

**Rockford Public Schools, District 205
Facilities Master Plan 2025 – 2030
Program Meeting – Special Programs
Meeting Minutes**

**Teams Meeting
Tuesday, February 13, 2024**

DLR Group members present:

Korey White, AIA, pK-12 Planning Leader/Senior Associate
Keri Vansant, AIA, Project Manager/Senior Associate

Rockford School District Staff Present:

Mike Phillips, Chief Operations Officer
Greg Brown, Chief Financial Officer
Heidi Dettman, Chief Academic Officer
Scott Jenson, Director of Design and Construction
Melissa Wolf, Director of Fine Arts
Candice Collins, Montessori Principal
Loree Leathers, Haskell Principal
Ryan Miller, Haskell Assistant Principal
Adam Cengiz, Secondary Special Program Principal
Misael Nascimento, ED Bilingual and Multicultural Department
Sarah Brenner, IB Principal
Julio Lopez, Barbour Principal
Dr. Travis Wolf, Executive Director of Improvement and Innovation
Scott Sevey, Director of Career/Technical Education
Jessica Powell, Marshal MS Principal

Ms. White opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Ms. White: We have a very packed agenda with some questions we are going to ask and allow you time to respond and discuss so we can get as much information as we can about your programs.

Participants introduced themselves.

Ms. White: First question; What is missing when it comes to the spaces that you need to exceed and allow for your program to grow? Very broad, and we encourage you to jump right in and share with us.

Ms. Collins: I can start with one. You asked what is missing from the space, here in our building, space is missing. When we moved here, we have enough classrooms, but we don't have any support staff space. Last year we had a social worker, counselor, team and all the itinerates in the same space and that is really not ideal. I think space is an issue for us.

Ms. White: Thank you, that is very helpful. Candice, we talked yesterday with a group about student support spaces specifically, and I see a few familiar faces from that conversation, So, we are getting feedback on that as well.

Ms. Brenner: For my program at IB, we had some initial dialogue with Greg and Mike on a call, and we don't know full implementation of the program, but there is a possibility for my school that is currently a K-5 program, to be K-8 next year. We're adding portables and such and we might need broader space for continued rollup if it's deemed that the rest of my program will be on-site here as a K-8 building.

Ms. White: We have a question about that later, but I'm assuming that means student support services, gym, cafeteria, the whole gamut when it comes to serving as a K-8?

Ms. Brenner: Yes. In addition to classroom functionality, there would need to be increased spaces, as discussed on the call yesterday, whether it's intervention, Title, resources, any of those types of supports too, with the broader number of students that we would service.

Ms. Leathers: I think that would be the same for us, space. We have a Makers Space lab out in a portable right now which works for us, but it's outside the building. We have enough on our waitlist to probably have three strands of a few grade levels, but we don't have a single room available. We have three support staff in rooms together as well, and as we talk expansion for middle school and adding sixth, seventh and eighth and deciding what that looks like with our program.

Ms. Powell: We have a lot of square footage at our middle school, So, technically we have a lot of space, it's just not appropriated or able to be used for what we need it to be used for. It's a lot of open space, So, that could be a great thing, but when I think of things that our program needs, we don't have science labs. Our students by eighth grade are taking high school level science classes. We don't have collaborative spaces for inquiry, we have one classroom for Project Lead the Way which is a huge component of what we do for gifted in first grade, all the way up to gifted at high school. We have over two hundred fifty students in orchestra and band, and we have one room for band and orchestra, so they share a classroom. Those are the things I'm thinking about for space. We have a building of five hundred students, but so many of them are involved in sports and extracurriculars. So, we have room, we just don't have it in a way it can be used.

Mr. Cengiz: CAPA and gifted at the middle schools and high schools, this question depends on how we are moving forward. If we are moving forward as a school within a school, we have office space needed, we have counselors, and clerical staff, labs need to be improved because they are really old labs, my band and art people need a lot of storage. Outward, pods need to

be addressed, if each of them is to be added to the building because we're getting rid of the pods, it's a safety issue and foundational problems. Maybe adding some innovative labs like robotics. We need conference rooms for my staff if we are a school within a school.

If we are not a school within a school, but a stand-alone school, I cannot comment on something I cannot see, but in general if there are modern labs and space.

Ms. White: Adam, follow up question for you. When you say meeting rooms for staff, how many total staff are you envisioning?

Mr. Cengiz: For our meetings we are using the library and classrooms, we have solutions. So, I'm thinking of small groups – ten to fifteen people.

