

Rockford Public Schools, District 205
Facilities Master Plan 2025 – 2030
Meeting Minutes

Steering Committee
Monday, December 11, 2023

Korey White, DLR Group opened the meeting at 5:04 p.m.

DLR Group Members Present:

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

Committee Members Present:

Board:

Paul Carpenter
Tiana McCall

Principals/Teachers:

Adam Cengiz – Principal Special Programs CAPA & Gifted
John Schmelzer – Principal Ellis ES
Dawn Myelle-Watson – Science, Jefferson HS

Students:

Jessica Garcia – Auburn Superintendent Student Advisory Committee

External:

Brent Pentenburg – YMCA
Antonio Ramirez – Alignment Rockford

Internal:

Heather Psaltis - ED of Schools, Southeast Quadrant
Jason Pope – Director of Recruitment
Misael Nascimento – ED Bilingual and Multicultural Department
Susan Uram – Director of Education Technology
Tessa Huftalin – Director of SPED
Bridget French – ED College and Career Readiness
Dawn Williamson – Director of Athletics, Activities, and Program Development
Melissa Wolf – Director of Fine Arts

Committee Members Absent:

Principals/Teachers:

Joshua Tatman – Science, Auburn HS

Students:

Emmanuel Edwards – Roosevelt

External:

Angela Hite-Carter – Former RPS 205 teacher, principal, administrator

Jay Sandine – Rockford Park District

Ron Clewer – Gorman & Company

Administration Present:

Michael Phillips – Chief Operating Officer

Greg Brown, Ed. D – Chief Financial Officer

Scott Jenson – Director of Design and Construction

Ehren Jarrett - Superintendent

Ms. White started the meeting reviewing the Steering Committee Agreements.

Steering Committee Agreements

- Stay engaged (Ask and respond to questions, etc.).
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Be mindful of being a dominant voice. We want to hear all voices.
- Share and make space for others to share questions and perspectives.
- One mic, one voice. Refrain from talking over one another or having a side conversation.
- Speak only from the “I” perspective.
- In the event of an absence, we commit to reading the materials from missed meetings and providing written feedback, if and where needed.

Ms. White shared the agenda for the evening, stating that the goal was to finalize the Guiding Principles and start to dive into three of the Strategies. Guiding Principles are big-picture aspirations about desired outcomes to provide a roadmap for project decision-making. Strategies are specific actions used to achieve a goal, whether Physical design intervention, policy/practice, design guideline, advocacy, programs and partnerships, or education and awareness.

Meeting Agenda:

Finalize the Guiding Principles

Overview of three key-strategies to support Guiding Principles and Themes identified so far in plan:

1. Newcomer Center
2. Student Support Services
3. Early Childhood Center / Expansion

Ms. White recapped the different Phases of the project. Phases will overlap throughout the process. At the time of the meeting, we were currently between Phase 2 and Phase 3. The committee has articulated the vision and is moving towards starting to understand what the departmental program needs are, and aligning the vision with the space that is in the buildings. Next step will be to develop the concepts, build out scenarios, understand what the costs might be, keeping the committee informed along the way. Scenarios will eventually be finalized, cost models refined, and then the final plan will be presented to the Board.

Ms. White recapped how the committee developed the Guiding Principals at the last Steering Committee Meeting. DLR then refined the statements with feedback from the Steering Committee and the Superintendent's Cabinet. She shared the changes with the Committee.

Cabinet suggested Statements 1 and 3 be combined.

Original Statement 1: Our schools allow students and teachers to create a broad and unique learners' experience that is inspiring and flexible to ensure students can reach their full potential.

Original Statement 3: Our schools will reflect and promote inquiry and innovation within an academia-centered and welcoming environment.

Rewritten Statement: Our schools will reflect and promote inquiry and innovation to support each unique learners' experience in facilities that are welcoming, inspiring, and flexible to support students in reaching their full potential.

