



## Elementary Facility Plan Citizen Task Force Outcomes from Meeting 3—August 21, 2024

### 37 Task Force members in attendance

**Planning/Facilitation consultants in attendance:** Mark Roffers and Nick Johnson

**District staff in attendance:** Cale Bushman, Interim Superintendent; Diana White, Coordinator of Communications & Marketing; Joshua Viegut, Assistant Superintendent of Operations; Julie Schell, Director of Elementary Education; Jon Euting, Assistant Superintendent of Academics

**Presentations:** District staff presented information on elementary school policies and programming, transportation (bussing), and District finances.

**Small group exercise results:** Each of the seven small groups formed at this Task Force meeting were asked to respond to three questions.

#### Question 1. What did I learn today?

The following is a summary of member responses to this question from ChatGPT – a generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) program – with consultant modifications for clarity and relevance:

- *Funding and Budget Insights:* Learned about various funding sources. Key points include the transportation costs, routes, and how they impact consolidation decisions; the importance of keeping a fund balance; the district's limited maintenance, repair, and replacement funds; how referendums are used; and the complexity of budget processes.
- *District Operations and Efficiency:* Gained an understanding of the overall health of the district, including the factors leading schools to be more or less cost-efficient to operate and how salary and benefits make up the vast majority of operating costs.
- *Program and Policy Clarifications:* Learned about the factors influencing class sizes. Clarified the requirements and impacts of Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) and Title 1 programs, and the importance of maintaining AGR status to support funding and class sizes.

The following is a list of all Task Force member responses to this question:

- About AGR funding
- Transit budget is \$3.1 million for First Student, new RFP coming
- Fund balance of \$30 million; only \$1 million for maintenance of cap stock
- The AGR program - I was unaware of the requirements and what it involved
- In where money comes from and it is not keeping pace with inflation
- I learned where funding comes from and that there is a max per student
- Overall health of the district is still strong
- Larger schools tend to be more cost efficient
- Relevant transportation and financial info and its effects on elementary school consolidation
- Overview of funding
- Layers that determine class sizes
- Is keeping AGR status something we should consider when choosing school consolidation?
- One person talks a lot
- Bus system
- Budget % from state and local levies



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- Types of elementary funding
- Lots about busing/routes
- Title 1 schools and what that means
- Budget process
- Transportation costs \$3.1 million annual
- It is really complicated
- Josh did a great job
- The need to make decisions that maintain AGR/SAGE/Title 1 monies
- I learned more about transportation costs and about our deficit in the district
- Clarification of operational referendums and staffing... capital referendum is building
- Information about AGR and Title 1 Schools

### Question 2. What questions on these topics remain?

The following is a summary of member responses to this question from ChatGPT with consultant modifications for clarity and relevance:

- *Funding and Efficiency Questions:* How will combining schools impact AGR funding and efficiency? What are the specific operational costs per elementary school and how do they compare? What happens to funding if AGR and non-AGR schools are merged or consolidated? What are the annual operational costs for each elementary school?
- *Data and Trends:* Do we have data on poverty trends specific to schools, and how might this affect Title 1/AGR eligibility? How specific can financial information be regarding a school closure vs. keeping a school open?
- *Impact on Students and Logistics:* What are the implications of school closures on busing pick-up and drop-off times and length of time a student is on the bus? How will the proposed changes affect class sizes, student distribution, and staff retention?
- *Community and Facility Use:* How will community use of facilities (e.g., playgrounds) be impacted with school closures, and what is the role of Wausau Child Care in providing before/after care?

The following is a list of all Task Force member responses to this question:

- What schools can be absorbed by an AGR school and not force a loss of funding.
- Do we have data on poverty level trends? Even specific to schools? I.e. are we forecasting school X may become Title 1 and eligible based on income trends by that school?
- If there are concerns with certain school closures and the resulting time on a bus for some students, is an evaluation of other district boundaries in scope (maybe Antigo is closer or Everest)?
- If 2 schools are combined, would the efficiency an ability to more evenly distribute class sizes and supports associated outweigh the benefits from AGR (assuming AGR is lost with the merge)? If more clarity in question contact Laura Held
- The first data set showed 200 bus routes last year. How did we go from 200 to only 54?
- What are annual operational costs per elementary school?
- How many students live within in 1 mile of a different elementary school