Mr. Lopez: For Barbour we could use more room. We have land space, we also run middle school athletics like most middle schools. We have horrendous facilities in terms of space to be able to run the middle school athletic program. For fine arts and extracurriculars, we need something more than what we have now. To the point that sometimes we rent the Sports Factory and run sports there. So, it's just not equipped to be a middle school. If we're talking expansion of the program, then we would need another six to ten classrooms in order to be able to do that. We are in a neighborhood, and we would appreciate having some sort of circle or oval drive for parent pickup and drop off because it is a cluster, and I know some of you have it worse than I do, but for people dropping off and picking up children, some sort of circle drive close to the building would help us a bunch.

Mr. Cengiz: Can I add one more thing for the record? If we move forward with the College and Career Center, having space for AP classes and . . . as well.

Ms. White: Yes, we're actually talking with those folks next. Any last thoughts on what may be missing in your facilities before we move on with the next question?

Ms. Collins: One more question. If we're talking parking, it is a huge issue at schools.

Ms. White: Yes, we have heard that in conversations with other groups as well. There are a lot of things that were missing or would be great to have. Our next question is, what do you consider to be baseline needs that you must have to function that may be missing, as to what would be nice to have? So, a little bit of prioritization. We're challenging you all, but it is helpful to us as we consolidate everything we are hearing across all of the needs, to know what should be baseline when we're talking about special program needs.

Ms. Vansant: It's also okay to say anything that was said in the prior question is considered baseline.

Ms. Powell: I guess one thing I was wondering, I can't think of anything I have right now that I don't think is baseline, but there are certainly things that I think that I am missing that I think should be part of the baseline, but maybe I'm just being overly detailed about it. I don't really

know. Do you mean in terms of furniture in classrooms? Is there a situation where what I have now, I would not still have? So, I need to say that something is baseline? I'm just confused by the premise of the question.

Ms. White: That's a good question. I think at this point we are not assuming that anything is taken away. Michael, I may look to you for help on this question. This is just around what is missing currently and what may be needed for future planning, but not looking at removing anything.

Mr. Phillips: That's right Korey. So, basically, everything that you said Jessica is open. Furniture, I'd be interested in hearing baseline needs that are missing.

Ms. Powell: I would argue that in my building, as a point of contention, all of my English teachers have always had spaces that had furniture that was welcoming for like literature, and reading, and doing that sort of thing. And because all of it evidently had been done with residential grade furniture, it all had to be removed. So, now we're back to all just hard surfaces and desks. I don't consider that as a baseline welcoming space for students, and it's already something that we've been working on, and I know that Mike's been in touch with the furniture people and they're trying to come up with what a package would look like. But I would think that a baseline would, or should, include a certain environment for students to learn in that is welcoming and comfy. I think that is a baseline we don't have right now but should. From a curricular lens, and I know the pool is a point of contention and ours is broken, but if it's part of what we're teaching in physical education, and now there is this big push that physical education has to be every day, all year long, and we're trying to make that happen, but not having the gym space, or a pool space, or a track space, or whatever that is. The high schools have those facilities, but the middle schools don't. That's true for the people on here who have K-8 in their buildings too. They're trying to do all the things for sports without the facilities to do it.

Ms. Collins: I know I mentioned this earlier, but a science lab is a baseline, or an area to store the materials that we would need. Because growth is an issue and storage is an issue in a lab.

Ms. Brenner: To add to what Candice said, I think for us, many of our buildings were just elementary buildings or middle school buildings that became special program schools. I think, like Jessica said, keeping baseline what we have, but also like Candice said, whatever matches our program goals. So, whether it's a STEM lab, a science lab, a place for inquiry, for us to say we are different and look different, we need some of those different spaces that align to our curricular goals that may not be in all the settings.

Ms. Leathers: Well said Sarah, 100% agree. We were just having a quick discussion on our need here and if it would make more sense to grow and have three strands at every level before rolling up, or if we start rolling up and then grow. We can't do either right now. So, as we're planning, do we plan to roll up or do we plan to grow and keep accepting kids and plugging kids in? The other thing, and this feels really petty to say, we got beautiful new furniture, new carpet, a lot of interior updates in the last ten-year plan, in all of the classroom

spaces, but not in any of the support areas, or art, or music. So, they still have super old carpet, piecemeal furniture, things like that. Slowly each year we are buying new stuff. We bought new chairs for our music room and things like that, but they were kind of forgotten about in the ten-year when we did the internal stuff.

Mr. Cengiz: In our case, with a school within a school, everything I said in the previous question is baseline. To be able to run these programs as a separate school within a school, I need those. Again, if the decision is a stand-alone school, we need to talk about that.