No changes were made to **Statement 2:** Our schools will reflect the community to promote a sense of belonging.

Changes to Statement 4 included removing “achieve their fullest potential” – verbiage already in Statement 1.

Original Statement 4: Students are able to achieve their fullest potential, to express themselves freely, to collaborate, and to communicate creatively, allowing their passion for learning to flourish.

Rewritten Statement: Our schools will create an environment where students can express themselves freely, collaborate and communicate creatively, allowing their passion for learning to flourish.

Change to Statement 5 was to add “balance the needs of *all our students, staff and programs*”.

Original Statement 5: Our district will balance the needs of the various learning models (Academy, inquiry, traditional, Project-based Learning, etc.) and how they work with the buildings we have, maximizing the well-being of all stakeholders.

Rewritten Statement: Our district will balance the needs of all our students, staff, and programs and how the various learning models (Academy, Career Education, Early Childhood, Project-based Learning, etc.) work with the school facilities we have, maximizing the well-being of all stakeholders.

Ms. White asked the Committee if there was any input on the rewritten Statements.

Input from Steering Committee Members included:

Committee Member Uram: Feels that only Principle 4 says anything about staff, and she feels the ability to attract and retain high quality staff should come into this. Not sure this is strong enough, as presented, but I’m also okay if that is something we’ll get to later.

Committee Member Williamson noticed that as well. One of the things she likes about all four Principles is that it talks about students, staff, and community – we are including all the groups that need to be involved in this. So whatever revisions are made, she doesn’t want to lose that aspect.

Ms. White suggested that *staff*, in addition to students, be added to Principle 3. She said it may not fully capture what Ms. Uram was looking for, but would that help in trying to address it in both Principle 3 and 4?

Board Member McCall suggested that staff also be included in Guiding Principle 1 with students reaching their full potential.

Ms. White asked Ms. Uram and Ms. Williamson how they felt about that suggestion.

Committee Member Uram replied that she thought it was getting closer, but thought that adding staff doesn't necessarily highlight the idea that through this process we are thinking about the professional lives of the teachers in terms of what Ms. Williamson was talking about at our first meeting. Are the classrooms set up correctly, are we putting the right number of kids in the classroom because we're out of space, and some of those things.

Ms. White said that she thought that once the committee got into the specific strategies, it would help achieve these Guiding Principles. Those conversations will be a core component of how we ultimately make the recommendations of the plan. She thought it was a good concern to voice and to make sure that is brought forward.

Committee Member Myelle-Watson said that she appreciated what's been offered so far and loves the addition of staff and felt it would be good to add *staff* to Principle 3 also. And with what Ms. Uram said, keeping our eye on strategies, that it's not just words, but we're thinking different strategies too.

"Staff" was added to Principles 1 and 3.

Refined Guiding Principles

Guiding Principle 1: Our schools will reflect and promote inquiry and innovation to support each unique learners' experience in faculties that are welcoming, inspiring, and flexible to support staff and students in reaching their full potential.

Guiding Principle 2: Our schools will reflect the community to promote a sense of belonging.

Guiding Principle 3: Our schools will create an environment where staff and students can express themselves freely, collaborate and communicate creatively, allowing their passion for learning to flourish.

Guiding Principle 4: Our district will balance the needs of all our students, staff, and programs and how the various learning models (Academy, Career Education, Early Childhood, Project-based Learning, etc.) work with the school facilities we have, maximizing the well-being of all stakeholders.

The Committee was okay with the Guiding Principles as rewritten. Ms. White thanked the committee and said the group would be coming back to these Principles at each meeting and that they would be shared with the community, so they understood what was guiding the process.

Ms. White then moved on to Strategies. The themes for a District Vision compiled from all the meetings and surveys were reviewed and the committee was asked if there was anything they felt was missing. The three themes to focus on that night were Support Services spaces in schools, Bilingual Services / Access, and Early Childhood Education.

