

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

**Steering Committee
Wednesday, February 21, 2024**

Leanne M. Meyer-Smith, DLR Group opened the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

DLR Group Members Present:

Scott Pashia, AIA – Senior Project Manager
Leanne M. Meyer-Smith, AIA, K-12 Education Leader/Principal

Flo Analytics Members Present:

Rebecca Wright, Project Manager
Charles Rynerson, Senior Data Analyst/Demographer
Kate Doiron, Senior GIS Analyst

Committee Members Present:

Board:

Paul Carpenter

Principals/Teachers:

Dawn Myelle-Watson – Science, Jefferson HS
John Schmelzer – Principal Ellis ES

Students:

None

External:

Brent Pentenburg – YMCA
Antonio Ramirez – Alignment Rockford
Ron Clewer – Gorman & Company

Internal:

Jason Pope – Director of Recruitment
Misael Nascimento – ED Bilingual and Multicultural Department
Bridget French – ED College and Career Readiness

Committee Members Absent:

Board:

Tiana McCall

Principals/Teachers:

Adam Cengiz – Principal Special Programs CAPA & Gifted

Joshua Tatman – Science, Auburn HS

Students:

Jessica Garcia – Auburn Superintendent Student Advisory Committee

Emmanuel Edwards – Roosevelt

Internal:

Heather Psaltis - ED of Schools, Southeast Quadrant

Susan Uram – Director of Education Technology

Tessa Huftalin – Director of SPED

Dawn Williamson – Director of Athletics, Activities, and Program Development

Melissa Wolf – Director of Fine Arts

External:

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

Administration Present:

Michael Phillips – Chief Operating Officer

Greg Brown, Ed. D – Chief Financial Officer

Scott Jenson – Director of Design and Construction

Ehren Jarrett – Superintendent

Heidi Dettman – Chief Academic Officer

Mr. Pashia opened the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

Flo Analytics Members joined the meeting via ZOOM. There were technical difficulties with sound. While troubleshooting the Zoom issue, Mr. Pasha shared the next meeting dates.

March 7, 2024 – Steering Committee

March 20, 2024 - Steering Committee

April 10, 2024 – Steering Committee

April 25, 2024 - Steering Committee

May 8, 2024 - Steering Committee

May 21, 2024 – Board Presentation

Meeting moved to the Board Room where Zoom Meeting commenced.

Flo Analytics members introduced themselves. Ms. Wright explained that the overall project is the boundaries and articulation Area Analysis Project update. They are a consulting firm that is based primarily out of Oregon and Washington who have worked for many states, principally for school district projects. They have assisted districts across the nation. They use custom tools and procedures and try to promote transparency to the public by and in their processes. As a company, they strongly believe that students should have access to educational opportunities that meet their individual needs, and they specialize in helping schools district with that.

They are committed to communities and work a lot with communities, school districts, cities, and counties across the country. Their primary goal is a long-term positive outcome for districts, but also students, parents, and the broader community. They specialize in student enrollment forecasting, boundary adjustments, special program analysis, school capacity and utilization analysis, school choice analysis - why students are choosing which schools, communications, and community engagement as a part of these processes, and they also do electoral redistricting for school boards.

Flo Analytics then presented their PowerPoint presentation that they will be presenting to the Board of Education on March 5, 2024. Please refer to presentation on our website, below these posted minutes.

Mr. Pashia: We are going to move now into some high-level conversation around scenarios, how we're starting to pull some of this together. Looking forward to the next meeting, where we have some draft scenarios built out to get some reaction. I am going to walk you through the look ahead at the next several meetings we will have. I am going to ask Leanne to give a quick update on the community engagement meetings we had after the last Steering Committee meeting, and about the exercise we did there and what some of the take aways were.

Ms. Meyer-Smith: I think these were January 18th, we had meetings simultaneously at two locations. It was a little snowy, a little blowy, but a lot of good conversations, warm and inviting inside. We tried to align the discussion of space with the guiding principles, there was a lot of big discussion. Some of the major takeaways were no surprises, things you've heard from other stakeholders. A lot of talk about flexibility and the need of multiuse of space, make the space hard working. A need for small group sensory space for those students to pull away and have some relief in their day. Real world learning, a lot of talk about that with the adults in the room. A space for movement, a space to support all students and teachers for their mental health needs, brain breaks, so they feel supported throughout the day. Filling the community needs with the local workforce, went in line with that real world learning discussion. And then space for co-creation. Again, you've probably all talked about most of these things, but it was really refreshing to hear community members bring that to light and have some of the same thoughts that other stakeholders have been talking about.