Mr. Lopez: All of it is a priority for me. Don't expect me to run middle school athletics if you don't give me the facility to run athletics. From that perspective, don't expect me to have the same offerings as fine arts if I can't offer the space. Depending on what the district's reasoning is with special programs, are we looking to expand or maintain, then more classrooms or the same classrooms? Depending on that conversation, do we want to grow? That needs to be clearly laid out and we need the room.

Ms. White: Okay, if something jumps out, feel free to circle back. We want to dive in a little bit deeper to K-8 configurations. Knowing what you know about existing K-8 buildings, what are some of the space themes, the best type of campus that don't currently exist or maybe are not appropriate to serving the K-8 population, that needs to be considered as a part of this plan, or for future expansion to K-8? I know there were some comments around athletics, but also needing more classrooms, are there additional items when you think about K-8 facilities?

Ms. Leathers: When I think within our specific things, the idea of an upper and lower campus with something that connects us would be super cool. Because there are times when kindergarteners don't need to be with eighth graders, and there's sometimes when they do.

Ms. White: Laurie, could I ask a follow up question on that? What spaces would you consider to be appropriate where that mingling would occur? Would it be during gym, cafeteria . . .

Ms. Leathers: Where mingling would occur? Commons area, cafeteria, art, music, PE, like specials, science lab, things like that. Common spaces, probably not hallways, not classrooms.

Ms. Brenner: Along with that, obviously the developmental differences of what that looks like, and being thoughtful of that for those kids that are in our program, we want to remain in our program versus maybe a traditional elementary or middle school that looks different. Is it separate bathrooms, is the set-up such that we can mimic a middle school structure of sorts where they might move independently across the space to the given classrooms where the teacher is not walking them physically through those spaces because it is just not appropriate.

Ms. Powell: I think the other part of that, and I'm not a K-8, but we were a K-8 campus, and we have an auditorium that is too big to utilize it, but for middle school, our students have PE and don't have locker rooms and they utilize those for changing. Now at high school, they have primarily moved away from having kids change for PE, but at middle schools across the district a lot of our kids still do that. But as you're thinking about buildings that need to provide an

authentic middle school experience, I think those are some of the things that we have that it's nice if elementary kids could use.

Ms. Collins: At Montessori, we have six very large parent attended orientations for our lottery and I never have space to put close to fifty adults or more, so that is an area that I would like to see change. These parents come during the day when school is in session so they can actually see what our school looks like, and experience it, and tour it, and we don't know what to do with them during those orientations. I cram them in a room, but I don't think it is a great experience for the parents.

Mr. Lopez: Two campuses would be preferable with a main hallway, a joint kitchen, those kinds of things. An auditorium is a big thing where we can host a good amount of people comfortably. Consider the needs of what a middle school needs with science lab, bigger rooms, those kinds of things but at the same time understanding the needs of what kindergarten and first need with a lot of book libraries, stimulating environments. They are bigger and smaller depending on what subject you're teaching in middle school sometimes. But understanding that the size of the rooms depends on what you are teaching and what kind of stimulating culture you want to create. You need some of those bigger things with middle school.

Ms. Collins: Parent drop off. At Montessori we literally have one way in and one way out for over one hundred cars, easily. It takes twenty-five minutes to get through parent drop off and pickup. I know some schools have the capability of doing a double lane drop and pickup and we don't have that option. So, we're back to parking, but parent pickup is really difficult at Montessori. I have a parent in the group here who can testify to that.

Ms. Dettman: We don't even leave our house until school dismissal time, full disclosure, but we get there 20 minutes after school dismissal time and still wait several minutes. It is very, very tight. And just to add on from a parent perspective, in the K-8 school you are going to have children who are involved in all of the special programs, because if you have more than one child in the program, you're going to parent Pre-K night, you're going to the elementary spring concert, you're going to the middle school band concert, you're going to all of them. The high volume of traffic of parents constantly there for all of the events makes parking really challenging and just accommodating that and making it a calm and peaceful environment is really difficult. I know the teachers do their best to break it up into grade level chunks, but we all still come to everything because we've got siblings in all the different grade levels, So, it's difficult.

Mr. Lopez: One last thing for me, I think our libraries, for my particular thing, compared to middle school and elementary, it's not really a resource center, it's just books and we need something more there, significantly more. Again, understanding the limitations of space, but you need to consider it a little differently when you have a middle school library as opposed to an elementary library.

Ms. Brenner: I agree with that, I would need some additional support, so I'm glad he said that.