Ms. White asked if Mr. Phillips had any additional insights on these themes for the group and he turned the floor over to Committee Member Misael Nascimento, Executive Director of Bilingual.

A summary of what Mr. Nascimento shared follows. The District has a need for a Newcomer Center. We currently have approximately 7,000 English learners in the District and that number is growing. Many of these students are coming into the country from refugee camps or dealing with trauma. Some do not even know what school is or how it works. We need a safe place for them to come that can help them transition into the school setting. It would be a short-term program, possibly six months to a year, to help familiarize them with our schools. It could also be a space to provide services for parents as well.

Board Member McCall asked the question if we were looking to use spaces we already have in our current buildings, or use a new building? Secondly, when you say we have Middle Schoolers and High Schoolers, are they still being passed on to the next grade level? Or what does that look like when you have a student in your class, and they've never been to school? What does that time look like, and what happens next year?

Committee Member Nascimento responded that the Newcomer Center is not a place for them to go and stay, it's a place for them to arrive. They are screened so we know where they are academically. If they say, I'm sixteen and I've only gone to school through the third grade, we know there is a gap. Now we have a language issue and an academic issue. We have to merge the two and offer the right kind of service. The Newcomer Center is a place for them to arrive and then we're going to put them to their zone school. Their zone school should be providing language services, content instruction (Social Studies, Science, Math, English), and also providing extra support when looking at academics. Right now, we have what we call shelter classes where we assign a teacher who teaches Math, Social Studies and Science full time. It takes a long time to catch up, so we're trying to close that gap. You also have to realize that some of the students are brilliant, and they don't only know the language, so they don't have to help them catch up. We do have some things in place, but not everything. The Newcomer Center would provide that first support. When you receive those three, four or five kids in the classroom, what do you do with them? The Newcomer Center will have already provided the basics for them.

Committee Member Ramirez expressed that it was really a transition center.

Committee Member Nascimento replied yes, it will be for six months to a year. It is not the intent to keep them there. The intent is to integrate them into their zones.

The question was asked as to how much space they would need.

Committee Member Nascimento replied that we currently have over 180 kids and got 9 more today. It depends on how many are coming in. When I hear from Catholic Charities and I share with the Superintendent that 90 families are coming, he says “then be ready”. Well, we’re ready, and then I hear another 30 families are coming. I’m talking about families, not just kids, so we don’t know. It’s very unpredictable, with all the political things going on right now. Thankfully when they arrive here, we are ready.

Committee Member Uram commented that she had started looking at opportunities for community engagement, and as Mr. Nascimento had mentioned Catholic Charities, and then there’s United Way. She is assuming that there are community organizations that can offer support as the first contact for families. Can they be offering supports and communicating some information to us, so we know what support has already been provided, or if they have a special circumstance, or something like that. I see this as an opportunity to engage with the community.

Committee Member Nascimento said that as far as number of rooms, maybe two to three rooms for elementary, and then a middle school room and high school room. So maybe five classrooms, then one for ESL for families and an office. The place we’re thinking about is pretty large, with at least seven rooms.

Ms. White said this was great information and they do have some questions that we have thought of for some discussion.

What opportunities for community engagement might support vested interest in this center, knowing that it may be inconsistent.

If this was a district-wide center, what would be needed to ensure a sense of belonging for the students. I would also say for this question, based on our earlier conversations, to say and staff, knowing that it would be regularly staffed.

What spaces would support this? We just started to go there, but again, I would pose the question, what spaces, in addition to the classrooms, ESL and an office might be needed. I think we should really think about the families themselves, and the staff as well. Do these spaces capture that or are there additional spaces that may be needed beyond just the learning that would be going on in this space.

Committee Member Myelle-Watson said she was just doing the math and that’s 25 kids in a room, even with seven rooms, you need more, because one of those rooms were for staff. If we’re thinking 180 students, with all the trauma, the language, and all that, we need more than seven rooms.

