

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

**Patriots Gateway**  
**Northwest Community Center**  
**Thursday, January 18, 2024**

DLR Group held two community Workshops simultaneously at Patriots Gateway and Northwest Community Center from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. to review where we are in the Facilities Management Plan and gather community input.

DLR Group members present:

*Patriots Gateway*

Korey White, AIA, pK-23 Planning Leader  
Helen Ho, Ph.D., EDAC, Designer Researcher  
Kristin Stone, AIA

15 Community Members in attendance

*Northwest Community Center*

Scott Pashia, AIA, pK-12 Planning Leader/Principal  
Leanne Meyer-Smith, AIA, K-12 Education Leader/Principal  
Morgan Wynne, AIA, Architectural Designer/Associate

4 Community Members in attendance

Community Agreements

- Stay engaged (ask and respond to questions, etc.).
- Be mindful of being a dominant voice – we want to hear all voices.
- Share and make space for others to share questions and perspectives.
- Refrain from talking over one another or having a side conversation.
- Speak only from the “I” perspective.

Agenda

1. Overview of the Process
2. Progress to Date:
  - What have we learned?
3. Guiding Principles
4. Community Voice
  - What’s your vision for RPS 205?

The purpose of the meetings was to come back to the community to provide an update since the kickoff meeting in September. An overview of the various workshops with teachers, students, staff, and community members was presented. A building level survey was also done to get feedback from the teachers and administration. All of this data is being compiled to be used in making decisions and recommendations.

DLR Group has 30 locations Worldwide and is an integrated design firm with team members across all different types of professions within the design industry: architects, engineers, planners, acoustical specialists, lighting designers. That means that as we start to understand what some of the issues are that you are facing, we're able to bring that knowledge to our team to make sure we address it.

Team members work with different school districts of varying sizes and scales across the United States, trying to help them identify what the teaching and learning vision is and to make sure their facility is aligned to that vision. Our process is set up in multiple phases. We do that so we can take the time to understand what the conditions are of your schools today. We hear from teachers, students, people like you, members of the community to understand how they are being used, what is important about them, and what the needs might be. Then we spend time figuring out what the vision is for the future. As we start to plan, we really want to make sure that we are keeping in mind the flexibility that is needed to make sure that your facilities can adjust to how teaching and learning may change in the next few years.

We have seen a lot of shifts in how schools' function over the past few years, probably more rapidly than we ever expected to. We need to keep that in mind as we move forward because we never know how these things are going to change, how careers are changing for our students and what future jobs will be. That is what our visioning phase does. This is where we start to identify what some of the program gaps are and how we identify what is needed.

That then helps us move into our base work, which is very conceptual in different scenarios. We formed a steering committee made up of community members, teachers, administrators, and students from your district. They are the group that helps guide us, questions us, and provides us feedback along the way that will ultimately help us understand what are going to be some of the best scenarios taking all of this into consideration. Finally, we start putting costs on that and identify what recommendations will go to the Board for their approval.

As you can see, the phases overlap somewhat, and we are currently right in the middle of this. We are trying to tie all this up by May 21<sup>st</sup>, so we are getting ready to move in to scenarios. We have heard so much from your community. We have had weekly meetings with the administration team to understand the details, to dive in deeper and begin to conceptualize.

Tonight, we wanted to give you an overview of what that vision is that we have heard for public schools. We use a lot of data in this process. The reason for that is we want to make sure that all the recommendations are supported by what we know to be true information.

There are a lot of things that your district did before this long-range planning process started. We are using all of that data to inform this process and help make those decisions. Some of those things include a facility condition assessment in 2020, capacity and utilization study, which looks at the number of students and how many students the building can hold. Enrollment is also a big part of that. We look at how many students are enrolled and how many will be enrolled in the future, out to the 2028/2029 school year. The district also conducted a security audit that looked at the different pieces of security around the school buildings such as data security, site security, etc.

We also do some data collection in this process. That included walking through some of your sites to understand how well they are working for teaching and learning at your schools. We toured a handful of elementary schools, four middle schools, and four high schools.

We then updated the facility condition assessment information we received, because there have been improvements that have been made since 2020. There have been some roof replacements and some mechanical and HVAC upgrades, and we wanted to make sure we were taking that into account when we're looking at the condition of your facilities.

The last big piece is what we call qualitative data. Not necessarily numbers in a spreadsheet or quantifying how well a building is being maintained, but this is where we get to hear from your community members, your teachers, and your students. That informs this process too.

That is what we want to share with you tonight. What we've heard and this engagement timeline. We kicked this off in early September and then did teaching and learning visioning workshops. One of the big things that we heard from that, is that your existing buildings and some of the available resources have created some challenges for the type of teaching and learning that your teachers are trying to do in the classrooms.