Mr. Pashia: Thanks Leanne. Moving into the scenarios, overall vision of how we're starting to organize this. If you look up on the screen at the diagram, there are datapoints that will inform us. You can see facility condition, capacity/utilization, enrollment, a lot of the information Flo just shared with us, as well as student/neighborhood specific datapoints. There's also all the engagement we've been having with community inputs, the work that you have all been doing, program needs that have either been expressed across the district or goals that have been identified, as well as how do we wind that vision, and those guiding principles, and high-level narratives into the creation of these plans. All of those feeds into the scenario building which ultimately leads into the recommendations. Again, just a simple diagram, but trying to highlight the parts and pieces that try to inform that.

We've talked about all of these datapoints with you all as we've kind of walked through the exercises. Again, condition; utilization; the National Neighborhood Equity Index has formed some of those conversations; location of intensive schools and some of the needs there; portables has been an area of focus from the beginning as to how do we alleviate some of the need for the mobiles; where are the students enrolled in special programs and how can we support that better, I think some of the information they just shared will help us understand the distribution of that a bit better; projections related back to capacity and program locations; and then undersized classrooms has been one of the final areas that has been brought up consistently in our conversations.

We tried to organize this into engagement groups or categories. Some of the needs identified at the administration level. I'm not going to read all of these if you need me to point them out a bit more, I can. There were some concerns and areas of focus from your team as well, so that's identified here. There were outcomes from the teaching and learning vision that were identified, related to how can the spaces better support the instructional delivery model. And then ultimately and finally the community programs as well. These are all the kinds of lenses we can overlay on top of the scenarios that confirm that we're addressing, as best as possible, all of these areas. *Refer to DLR Group Presentation located below the minutes on the District website.*

We know that there are going to be scenarios that look at what items are applied across all the schools, what items are specific to some of the schools, and then there will be items that are distinct and separate from the schools as well, kind of that holistic need. Ultimately what we are going to ask your involvement in is how do we prioritize some of those. We know that we have a bucket of money and it's limited, and as we start to think about this, we need to understand what projects are included. And other projects that don't get included, is there a way we can at least touch them at some level. This is really high-level scenario thought.

What we tried to do, based on all of the conversations we've had and the data we've started to look at, is try to identify some of the key investments that we consider above the line that we feel we must have these, or we believe it is a good idea to have these to address multiple conversations we've been having. That will be a chunk of money to support that investment. The priorities that would remain would be this below the line conversation. Again, just trying to separate these conversations a little bit and help us understand how they impact each other.

So, what I want to do is spend a little bit of the time on the top-of-the-line items that we've identified here and just get your reaction to those, confirmation, any questions you might have as to why they are key initiatives. I'm just going to walk through each of these briefly and Michael and team, feel free to add.

The 4-2-1 College and Career Center, I believe, is a major initiative from the district related to access to programs and real-world learning for the entire district. With the vision of taking the College and Career Center and transitioning that to a kind of centralized hub that students can feed into for more advanced courses, more exposure to additional courses. That will allow us to look at each of the high schools and understand what programs stay and get enhanced at those areas. This is really an investment at the high schools and at the new College and Career Center. Again, this would be a pretty important investment that we've identified that addresses some of the conversations we've had related to real world learning, career opportunities for students, and a way to allow students from across the district to engage in those programs. Any questions around that specific item? Does that seem like a reasonable approach? Okay.

Newcomer Center is another initiative that the district has identified that is really an effort to enhance the understanding for new families when they come to the district. Whether it is issues related to language barriers or just bringing folks into the district. This is really a kind of onboarding opportunity that helps ramp up the families faster. So this is an investment that we've identified, adding some additional classrooms and area support spaces to provide a more robust program. We haven't identified a location for this yet, but again, this would be an investment that would probably be an addition to an existing facility. Looking at more of a centralized location, so again, related to access. Any questions around this investment? Okay.