Board Member McCall asked what is going to happen, when we come up with this new center, what is going to happen to all the students who are already here? Is this going to be something for just new incoming students? What are we going to do to encourage the students who are already here?

Committee Member Nascimento said that was a good question. Some of them have already been here one or two years and have been receiving services. We don't want to send the kids back because we have a center. They are already in their school, they know how school works, they have been here for a while. They already know their school communities, they're integrated. To pull the students back to a center is not the intent. It is for new students arriving here. We are a traditional program in our district. Our main job is to transition them into the mainstream. It would be too traumatic to send them back.

Committee Member Ramirez commented that location is important, it needs to be easily accessible. Has there been an assessment done at the other sites as to what is working and what is not? He has been talking to families and some feel there are still more services that they need. So, has an assessment been done in our schools to see if we currently need more services? I wouldn't want to see us start something like this without seeing what additional services are needed within the district. We just need to be strategic in how we are going to service that. I like the idea of a central site, but I'm getting feedback from too many members of the families that sometimes are really struggling with these supports.

Ms. White said she wanted to elevate the question to confirm the answer as to whether we're talking about a school with rotating newcomers, or a space to provide temporary support while the student transitions?

Committee Member Nascimento replied that he would not go into a school with a traditional space. He was thinking that if we could find space in the new College and Career Readiness Center by Jefferson, or another place that would have enough space.

Committee Member Uram said that it sounds to me that when we're looking at providing classrooms, lunchroom, and office space, to me we're creating a school for newcomers. Then you say they will only be staying six months to a year. It feels more to me like an entire package where there is staff, space and supports for newcomers for a few weeks as they transition. We're helping them understand the community and school while they're transitioning with the purpose of getting them with their peers as soon as they're ready. In my head I see these as two different things, that's why I was asking.

Ms. White said that is a good question. What is the right balance of space for what we have been talking about to meet the needs of these students, but not just create a school, knowing that it is just a temporary location for them, but making sure they're getting all the services they need.

Committee Member Psaltis commented that what she was picturing was more of a single point of entry for social services for newcomers that also has an education component. What I'm

having trouble with is that already have community services such as United Way and Catholic Charities in our area. I understand that families are coming here that need our support systems, but I'm wondering if it's not an intermediary's job to convene everyone to support newcomers rather than creating an entire building for newcomers.

Superintendent Jarrett suggested that as we look at this space, this is our opportunity to prioritize location and flexible space as opposed to shoehorning this into an old school building or school setting. I think this is an opportunity to be geographically thoughtful so that transportation issues are realized and to be geographically thoughtful so that service providers have as short as possible commute to get there. With some of the loss of retail space that is happening in our community, we potentially have the opportunity to turn some blighted space into a beautiful new space that could reenergize our community. Those are three things we should think of. I don't think this has to look like a school. We can get that in school experience with gradual hybriding and spending more and more time in the school setting. An actual Newcomer Center, I think we can think differently about.

Committee Member Nascimento added that this is not a new concept. Other school districts do this. We are large here and we don't. It is beneficial for the district and a lot of benefit for the families.

Committee Member Pentenburg responded that the YWCA also has a vested interest in this space.

Committee Member Nascimento said there would be value for this. Because a lot of times they don't know the families, they don't know what they're dealing with. We can connect them. If we can be the arm of connection, why not? Let us be the arm of connection. We are about to put together a plan for this, and all the details that comes with this. It is going to take a little bit to put this together. An idea is just an idea, it can be a good idea, but if not well planned, it can be a bad idea. Let's make this a good idea that works, but it is going to take a little time to put it together.