Your teachers are really creative. They are trying to push the boundaries and provide students with the opportunities to learn in ways that support them. But sometimes the spaces limit themselves. That is what we heard from the students, which is always our favorite workshop, and the students really want expanded program opportunities and career and technical education, arts, and athletics. They want exposure. And then the one that is really unique for us in this process is values. That is about understanding how we can make the learning environments and the buildings healthier. What does that mean for Rockford? There are a lot of questions we posed and asked your community to prioritize. What came out of that is there is an opportunity to strengthen your schools as neighborhood connections and make sure we're investing to make them resilient and healthy.

A lot of this information occurred as we were starting to meet with the steering committee. We have now met with them four times since we have kicked this off. We have reviewed all of the Let's Talks that have come in related to the plans. Some of the key themes we are seeing will mean renovations, upgrades and improvements made for more safety measures, a need for staff resources, a need for single user restrooms, and then just addressing some of the conditions of the existing facilities.

In our teaching and learning workshops, this is where we assembled teachers from all over the district, some of the recurring themes were, support and creation of space and functional spaces, making sure that everybody feels safe and comfortable when they are in their learning environments, making sure all the students can do the things that they enjoy and feel excited about those when they are at school, and that this plan should include exciting and creative ideas that treat everyone fairly and make all of the schools and neighborhoods better for everybody.

Across all grade levels, some of the takeaways we heard were that there are a lot of large and small group instruction going on, whether it be a whole classroom or smaller groups of students getting together. There are a lot of different types of teaching and learning and approaches in your schools, but the facilities do not always support that. There are some others that have been very traditional sort of classrooms, down hallways, which does not necessarily allow for teachers to break out with smaller groups of students because the classrooms are full of students and furniture and there is no place for them to go. Teachers really want to try new things, but their classroom spaces make it difficult to test those out.

Some additional items include that the teaching and the spaces should support the students' needs. We know our students have a variety of different support needs, and there have been a lot of conversations we have been having with our steering committee and the administrative team.

There's an opportunity to align spaces to meet the needs today and into the future, as well as looking at, is large group instruction the right approach, or should we create opportunities for some real-world learning? Those conversations have started, particularly around college and career technical education, so that really allows students to be active participants in learning. We felt rather than summarizing some of the students' passions for what their futures hold, they could do a better job sharing.

A video was shown of students sharing their passions and what they want to do in the future. The video was shared to show that this planning opportunity provides us with a point in time where we can start to align the recommendations with what their passion and their visions for their own future are. Students in the videos shared their passions were pharmacologist, interior designer, CDL driver, and a Military battlefield trauma surgeon.

Why did we show you that and how do we talk about it? Our job is to translate what we're hearing from those students and those teachers and understand what those impacts on your spaces and classrooms are, as well as the other spaces within your schools, such as gyms, cafeterias, art rooms, music rooms. So, we go through a bunch of exercises that ask, what kind of learning do you want to see? What kind of teaching do we need to support that learning? Finally, what are the spaces, the types of furniture, the technology, and the safety and security measures that help that thrive?

Across all of these engagements, what we heard was that furniture is needed that is easily moved around for different groups to allow either small or large groups, and to allow for different heights, because we all know our students are not uniform in the sizes and shapes.

This helps creativity; this helps them feel more like themselves when they are doing part of what they want to do.

We also hear that flexible and interactive technology supports this in a way that teachers and students need, so that they can really focus on the unique way that they learn; spaces that can be easily changed. We know that in every district, there is history of movable walls or partitions that slide, and that has not really worked in the past. However, technology has come a long way since the 50's and 60's when those were designed, and we are seeing that there is a desire for some walls to be able to be modified in a way that helps create different spaces within a larger learning space, whether that is a classroom, a library, or media center. As well as creative spaces, that came up again and again. Really wanting opportunities to explore creativity, curiosity, hands on interactive learning that may involve making things with our hands or using technology as well.

Out of the workshop we did with community, focusing on values and asking the question, "How can we make our schools healthier?", three big themes emerged, the first being equity and to ensure that every person has what they need to do well and feel included. Some comments that we can provide on this are:

*We want to make sure our schools create a sense of belonging for the families and students.*

*We want to make sure students feel happy and satisfied and successful when they are in our buildings.*

*We want to make sure that people have access to the schools and the services that they need.*

*We want to make sure that transportation and safety are considered as part of this too.*

The second big theme was neighborhood connection, and that was really acknowledging the important role that your schools play in their neighborhoods as well as seeing as a way that could become social service hubs within their neighborhoods, providing resources to families in the community. Services such as food services, physical and mental health services, close personal care services and more. Those are just some of the ideas that came out of the workshop, across 44 participants, so these themes were pretty resounding from those community members.