Early Childhood Center is another area. I think if you look at some of the facility conditions, some of the other data and trends, that early education centers need some help, they need to be looked at. So, really starting to look at where a new early childhood center might be located and making that an investment to enhance our early learners.

The final bucket, or category, is somewhat of a catch-all. In conversations we felt like the functional building requirements were something we've talked a lot about, whether it is related to the student support spaces or the modulars. You can also see there are a handful of buildings without walls and doors that impacts the ability to be successful from a teaching standpoint in those areas. We tried to find a category that all of these could fit into. This would be an investment at some level to support each of these specific buildings.

So we put this above the line. I think we really need to dig into cost modeling to see how much this impacts because there's a lot of meat here. But we've had some great meetings with teachers and administration around the student support spaces and what is needed. I think what we're looking at is building out the different parts to understand what is some initial

investment that may be needed to add those spaces at various locations. These would be some of those projects that we're proposing, these are great investments based on the kind of holistic conversations we've been making. Next step would be to jump in and understand what each of those costs would be, so from the overall budget we know how much we have left.

I would love to open it up and see if you have any questions related to those?

Committee Member Pope: I'm curious about the early childhood center. With the early childhood center, is that in addition to our four existing ECs, or is this a new building for the support staff that operate out of the transportation building?

Mr. Phillips: Jason, some early discussions have been a new center would replace one of the existing. If we address the four that we have right now, we're looking at Summerdale being in the worse condition. But as part of that, that definitely has been a discussion of our home visit program that is located in a not-so-great location currently at Sterling Holley. It doesn't facilitate families coming to that location and those needs.

Committee Member Pope: Multi-purpose then?

Mr. Phillips: Yes.

Dr. Jarrett: I think what we would also be looking to envision is, these were all buildings built in the fifties to be elementary schools. What could we do if we started from scratch and really thought about what families, community partners and students and staff need to serve birth through four and a half to five-year-olds. What would that look like as a best practice center that could then be a model for other sites? I also think this is something that could attract some interest from our public officials for grant funding. I think this could really be a model of excellence that we could then replicate over time in future facilities' plans. At the end of the day, I'm proud of what we've done with our quadrant based early childhood strategy. But we do have limitations as to what we can do with the buildings that were designed for five- to twelve-year-old and were designed coming up on 75 years ago in most cases, with the four sites we are using. The other big change would be that we would have to coordinate with the grant writing process, because we would want to think about the number of rooms to start to move in the direction of more all-day seats. We hear very consistently from families that the two and a half hour time frame is very challenging from a transportation perspective and if we could have wrap around before and after school and all-day services, this would probably serve our most vulnerable population of students with much higher attendance rates than we get. So a lot of powerful 'whys' there. This would also require very intense coordination with Kim Nelson and the EC team as we write our new grant. We can't just say we want more all-day seats, because there is a state funding requirement tied to that. A lot of complexity comes with this, but I think this is part of the big goal vision that we would have for early childhood moving forward. I'm certainly hopeful we can continue to entertain that conversation.

Mr. Pashia: Thank you. Any other conversation around those four buckets?

Committee Member Ramirez: It's a lot of information and a lot of questions, we'll be here all night for what I have. I'd really like to get more of an understanding of how those boxes were created and how clear we are on the things that are going to go into each box. For example, the functional building requirements, what schools do those include, what are we looking at program wise? The special programs that are out there were part of the facilities plan last round, so what have we still not completed? One of the talks was Barbour Language Academy getting an expansion, and I haven't heard that since I've been coming to the meetings. Is that off the table now? Where are we with that? That was part of that plan too, being Phase II or III, I can't remember what it was. I haven't heard anything about that.

When it comes to early childhood, now that I'm getting involved in more early childhood work, I don't really hear a strand or support for bilingual families in a lot of the schools, and how is that going to tie into creating a pipeline of our young children who are going to go into the bilingual schools. What are the supports that are there for those families? I love the concept that we're trying to figure out where we need more programs, like bilingual programs, but what other things do we have in place to make sure they have the resources and supports? At that level, we have to be able to say we have kids that can walk to a school and not have to be bused from north side of town to far east, but do we have the capacities to give the resources and supports that those families are going to need?