The discussion moved on to support services in elementary schools. Mr. Phillips gave an overview. When you picture our older elementary schools, where basically you have a central administrative office with classrooms wrapped around that, and a gymcafetorium. We've now added cafeterias and we've added some gymnasiums separately, but we were still locked with just one administrative office and several classrooms. As we've grown and as the community's needs and our students' needs have grown, we're seeing the need for more support services space. This could be speech, social work types of areas, areas for behavioral interventionists, ESL, and these are all spaces where we're bringing students outside the classroom for a time period and then moving them back into the classroom. Currently, if for some reason we're short a strand, let's say we had two strands of kindergarten instead of three, a lot of times we put these needs into that classroom, and then the next school year comes and we have three strands of kindergarten, so they're not rolling up to a first grade class that's open. We're kind of moving people around, or they're shoved in a hallway, teacher's lounges, different areas, so we really need to think about how we would create flexible space, for all this space and

breakout services. Several of our elementary schools have some opportunities where we have space that isn't currently used well that could be reconfigured. We have opportunities for some unused courtyards that could be potentially converted into space also. It's just a need for these individualized services that we currently don't have.

Committee Member Psaltis to piggyback on what Mr. Phillips said, we also have some spaces that are chopped up little rooms that could be turned into a more flexible space that could be used over the different years as multiple configurations. I think there's opportunity there. There are some schools that have defunct swimming pools, like Rolling Green, where that is unused space that we could use for that. Additionally, we have schools with global programming, such as schools with autism classrooms where they're in such a tight school that there's no room for like a sensory room. We tend to move those programs around a lot as well, so we may have to maybe make a commitment to look at including Special Ed and having a more permanent home for some of those if we were to work to build those spaces out. And they would all come with our support staff as well. Our schools that need calm classrooms, there would be three different spaces. In a lot of the older buildings, the Tier I classrooms are small too.

Ms. White asked Ms. Psaltis if she would share what a calm classroom is. I'm not sure everyone is familiar with that.

Committee Member Psaltis said that it is a classroom where a student can regroup. A Title I teacher, social worker, where we partner with Rosecrance, that's where that person would be as well. There can be scheduled times during the day, but often it's the time for a student to calm down, do some sensory things, if need be, work through something restorative and get back to the classroom as soon as possible. Some students use it more than others. But as we see the needs of our students change, that's an opportunity that's worked in many buildings. That's the way schools work now.

Mr. Philips explained that the distinct three spaces in school support services we currently use are the calm classroom which has one adult supervising and can serve from one to five students at a time. The next room that we started using also, is called the Refocus/Reset/Restore. This is supervised by one adult and can serve from five to ten students at a time. The space is divided into separate areas to support individual, small group and large group instruction. At more of the secondary level, we have in-school suspension space that we're looking at. Again, one adult to supervise and it can serve from one to fifteen students at a time. This area would also be divided into separate areas to support individual classwork with access to devices and can also work one-on-one with the classroom supervisor. The students also eat lunch within the classroom.

Ms. White asked the group to share out where they see gaps in the support programs and how they are currently accessed by the district, or how they should be accessed. What opportunities do you see for support services and then what opportunities are there for collaboration. Are there examples of schools that are doing some of these things well? Those

are things that would be good for us to look towards as we start to fill out more details into what our strategies would look like here.

Committee Member Nascimento said that several of the schools are doing that very well. He said that the District has ESL in every building, from elementary to high school. In high school and middle school, those are actual classrooms for ESL. In elementary school, they have pull out service. Constance Lane is a good example of how that's done.

Committee Member Ramirez commented that he agreed that Constance Lane is a great example of how they spread out the services throughout the school. He also wondered if we could look at resource services for kids. Not all students have easy access to go back to their teacher's classroom. They need a space where, if a child has to grab lunch and get extra homework time, or tutoring time, they don't have to go up a second flight of stairs to get to the teacher, a long hallway and barely get like 10-15 minutes of tutoring time. Maybe something like that is also added to it for the students who are different learners. A place for them to go get their homework done away from the crowds.

