above \$100,000, and more likely to state a high likelihood of voting in April 2015 relative to the survey respondents overall. Although comments on East's theater were by far the most common, the second project that appeared throughout our feedback was Jefferson Middle School, with respondents wondering why Jefferson was not included despite having the lowest facilities grade in the district. In particular, respondents cited the lack of walls in the school as a huge problem. Comments like "with dividers instead of walls, the school is loud and distractions are constant" are representative. Finally, many respondents also discussed plans for Van Hise and Hamilton, including concerns that the current plan is inadequate. In particular, respondents discussed the cafeteria and lunch schedule, as well as safety concerns around crowded hallways.

Other Input

Participants

Approximately 15 individuals attended the Madison Parent Partners meeting, including representatives of various schools' PTOs and some community leaders. The group was largely white and female. Attendees saw a presentation about the plan and had an opportunity to ask questions, as well as work in small groups to provide feedback. Meanwhile, about 25 individuals attended the Community Input Session. This group was primarily white, about half female, and mostly had children in MMSD. In addition, a total of 50 comments were posted on MMSD's facilities website as of October 22nd. Because the website allowed for anonymous commenting, we cannot describe the characteristics of commenters. Finally, we included comments from a digital focus group with a small group of MMSD staff as part of the web feedback.

Methods

Similar to the open-ended survey questions, we used structural and attribute coding to account for the questions asked to attendees at these sessions that prompted each response and the characteristics of respondents, respectively. We also used descriptive coding to categorize the topic(s) of each response or comment and evaluation coding to assign either positive or negative feelings to each response. For the online comments, we used only descriptive coding to categorize the topic(s) of each response or comment and evaluation coding to assign either positive or negative feelings to each response because of the lack of contextual information for these comments.

Findings

The Madison Parent Partners were largely supportive of the plan, recommending that MMSD work to "sell" not just this plan, but a long-term plan. Comments like "we should be a leader in investing in our schools" and "make sure that people know what is next" are representative.

The Community Input Session also was largely positive and supportive of the plan. Attendees responded to three questions, including whether the plan addressed the most critical needs, whether taxpayers would approve an increase in the levy, and what additional information they would need to decide whether to support the referendum. Attendees thought the community would support a levy increase, but that presentation of the plan and even the specific wording of the referendum would be key. They also believed that having schools be part of the process of designing plans was important. In general, they agreed that space and accessibility were key concerns worthy of investment. Other comments were largely similar to those received in the online survey, including requests for additional detail and attention to specific projects.



Online comments were more often negative than positive. Some of the primary themes in the online comments were a call for more *Detail* to be provided on the plan and process to develop it; one commenter, for example, called the information available online about the plan “scant.” Another theme was *Space/crowding/boundaries*, with commenters focusing on specific schools that could have their facilities problems alleviated or exacerbated by these issues. Concerns around specific facilities issues for Van Hise and Hamilton were voiced often, and so was the need for a new theater at East High School.

Conclusion

Overall, community input indicates willingness to invest in facilities improvements through a tax levy to address the space and accessibility upgrades. In the survey, the tax levy received an overall support level of 78%, with majority support from all demographic groups. Community input also indicates support for the inclusion of more projects and the need for more detail about the choices made and greater clarity around how immediate needs intersect with long-term plans. In particular, respondents called for upgrades to the East theater and Jefferson. Van Hise-Hamilton also came up consistently as a school where respondents felt the draft plan did not adequately address the needs. In general, the input provided points to a consistent support for a broad and inclusive long-range facilities plan, and the need for all schools to be included in that plan.

In the course of our analysis, we noticed two distinct trends in the open-ended survey responses and other input. First, we saw that much of the input did not focus on the primary question behind the input process: whether to move forward with this short-term plan. Instead, much of the input was focused on specific projects not tied to space and accessibility needs (such as the East theater), or related to other district issues that were not germane to this topic. Second, we observed a prevalence of misinformation. Many of the comments demonstrated that respondents had either not read the proposed plan for each school or had not understood the plan. This could be the function of the way information was distributed or the clarity of what was provided; in either case, it led to collection of information that may not be entirely relevant to the primary question at hand. We also saw comments that included statements about happenings within the district (e.g., shifting of boundaries, extensions of programs) that were not true.

When considering next steps based on this input, we would offer two additional points for the Board to consider. First, presentation of this plan – and any facilities plan to come – is incredibly important. Input participants directly made this point, and the results gathered from this data collection further illustrate it. When any facilities plan moves forward, it will be incredibly important to consider how the plan is framed, how questions are asked, and what roles school staff should play in the creation of plans that directly affect their day-to-day work. The information in this report can help frame the information that is provided later on. Second, any community input findings are dependent upon who chooses to participate in the process; as such, they reflect that population more so than the MMSD student/family population. This does not mean that the findings are not useful; in fact, if the survey respondents and input session participants are representative of the individuals that tend to vote, particularly in spring elections which historically have low turnout, then findings from this kind of sample may be a truer representation of the likelihood that a referendum would pass as opposed to a random sample of MMSD families.