Same thing with the College and Career Center. I love the idea, but again, if I live on the north end and I'm going to have to come all the way to Jefferson for a special college program, and I know we are going to try to figure out special programs to high schools near there. But I really need more clarification how as a parent, and a member of the community, I'm going to say, "Let's support this because they have great opportunities.", but that child is going to have to get up super early to get on a bus to go to the College and Career Center versus someone who lives nearby.

For me, I just need more of a breakdown to understand how each box is going to be workable. And for people in the community to say my . . . was hurt where I'm going to buy into this. Another question I've gotten from the community is, are there going to be any more community sessions, because there were only two and a lot of families feel they didn't get the chance to go and voice what they want to see at their schools too. That is another question I had, and I was just waiting for the right time. I know we have a lot and really don't have that much time, but I'm part of newcomers, and I'm part of other programs and I don't think they've had a chance to speak up about what they want to see in their schools.

Mr. Pashia: Do you want me to tackle some of those, I can jump in. For instance, on the College and Career and 4-2-1, the District's working on the class schedule, for lack of a better term, and working through how that will play out. So that is in the process and that will inform what spaces get backfilled and how they get backfilled at some of the high schools. A lot of this is running concurrently. These are big theme investments, for lack of a better term. Related to the engagement, I feel like when you get into the specifics like what is a newcomer center need, that is more of a programming conversation that would happen down the road. I've seen it handled that way in other districts too. So as you kind of lay out the big vision, then you can

start to get into that level of detail and have those conversations. I don't know if that helps. If Mike . . .

Mr. Phillips: Tony, we do intend to come back out to the public to share some of this early work we've been doing to make sure we're on target from what we've heard. We've actually had three community workshops. We had one that was held at the College and Career Center, it was called a Values Workshop, but that was community based, and then the two that were recently held. But our intent is to go back out, I don't know if we have those dates established yet, but it is to go back out and to still listen and make sure that the folks that have come and shared, that we have captured that and what we're putting in place resonates with our families.

To your point, there is still a lot to hash out. When we look at the College and Career Education Center, one of the thoughts there from the 4-2-1, when you look at an automotive program or a welding program, that you duplicate it over time at the four locations. They are very expensive programs to duplicate; let's create a space where we can have an A+ space for our students to come. I think what we're looking at there is not so much that that would be the first place students would go to in their day, but that they would go to their home school and then be transported to the center. We're still working through those logistics, but we're really looking at where students would spend a portion of their day, maybe it's a morning, or maybe it's an afternoon, but that is some early thoughts as we think about that. So that's career, from a college perspective I think what we are looking at is, some of our higher-level classes, physics, math, science, where we've struggled to have the number of teachers to duplicate over four high schools, having a class here where all four high schools could come. In some cases that may be where they'd actually come to the building during the week, in other cases creating a remote lab where they could still stay in their home high schools, but maybe come for a very intense lab. We have a biology and chemistry lab that was built out at that center not too long ago that's in excellent shape. I think that's some of the early thought with the college and education.

Touching on the functional building requirements, that kind of hits a lot of the topics that we've heard not only from our families, but from our teachers, staff, and students. Our buildings that are modular, that didn't have walls and doors, taking care of those issues. The six to eight buildings that have modular classrooms, I'll use Auburn as an example, they have a pod of I think six classrooms. As we pull things out of Auburn, we are able to backfill space to be able to get rid of those modular classrooms. So looking at the elementary schools and high schools that we have that at.

And lastly our Student Support Services space. That really boils down to some of our bilingual, some of our Special Ed needs, some of our tutoring needs, some of our multi-tiered support service space needs, so creating office space, as well as flexible meeting space, that our teachers and students have access to. As Dr. Jarrett said, we are currently in 1950 buildings that had classrooms and an administrative office and really weren't like what we built at Constance Lane and Cherry Valley where we were able to address some of these issues. That is a need that is not going down at any time, we just see that steadily increasing over time, that need for those spaces.

I hope that answers some of your questions. There's still a lot of things to answer. I did have a chance to look, but I have not located anything on two-way language at Barbour for an expansion. But that has been a discussion, we do know that when that was built, the gymnasium wasn't built to an adequate size for a sixth, seventh, eighth grade, and also an auditorium. Those are some of the below the line items that, as we hear different things, how do we prioritize those needs through these three lenses, the facilities condition assessment, overall capacity across the district, and then lastly, that National Neighborhood Equity Index in our current enrollment. Those would be our lenses that we would be looking at some of these other projects, and then prioritizing. I hope I answered your questions.