Committee Member Psaltis commented that she thinks what we're hearing is on the newer schools, because most of our schools, I'm really proud of all the support people, even with the schools where the model and the systems structures are going on, you have a lot of adults on top of each other. They're pushing in two classrooms as much as possible, but then when they're pulling in small groups, they are doing things in hallways and little nooks and crannies where we really don't want to be doing that. They are being really creative with their spaces.

Ms. White said that was great insight. You can have the systems and the support in place, but if you don't have space, it can't be as good as it could be for students and educators.

Committee Member Psaltis shared that Swan Hillman is also good at utilizing their space, if you want to look at an older building and how they're utilizing the space and finding spots for all their people. It also depends on the number of students we choose to put into the school and how that fluctuates from year to year.

Committee Member Huftalin said that the schools need a confidential space for IEP's. In some schools there are people sharing offices inside of those rooms. Cherry Valley has a conference room right off the main office where they don't have to go into the school to be a part of that.

Ms. White asked if there were any other comments. She posed the question that when you think about these spaces, do you see the opportunities for spaces to be flexible and if more collaboration could be done in using spaces, or do they really need to be distinct and separate spaces?

Committee Member Nascimento said that he thinks it depends. For some services, collaborating on spaces can be done. We have larger rooms for the ESL teachers and Special Ed services in the same room, but it becomes very loud sometimes with these groups, and

they interrupt the other group. Teachers are very creative, they put partitions in larger rooms and they can collaborate. It can be done, we do that already, but it's not always the best solution for the problem.

Committee Member Psaltis suggested there should be a matrix that factors in the size of the school. Obviously, our schools have different needs, but we also know that over the decade's programs shift and schools change a little bit. We don't want an evergreen situation. Larger schools might need more than one space. Some type of matrix that looks at the number of students and the level of need for certain kinds of services in the school versus one size fits all. Ms. White thought that was a great suggestion.

Committee Member Ramirez commented that when looking at spaces, we also need to look at spaces for agencies offering community services to our students, and also need space for after school services. This includes room for supplies. In working with the schools in the past, some were easier to work with and some were a tight fit.

The last topic of discussion for the evening was regarding the Early Childhood Center and/or expansion.

Mr. Phillips gave an overview of our current Early Childhood centers. We are currently housed in four locations, Summerdale, Beyer, Nashold, Fairview, all were once elementary schools. We're looking to add some more full day options within a center, which we currently don't have the space to do. All of these are school buildings built in the 1950's that are not necessarily conducive to the Early Childhood model. I think there is an opportunity to improve all.

Superintendent Jarrett shared that he feels very strongly about this one. We currently have about 600 families that would like to convert from half-day to full-day. That doesn't necessarily mean full-day instruction, we could do half-day for childcare. But what that means is we will have to add 30 – 40% more space over time to do that. Transportation becomes a real issue here. Transportation becomes a big issue here because (a) can we get transportation and (b) whose life works well with a 2 ½ hour – 3-hour time window for a three- to four-year-old child. So many of our most vulnerable students, and so many of our students in general, are missing out on this. If we move towards a long-term vision of early childhood, and birth to kindergarten experiences being important, I think we have an opportunity to image what an early childhood experience looks like and to build around an all-day experience on all of our existing sites, as well building a new site. I think we would prioritize longer day experiences that match the families work schedule and longer year experiences that match that as well so we can truly bring that early childhood experience into the family's life, so we don't have to cobble together the childcare plus early childhood experiences, plus transportation. I think the idea would be to create a coherent system of universal early childhood as the ultimate long-term goal and the five years here, making significance progress here with a model new EC site being built and potentially revamping our existing sites to match that model as well. The last piece, I would say, we need to look at ancillary spaces for family education and experience and family services to be provided so that we can truly embrace the whole family. And provide space for community partners and childcare partners to embrace that space as well. I will be RPS

providing more school, but it would really be a continuum of family services providing birth through five. I think we can think expansively about what this might look like in the long term, but in the short/medium term, I think solving that need for more all-day seats would be an immediate need. Far too many of our families are getting stuck and opting out of these 2 ½ hour experiences. I think we should start with supply and demand and match the community's needs of what we provide.