Ms. Powell: Our library does not look like what others do because we're not Title I and don't have that funding resource for resources in the library.

Ms. White: This next question is specific to programs that are embedded in a school, or a school within a school. Maybe we can ask if those people who are in a stand-alone building have needs of critical adjacencies, we can get to that too. But let's first start with special programs that are a school in a school. Are there critical adjacencies that you need? And by adjacencies we mean relationship or connectivity to another space, to another function within the school, or something outside the school? What is critical that your programs are next to or have a relationship with when you are embedded in another school?

Mr. Cengiz: I guess I'm the only one that this question applies to. The issue that I can identify in my program is that it's scattered all around the huge campus. I'm not saying it has to be a totally separate section in the building, but closer together.

Ms. White: Since we have time, I want to open it up to those on the call. When we think about critical adjacencies, those things that must be right next to each other or have a direct connection for your programs, are there spaces that come to mind? It could be that they already do have that, for example you need your art room right off the library because of certain programs in the way you handle art curriculum for your building. Are their things that that come to mind as far as critical adjacencies that you have now, or that you feel is really critical?

Ms. Wolf: Any kind of interface we have with exterior doors. We have a lot of things that are moving in and out of buildings. I know in high school they are actively using the back stage area and shop area to get the materials in and out, but I know that is not the case at all of our schools. Sometimes they have . . . , so other access would be great.

Mr. Cengiz: Like my art class is at one side of the building, and for my students to transition to a core subject on second floor, or another floor of the building, they have a limited time to transition.

Ms. Powell: Right now, I have fifth through eighth grade, and I appreciate that in my building we have two pods so our fifth graders are sequestered a little bit from our sixth, seventh and eighth graders. That kind of goes with what Loree was saying about building up to having a middle school. They are adjacent to things, and the other electives are nearby, but their classrooms are kind of stacked right next to each other and they have their own locker area and stuff for just them. Then the sixth grade on the other end of the building have their own locker space. We haven't even talked about lockers. That's a whole other can of ... So, fifth and sixth need to be in their own little worlds.

Ms. White: Do you want to share anything on lockers?

Ms. Powell: They either need to work or not exist. My goal is, I keep trying to get the lockers gone every time I can because they're always broken. But then, where do the kids put their stuff, and how does that look?

Ms. White: The age-old conundrum and that is when we figure it out, then the culture norms around what students want to do changes too.

Mr. Lopez: This may be something completely different, but if we add more rooms, could we pay attention to traffic patterns and how kids move throughout the building? Some of our older buildings kind of funnel into one area. People are leaving the cafeteria and going into the cafeteria, gym class, so if we had multiple ways to get to the same area, that would be ideal. To be able to flow quickly and move them quickly to get through, sometimes we funnel them to certain areas and create the problem ourselves. But at the same time, we try to stack their schedule to get to different things, but there's only one way to get to the same area and exit it. Anything like that that you can consider, just give us a little better flow in the building. There's only so much you can do depending on how the additions look, I know that is the case. Just keep that in mind please.

Ms. White: Thank you. Do others have similar issues with that? I'm curious if it's a product of the retrofit into an elementary school for some of you? Does that seem to be the case, or is it just in general?

Ms. Collins: For us, we have so many additions in our school. I think the original building was small and it's just been built out over and over again.

Ms. White: Scott, thank you for joining us, welcome. We were talking about some critical adjacencies that people have identified for special programs. We were first talking about it for school within a school and then just generally. Which program are you with?

Mr. Sevey: I'm the Director of Career and Technical Education.

Ms. Corey: Please weigh in on any topic. Any other critical issues?

Ms. Collins: This is something that we had touched on earlier. At Montessori we don't have a receiving area or space for when things need to go out of the building, or when things are coming into the building, obviously it can't be that day. So, often times very unpleasant looking things sit in common spaces. So, a receiving area is something that I think would be nice too.

Ms. White: Any other thoughts on adjacencies?

Mr. Sevey: Just curious, not sure if anyone has spoken about at the high school level with the academies and adjacency as it relates to the academies.

Ms. White: We have not talked about that. Adam had mentioned that the CAPA and Gifted programs are scattered across the campus making transitions very difficult.

Mr. Sevey: This is just a general thing to note, but we follow the NCAC Academies Model for the high schools. Each high school has five academies. So, each high school should have its academies, it's a small learning community, adjacent to one another; the administrator that is over that academy, the OP that services that academy, any counselor that supports students in that academy. The idea is to keep those things as close together as possible, and that sometimes is a challenge in some of our buildings. But just being mindful of building out any type of changes for our structures in our high schools so that is more able to happen.