The third theme was about resilience and flexibility; building systems that work well at a functional level. We want to know that our buildings are going to do what they need to do, that we have better equipment that helps teachers feel and perform better. That can be daylight, it could be temperature, it could be air quality, it could be sound. Research tells us all of these qualities impact how much a student is able to succeed in a classroom. Also, there are better ways to deal with trash and use less plastic. Then having plans in place when unexpected things happen because of weather. This past week has been a good example. We know that this is important so our buildings can withstand whatever may come.

We also conducted an educator survey and a lot of the findings really supported and backed up what we were hearing from the other groups as well. We received over seven hundred responses across all of your buildings, most being from the elementary schools, which makes sense because you have the most elementary school buildings, but then the high school and middle schools were split at just over 20% from those cohort levels. This was great to see the participation and we got really great feedback. A lot of people say they want to do really creative things in their classrooms and that there could be opportunities to improve how those spaces support them.

All of this feeds into themes that we identified for your district vision. We did this just so we could see where we were hearing common themes, what that might be and what might help guide this process in the recommendations. Two big buckets, program and access, and then building function and investment.

Program and access are about some of the academics for arts and athletics programs, as well as early childhood education, bilingual services, community spaces, parent and family support, as well as support services in schools.

On the building function and investment, we hear a lot about making sure your classrooms and learning environments are inclusive for all students, that they are safe and secure, well maintained, and there is diversity and flexibility of spaces and that we are making decisions in an equitable manner.

That leads us towards what guides the plan. How do we know there is a lot of need? How do we start to prioritize in a way that we make sure we are addressing and having a positive impact in the best way possible? This is where your steering committee comes in. They help us with developing guiding principles, which are those high-level goals that provide a roadmap for making decisions for this plan in your school district.

Strategies then understand or support those guiding principles. This could be different approaches or policies, or different programs or partnerships that become identified to support those guiding principles. These guiding principles were created by taking all of this information around that vision that has been created or shared with us from your community, developed into those district themes, and then developed into the guiding principle statements.

Again, just to reiterate, the steering committee is a very diverse group of district voices and longtime residents who meet regularly. We have met once a month since October to support this process and influence those recommendations. We have community members, teachers, district leadership, students and alumni that are meeting in that group. The names of those individuals are on the district website.

We want to share the guiding principles, because the discussion we want you to have tonight is really going to focus on those guiding principles. The first one is about welcoming, inspiring, and flexible spaces that support each learners' unique needs. This is building on some of the key themes that were identified through what we heard about academic programming and

access, bilingual services, and access to those inclusive learning environments, as well as diverse and flexible types of spaces.

Making sure spaces can serve multiple different types of academic functions, whether that is the arts, English, making something that supports a history project, bilingual services, and access to those inclusive learning environments. Are we able to provide the right equipment and spaces to make sure students can get what they need at their school? Again, reiterating the need for different types of spaces and the ability for furniture and equipment to be flexible.

The second guiding principle is around community and belonging. This is important for the steering committee based on what they heard through all of the visioning, that the schools reflect the community to promote a sense of belonging. So, support services and spaces, making sure the students are getting the well-rounded support they need, making sure there are spaces that support the community, parents, and families. Again, inclusive learning environments, and safety and security. So, do students feel safe and comfortable when they are in their schools?

The third guiding principle is centered around creative collaboration. Making sure that schools are an environment where students and staff feel free to express themselves, collaborate with one another, and communicate in creative ways. Again, academic programming spaces for the types of learning spaces that are in school buildings that can support professional development spaces for teachers to learn from one another and share and collaborate on ideas and new ways of teaching. Again, inclusive learning environments and diverse and flexible spaces.

The last guiding principle is centered around ensuring that buildings support teaching and learning. The conversation around this one is a little complex. It is about balancing all the needs of teachers and students with staff and the programs that you offer with all of the different types of learning models, to make sure they work with your existing facilities. We have to be good stewards of the buildings and the funds that you have, but make sure that it is supporting teaching and learning. Again, looking at early childhood education, college and career education, athletics, physical spaces, arts, and education, we know those all contribute and all have to be balanced with the rest of the needs.

That is the high-level overview and we're happy to answer any questions you may have about that. There was a question from an audience member regarding eliminating portable modules. The response was that we are looking at that, no recommendations have been made yet, but it is one of our top goals.