Ms. White thanked the committee for their great input. Some of the questions asked around additional programs make sense. Dr. Jarrett mentioned family services, community partners and potentially the home visit program that could be brought in to share some space here. The other question was, how might this enhance the family's connection to the district? What opportunities are there for collaboration between support services, knowing that there are services needed for students in early childhood? What would help families feel comfortable getting to and from school? There was mention around transportation and security on the site, so I just wanted to ask that as well. If there are any examples of the existing Early Childhood centers that are currently doing this well, we would like to hear those. We know the buildings are a little older and not necessarily conducive, but that doesn't mean they haven't been doing some really great things with what they have. I will open it up to any thoughts or comments from you.

Committee Member Nascimento asked if the idea was to do one, and then this is how it's going to be done and then go and try to something with the rest.

Mr. Phillips added that there is also a fifth site with Circles of Learning and a sixth site with four-year-olds at Montessori.

Dr. Jarrett shared that to be clear, the district will have to rewrite the grant, because this is not funded by local tax dollars. This is funded by federal and state grants with a city Head Start partnership that must be considered. Kim Nelson and the team will be rewriting the grant next year, so the earliest we will be able to make the changes to the seats we will be offering is eighteen months away in '25/'26. But that is good, because it will give us some time to get in front of this.

It was mentioned that Roosevelt is also a current site.

Committee Member Ramirez said it was a great idea, he would love to see it happen for the community. He was looking at what other opportunities for collaboration, tapping into any other nonprofit organizations, there are for early childhood. Besides Head Start, what other city programs are out there that maybe could help these families that are spread out and can't reach their locations? This sounds like a great opportunity, and from the parent's side, to be able to offer parent programming and being able to offer information and resources for them to prepare the children for the long journey of their education years. The opportunity to show them the important stuff that families can start doing now, as their child is growing and looking forward to their elementary, middle, high school, and college career lives.

Committee Member Pope asked if this was a space that could also be combined with our Newcomer Center? Create a large resource center potentially?

Committee Member Huftalin commented she was thinking the same thing. She was also thinking that the families coming in would also need work. This would be an opportunity for these families to have access to early childhood and childcare.

Committee Member French added that she was also wondering if it could be an employee recruitment tool. Could we offer childcare for employees, and then we could use our high school students as work study or work-based learning experiences in the building?

Committee Member Pentenburg asked if that part of the vision was to extend beyond three- to five-year-olds? He thought a program that would make sense, outside the home visits and those already mentioned, nutritional services education should be included. Based on what is being seen in the foster care system, and how food is impacting families in outcomes, behaviors, and so on. Not sure how this impacts the school, but there are over 1000 kids in the foster care system in Winnebago County, and often foster care providers and biological parents are having meetings at McDonalds, or Burger King. I think there is a real opportunity to designate a space where parents and children are interacting, or a foster parent and bio parent are interacting with kids in a meaningful space, and a space that provides dignity to the child and the parent. This would be an amazing opportunity for that as well.

Ms. White told the Committee that there was great dialogue, and she appreciates the suggestions and the thoughts that were shared, as well as some of the questions as to what the District was thinking around these things. The committee will be receiving Phase I and Phase II reports before the next committee meeting and were asked to review them and are prepared to ask any questions at the next meeting. Discussion will continue on some of the topics that have come up and the themes have come up, as well as discuss priorities within the District based on what you read in the reports. There will be two Community Workshops on January 18, 2023. DLR will also provide some information on that. DLR will share information from the session with the broader community at the next committee meeting as well.

The meeting ended at 6:29 p.m.

Next Steering Committee meeting is Wednesday, January 17, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. in the Administration Building, Room 208.