Committee Member Nascimento: When you see the big buckets and no explanation, the community is going to say, "What is that?". How did we come about four big buckets? Those are four big needs that we know, there are thirty more that we know too, but I think that the community needs to understand, okay Newcomers Center, tell me more. What does that mean? I see the buckets, you see the buckets, those questions are going to be out there, and I think that is what the community is going to need an answer for. As they look at Early Childhood Center, great we need that, tell me more. Tell me more is the way to answer the questions that the community will bring up. Yes, there are thirty big buckets, but we can only do four out of how ever many.

Mr. Pashia: Great point, the intention would be to build that narrative out underneath each of these so it is more defined, and it would be cross referenced to all the pain points these are supporting. Thank you for that comment.

Committee Member Myelle-Watson: My question that came up has to do with the College and Career Education Center. From a staff perspective, have the CTE teachers, or teachers who would be teaching pathway classes, been involved in this new space? As a CTE teacher, no one has asked me. You teach these three pathways' classes, come over, let's look at this space, let's talk about this space. Have others been talked to? Because I'm not an industry expert, but there are some CTE teachers who are also industry experts. Have they been involved, hey let's look at the center, what could work over there? So from a staff perspective, to explain to my colleagues when they see these buckets, well no one has talked to me, have they talked to anybody? I'm only one high school, maybe there are others that have been talked to. That just comes up for me from a staff perspective.

Ms. Meyer-Smith: On the CCEC Center, we're just starting the programing right now. We do have, next Monday night, a workshop with Industry Partners to let them walk through the building and see what is there and talk about some of the areas that are already set up for something and would remain there most likely, like the automotive bays, because you don't tear those apart. Then there are some other areas that were previously medical that will probably stay that. But then looking at what is left and some of the ideas that Bridgett put together on a sheet. So, we will be having some programming meetings, but we're just starting. We will welcome all input, that's for sure.

Mr. Pashia: Michael, you gave us a good segway into the next steps, if we can move below the line. This may answer some of the questions on the remaining items. Some of the above the line are going to be major investments that support a lot of the needs that have been identified through the dialogue, but as we walk through the priorities remaining, there are three layers we've identified here.

Layer one is focused on the facility conditions. We know that there is a need at every building across the district at some level with life expectancy, buildings with total need over 50% of the total investment, and then what are the immediate repair needs. So these are ways we've started to think about; how can we parse this out? We may not need lockers immediately in building X, but we need a roof, or we need some of those other investments that are immediate repairs or within the next five years. So we're trying to focus on those as a starting point when it comes to building out those investments. So that is where Layer 1 is all related to the facility.

Layer 2 would be better understanding of the capacity a little bit better. Some of that information that FLO shared earlier will inform us. But looking at the mobiles, as Michael shared earlier, how can we get rid of the mobiles and not impact in a negative way the capacity of the school? So does that mean backfilling some programs or adding an addition that supports the education in a better way? The way we've targeted this is to start to look at the buildings that we know are over utilized. The District has defined between 85% & 95% utilization as the sweet spot, the ideal spot. It gives you a little bit of wiggle room to grow and not impact in an adverse way, but if you're pushing that 85% level, you're overcrowded. So first tier is looking at that overutilization area.

Then the special programming impact, again understanding the information that was shared earlier. Understanding where some of the need is that maybe doesn't exist from a bilingual standpoint, and from some of the other special programs, gifted, STEAM, some of those programs, and overlaying that to see if there is a strategic investment that needs to be made to make it more accessible, that maybe currently doesn't exist. So Layer 2 is that capacity conversation.

Layer 3 is really jumping into the neighborhoods and kind of understanding the Neighborhood Equity Index and making sure that we are focusing on some of the schools that have been identified as intensive. I know that was a conversation you all had a couple of meetings ago, the importance of that. Then making sure we're aware of the school locations in the census tract that are at that higher ranking from a social vulnerability index score. Then the high percentage of students in programs. This is again related to enrollment where some of the students are currently going and thinking about more of a neighborhood focus or centric lens here for this Layer 3.