Another comment from the audience member was regarding Barbour. That building was nice several years ago, but now it needs to be expanded for services. They don't have the sport areas or any extracurricular activities. The response was that we are also looking at that.

Third question from the audience member was what we have for kids with special needs? Response clarified that when we talk about student support needs, which is all a part of that dialogue. We are talking with leaders providing those support services on a weekly basis and

we are going to have calls coming up soon to address exactly that and understand what those needs are for spaces in the schools, how they are distributed.

We also use a lot of research at our firm so that when we recommend something, it is based and founded on things that have been proven to have an impact in a successful way on students. Through this research, we have found, and we know, what impacts students' learning progress or success. What research shows is that 50% of what students show up with in the classroom is due to who they are as individuals and what their home environments are like, really not going to be impacted by the work we are doing here tonight. Teacher effectiveness is 30%, but the building does contribute 16% to that success. It can also hinder it. So, we want to make sure that what we're doing, what we are recommending for Rockford Public Schools, helps to the tune of 16% in a positive manner.

Through our research we found that there are four key areas of design strategies, or ways that we can impact buildings that support that. Flexibility and Operability means routines and spaces that help students move. Making sure there are opportunities for that movement, that they are able to move around and learn in the ways that they learn best.

Individualization is similar, it supports that. Making sure that the spaces support the physical needs, so that those students who may have different types of needs in those classrooms and identify that for every user. So not saying that one size fits all, not saying this is how it is going to have to be, and everyone is going to have to accommodate, but make sure that the spaces are accommodating to the student.

A member of the audience asked if they had a source for those percentages. The reply was that they do, and she was sorry it wasn't on there. Below are the studies cited for that information.

### What impacts student learning progress?

Individual student variability = 50%

Teacher effectiveness = 30%

Physical learning environment = 16%

Hattie, John. "Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement." (2008)

Nye, Barbara, Spyros Konstantopoulos, and Larry Hedges. "How large Are Teachers effects?" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 26, no. 3 (2004): 237-57

Barrett, Peter, Fay Davies, Yufan Zhang, and Lucinda Barrett. "The impact of classroom design on pupils' learning: Final results of a holistic, multi-level analysis." *Building and Environment* 89 (2015): 118-133.



The next key area is Naturalness and Nature. This is just a simple way of saying, are our spaces healthy and comfortable in a way that we're seeing natural light and are we getting some airflow? We know that there are a lot of studies out there that show how nature impacts us in a positive way. It happens in the classrooms as well.

The last key area is stimulation, making sure it is the right amount. We know that if there is too much clutter on the walls, it can be distracting. If our lights are flickering, it is not going to be very good for our learning. So, having the right amount of stimulation within our learning spaces is critical.

The community members were divided into small work groups. Each table was given a large poster with instructions and asked to focus on two of the guiding principles. Asking the question "What does every school need?". They were instructed to answer the question based on their own experiences. Include any examples they are aware of.

Group input included:

Group 1

***Guiding Principle 1: Welcoming, Inspiring, Flexible***

Spaces include Outdoor Spaces and Physical Education Spaces together. This is to allow students to build community and participate in Nature and have movement and activities throughout their day. Small groups and small spaces to allow them to get their projects done together and collaborate. Media and Technology spaces to get them interested in things like robotics and getting more opportunities to incorporate everything they do in their core classes.

***Guiding Principle 2: Community and Belonging***

One of the spaces was Special Education Spaces. Every student needs to feel belonging, a sense of calm, a sense of counseling, a place where they feel safe. This supports kids' needs better and also decreases some of the stress that teachers have. Some of the teachers are not necessarily equipped to handle special education students. Another space is student dining spaces – it fills small and large groups, the most diverse space in the school. So outside of recess, this is where everyone interacts and has conversations with their peers and grades below. It helps with a well-rounded sense of community in the lunch spaces. Healthier options – when it comes to vending and such, especially middle schools and high schools. We also grouped together food service spaces and family and consumer sciences. I didn't know what family and consumer science spaces were, but it shows the kids in a kitchen like setting, they are cooking and interacting with each other. That can definitely build their life skills, not a lot of adults know how to cook. Just being able to interact with their food, knowing where their food comes from, being able to work with it, I think would definitely provide a greater guiding principle of community and belonging. Lastly, we grouped together

education spaces and professional development spaces. I see this as filling the gaps within our community. Let's say we're short on nurses, this would be a great opportunity to kind of fill those needs within our schools so that when kids graduate, they are able to stay right in the community in which they grew up and then have jobs.

Comments were made that they liked the healthy food options conversation. Some of the elementary schools have started making their own gardens, raised garden beds. Some of the middle school students do take a field trip to a farm for a weekend to take care of the animals and learn where their food comes from.