Ms. White: We have one more question, and then if we still have some time, we'll open it up to whatever else you all want to share with us today. The last one is: Do the means of your special program classroom spaces differ from general classrooms that may be at other elementary, middle, or high schools? I see some head shaking so feel free to go ahead and jump in and share with us what those needs are.

Ms. Collins: At Montessori, our rooms look very different from traditional. There are areas of the curriculum that need to exist in every classroom. Square footage is a challenge where we have some students needing to work on the floor, some students needing to work on tables or desks, we also have to have common area for community. Practical life is an area where food is often brought out during the day, and we do a lot with water. So, our classrooms are very different. I think here in our building, nine classrooms were built for us, and they are wonderful, and beautiful, and perfect, and the existing rooms are not. Not everyone was on board when we decided who would get what room eight years ago. It was not fun.

Ms. Leathers: I think for us, just thinking in terms of the 21st Century learning environment, areas for whole group, areas for small group, and individual areas. So, we need space in the classroom for all three types of learning, and space to push into. Otherwise, we need commons area for our interventionists and others in our Tier II/Tier III program that we're trying to run. Storage is a huge problem across our school, and making sure that when we get new furniture, that we have the same adequate storage. So, we get rid of the old furniture so we're not piecemealing, and the classroom looks a little like 1960 and a little like 2023, just making sure we're removing old cabinets that are breaking when they are replaced. So, storage and 21st Century learning environments. Our building has a sink in all the classrooms. I think that is huge in a classroom where children can stay in there safely.

Ms. White: We know that you may have for some of the program's, different types of spaces that you spend a lot of your day there, so feel free to share that as well.

Ms. Vansant: What about for all of these special programs needing lab setups, how are all of your utilities, your electrical, your power, gas, data, vacuum, whatever you might need for a particular lab setup? Are your buildings equipped or not equipped for those particular utilities to meet your functional needs?

Ms. Powell: We don't have any idea because we don't have labs like that now. I know when we run a microwave and a Keurig at the same time we blow a fuse, but I don't know how the other stuff works. Good question.

Mr. Phillips: You forget about all the space heaters we run in the buildings.

Ms. Powell: We've been told they're fine as long as if they tip over, they turn off!

Mr. Sevey: Keri, I'll say that I think one of the challenges from my perspective, working with the high schools and CTE, is that industry is changing, and the more that industry changes the more the needs change. Mike and his team do a really nice job of trying to work with us to make sure we have what we need in spaces. But the reality of it is that many times we're stepping into spaces, or needing to adapt spaces, and there are different things that need to be done in those spaces in order to make them functional. In general, thinking about if there are ways to create these spaces so that they are easily upgraded to be able to handle more power, for example, or ventilation? Power and ventilation are my nemesis. I feel like those are two issues that we face a lot.

But then more broadly, not just answering your question, but going back to what Korey was saying, I think that one of the challenges that we face is freedom of movement for students. Within CTE coursework one of the big things that we're pushing towards is that it is a conduit for teaching kids how to work in the context of teams and really work in a way that they are going to have to work when they are out in the industry someday. We are here working together as a team. To do that we need that functional space so we can push this group over here and do that brainstorming session and work out a plan for how they are going to troubleshoot this problem that they're having. Meanwhile we'll have space where teaching can be happening, and space where work can be going on. Several of our Project Lead the Way courses are very, very hands on and the equipment and things that are used when they start getting into robotics and things of that nature. There's a lot of space needed to be able to lay out what you're working on, continue to work on it, be able to leave it set up, and not worry about having enough space in the classroom that you don't have someone coming in and knocking it over. Storage for those things are huge concerns for us. But I would say most CTE programs need some element of functional space and freedom of movement for the students.

Ms. White: Thank you. Keri, as you've been taking notes, are there any other questions that popped up for you or anything we need to circle back to?

Ms. Vansant: No, I think each of our special program groups has been leaning in on our questions, so I think it has been very helpful. It's nice to hear when someone brings up something and it sparks an "oh yeah, we need that too". So, it is helpful to have all of you providing that dialogue together. I think I've captured all the comments.

Ms. White: Great, that is all of our questions. Michael, do you or anyone on your team have anything additional that comes to mind that you would like to add?

Mr. Phillips: Korey and Keri, I just want to make sure that you picked up in the chat about restrooms. Obviously, restrooms are a challenge across the district, but I just wanted to make sure everybody saw that.

Ms. White: Thank you, we will capture that. Thank you so much for joining us today and sharing your input on these questions for what your needs are. We really appreciate your time.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:54 p.m.