Refer to *Example of Prioritization in Action* page in DLR Group Presentation. There are nine criteria across the front. This is an exercise we will start to look at in our next session. But within this case study, you have the nine criteria that we talked about, related to facilities, related to capacity, and related from an enrollment standpoint. You can see as we start to

overlay buildings with these nine categories, where the buildings start to rank. This is a method of prioritization we often use. If you look at building B, building B is in need in seven of these categories. So does that start to raise that building to the top as a strategic investment? And that is really the first step is understanding how do the buildings rank, if we agree that these are the nine criteria we need to use to prioritize. How do some of the buildings start to rank holistically across the District? We may find five buildings that are touching six of these categories, and they may be clustered in a certain area of the District. Then there is a conversation around, are we going to make all those investments in that area, or is there another variable that kind of shifts that priority? But when we come back, we'll have names and locations starting to be assigned to this based on pulling all this data. I think my consideration for all of you tonight is, does this seem like a valid approach? Would you support that? And does this criteria and the layers start to make sense based on all the conversation and information we've shared? It's a lot to take in, I know. It's never easy and there are always a lot of inputs, but we found, at least as a starting point, as we go through and are intentional about prioritization, identifying those buildings with the most needs seems to be a logical strategy.

Committee Member Clewer: With these nine categories, would you consider weighing them differently? Like the building total need of 50%? It's not a one to one with a system life of less than five years. It doesn't have to be, right? So would you consider weighing each of them not just one, one, one, but maybe buildings total needs over 50% as a one and a half. Do you see what I'm saying?

Mr. Pashia: Yes, and we have done that in the past. What we typically recommend is you go back to the guiding principles and see if there is one that we feel needs to have a heavier weight. If the condition needs to be weighed higher than say the programs, we can study that. We would work with all of you to understand if that is the right category to weigh, yes, we have done that in the past. For instance, if student performance is an indicator that the District is really trying to focus on and you have a performance criterion, you may start to weigh that more to give that a little more importance.

Board Member Carpenter: And the high percentage of students in programs, that's the percentage of students in that school that are in special programs? (yes) Okay, so if the school is where a special program is located, then that school is going to have a higher percentage than schools that don't have special programs?

Mr. Pashia: I'm not sure I'm quite understanding. The intention here is to look at the programs and make sure that the percentage of participation makes sense from an investment standpoint.

Board Member Carpenter: . . . What are you looking at

Mr. Pashia: If within a certain location, and I can confirm this but what I believe we were trying to get at here is, if a certain location has a program and there is a lot of participation there, then that tells us there is interest. There needs to be a sustainable model to support that.

Mr. Phillips: Scott, I think where we're going with that, and maybe we use Montessori as an example, where we have a special program, and we have a waitlist. So, we see a need for an additional special program. Then going back to what Flo presented tonight, where we're seeing a lot of the programs in the northwest. Maybe we're positioning a new special program, whether that would be a Montessori, whether it be a STEAM, wherever we're seeing that high need and positioning that in an additional location in the District.

Mr. Pashia: If there are no more questions on that piece of it, I'd like to move to next steps. We're getting close to the end of the time here. We'll be focusing on using these criteria, building out some scenarios based on this, and ultimately it is going to be a balancing act at the end in related to funding, but at least we can start to identify some potential priorities based on these criteria.

So what we'll do is take some of your feedback from today, modify, revise some of the thought we put into this. Next meeting we're going to come back with some draft scenarios that we can dig into a lot deeper. I apologize, this was a lot of information kind of dumped on you. Next session will be more of a working session where we can start to dissect the strategy a bit more. Hopefully coming out of that meeting we can select some scenarios that everybody seems to think have some legs. Then we can start to overlay some cost models to those. That would be the path moving forward that we would propose. Does that make sense? Okay.

Michael, Dr. Jarrett, team, I don't know if you have anything to add, but that concludes what we were wanting to share tonight. I think a lot of that was showing you guys the work that Flo's been doing and understanding the landscape across the District related to some of those programs. Thank you and I'll hang around a little bit if anyone has any one-on-one questions. Hopefully, you are all starting to get excited.

Meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

Next Steering Committee meeting is Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 5:00 p.m. in the Administration Building, Room 208.