Group 2

### ***Guiding Principle 3: Creative Collaboration***

The first one we have is small group. They really don't exist in most classrooms, but teachers are creating their own small group spaces. We also have special ed spaces and family and consumer science spaces together. We need more sensory areas tailored to all the students' needs. This would help with addressing these needs and also help us teachers who need some support and have that release of the children, so they are ready to learn. We also had spaces for creative work, maker spaces and media center spaces. We don't really see it, sometimes they are combined with the libraries, we see those mixed together, so they're not very big. I think those would create more growing opportunities for the students. We also said music spaces. You mentioned that they don't have space for this at some of the schools. They basically need bigger spaces.

### ***Guiding Principle 4: Buildings Support Teaching and Learning***

The first space we talked about was student dining spaces. Schools need dining/café spaces that can have multiple uses. They can be used all day, not just at lunch. Students need room to move. We grouped technology education spaces and media center spaces together where they have better internet, etc. We also grouped special education spaces and Family and consumer science spaces together. Again, we need more sensory spaces at elementary schools. The family and consumer science spaces meet real world needs. Our last space is outdoor space. These must be secure spaces with fences or something to protect the kids. It was not necessary before, but now it is because times have changed. The outdoor spaces need to be more natural spaces, because this will help the students' minds to learn.

Group 3

### ***Guiding Principle 1: Welcoming, Inspiring, and Flexible***

We also had Guiding Principle of Welcoming, Inspiring and Flexible. That group did an outstanding job and had quite a few of the same things we did. We actually grouped a lot of them together, we focused on flexibility. The idea of having technology, consumer science, large and small groups, special education spaces, visual arts, media centers,

(I work in a maker space, a full-blown maker space at Roosevelt, you guys should check it out), but kids love that stuff. It gives a lot of flexibility, and it gives alternatives to kids that do not do well in a traditional classroom. Because every classroom has kids that don't do well in that setting, but they will do well in a class of thirty-five kids. So having flexible spaces that address all types of learning is crucial. Unfortunately, those do take up space, but if this district is going to get it right, they need to start providing those spaces to make it equitable for everyone. If not every building in the district has them, we talked about making sure every kid in the district has access to them from early age on, all the way through high school to whatever they need, vocational, trades, that sort of thing. There is a huge gap in that and it's a well-paying job. There are a lot of kids that are hands on learners and are lacking the resources to build those skills to be active members of our community. The other thing that I brought up was that kids don't come to school for the core classes. They come to school for vocational education, music classes, art classes, and physical education classes. That is what keeps kids coming to school. We have a truancy problem in this district, and we have a graduation problem in this district and having more access to those types of programs would be a huge benefit to the full community, but also to those kids coming out of these schools and graduating. I know this district puts a premium onto trying to bring people into the district, bring families into the community, and if we can increase the graduation rate and offer more of these vocational trainings, which would go a long way to return the investment that we are making in these schools.

### ***Guiding Principle 2: Community and Belonging***

Community and belonging, the same thing. There's a health clinic at Auburn, doing more of those community-based things, because we also have a transportation issue. It's a wide spread-out community and a lot of these families do not have reliable transportation, but they do go to school. So, if they can get that access at school, there was something recently, the laundry program. That is super important because some of our kids live in buildings that don't have access to laundry machines onsite. Our schools hold together our neighborhoods. If you get rid of a school in a neighborhood, it guts that neighborhood. It should be a hub for that neighborhood, there should be a vitality to that school, the school should have the resources to provide for that community members in that area and be able to provide for the kids and their families. This gentleman here is a fantastic father, and he has a lot of concerns, he cares a lot about this community, but I work with a lot of kids that don't have that kind of parent and have to do a lot of it on their own. That is also one of the onuses for doing family consumer science, for doing vocational education, to give kids skills that they don't get from their parents, they don't get from their houses. I know programs like the Montessori program do a fantastic job in giving kids those life skills that are applicable through their whole life. If we can start doing that for our kids, it doesn't matter what kind of house they come from, if they can start learning those skills and acquire them and \*have access to the same things that people generally take for granted if they are more fortunate than that, that will go a long way to creating more equity and better community.

We will leave these posters down if you want to walk around and look at them before you head out. It is really meaningful to get your thoughts, and your input, and your vision. There will be other points in the future, so check the RPS website where we are posting items as they come up through this process. The steering committee members are also on the website. There will be future opportunities to see how this process is progressing and we want to make sure you are all kept in the loop there.

Please refer to the 1/18/24 Community Workshop PowerPoint located on our website along with these minutes, for additional information.