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- Which closures affect budget the most?
- Operational costs
- How specific can financial info be concerning school closure vs. keeping a school open?
- Does the 60 min busing time account for secondary students that stop at elementary schools on afternoon routes?
- What constitutes a "major capital expense"? Under fiscal responsibility on criteria
- District placement - do kids stay at the placed school or move to their neighborhood school the next year?
- What happens to funding if 2 AGR schools are combined?
- Which schools have the best staff retention? Which schools have the highest staff turnover rates?
- Which schools have sensory spaces? Accessible playgrounds?
- When will the recommendations be implemented if any schools are closed/
- Building cost projection
- Why do families in district school choice?
- Do we have to accommodate inter district transfers?
- Which schools does Wausau child care provide before/after care at the school site?
- Can schools fundraise for improvements?
- Still not understanding 4K program
- How to efficiently combine schools in a good timeframe?
- What percentage of the district (staff) is likely to retire in the next 5-15 years?
- Are there short-term studies available analyzing effects of complete restructuring elementary schools in other districts?
- What percentage do the elementary schools account for WSD's transportation budget?
- Why are larger schools more efficient than smaller schools (less money per student)?
- Within an elementary school, what percent of labor and benefits costs are direct or indirect?
- How will the district communicate the work happening in these meetings? The info is so valuable and can be lost in communication.
- Community use of each facility outside school hours (playground, etc.)
- At what school size do we need to add indirect labor/staffing?
- Do we have cost metrics by school (e.g. money per student)?
- What does data say about families reasons for open enrolling out of district? How do they relate to start time/wrap around care and families trying to simply ensure jobs/work/income?
- Criteria 4e effectively indicates that options should not pull from students from different sides of the river (e.g. some Grant to Franklin) because they would be going to different MS, correct? And if so, we may be limiting feasible options that are closer for families albeit over a bridge and it seems that is something that should not be limited if otherwise a good option.



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### Question 3. What are your ideas for different elementary school facility options considering the Task Force's charge and criteria?

The following is a summary of member responses to this question from ChatGPT with consultant modifications for clarity and relevance:

- *Consolidation and Restructuring:* Explore consolidating schools and merging facilities to reduce long-term costs and improve efficiency. Evaluate the financial impact of closing or consolidated schools and the associated potential savings.
- *Data and Cost Analysis:* Gather more data on the costs and repairs associated with each building, including how much is spent annually on repairs and what specific issues are being addressed.
- *Facility and Class Size Adjustments:* Consider options like grouping grades in single classrooms and maintaining smaller class sizes for better educational outcomes. Assess the availability of land for expansion and the feasibility of adjusting school boundaries.
- *Transparency and Additional Information:* Ensure transparency from leadership regarding property management and potential offloading. Seek more information to validate ideas and make informed decisions.

The following is a list of all Task Force member responses to this question:

- Discontinue public funding for private schools
- We need to stop letting the river divide the district
- I don't feel like I have enough data yet to provide valid ideas. Some schools will likely need to merge/close but how many and which ones requires more data to determine.
- Could multi-lingual or foreign language be expanded in elementary school consolidation?
- Lower facility costs can we close 2 schools that will long-term impact the budget and absorb those kids into lower capacity schools?
- Hewitt-Texas to combined at Riverview; Rib Mountain to combined at South Mountain
- Please consider school consolidation to a level where some of the schools could have the encore staff full-time at 1 building
- Moving grade 6 to elementary provides option to restructure middle = 7/8/9, high school 10/11/12 - revisit idea of 1 city wide high school
- House grades 1/2/3 together in Elementary 1 schools (smaller sizes) at Franklin, Hawthorn, South Mountain, Stettin, Grant
- Move grade 6 to Elem 2 buildings, serving grades 4/5/6 at Riverview, G.D. Jones, Jefferson
- Group 5k with EC and 4K and move to their own buildings at Rib Mountain, Lincoln, Maine
- Equal and smaller class sizes; 18 is enough at any grade school
- Redraw boundaries
- Availability of land for each building to expand



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- How much is each building costing for repairs? Is there a way to get what each building is having repaired and how often?
- What is being repaired at each building and how often?
- How much does each building cost in repairs a year?
- Still need much more information
- Explain any problem for historical school... John Marshall and Grant
- Estimate for how much other bus companies charge
- Transparency from leadership about where there are properties that they'd prefer to off load
- Continue to put AGR schools together, have full-time encore teachers, guidance, social workers, principals (1 to help with behavior, 1 to help with financials)
- Consider ad hoc groups to tackle complicated issues

### **Other comments provided in large group setting and in “parking lot” during meeting:**

- If a new school is built in the place of an AGR school, would it still qualify for AGR?
- What are the intra-district transfer bussing costs? 65 students last year... is this included in the transportation budget?
- Does each school have designated spaces for speech, GT, psychologist, sensory spaces?
- The consultant needs unusually hazardous roads and crossings and walking zones maps.
- Is there a conversion factor of drive time vs. bus time as options change re: bussing?
- Should WSD be involved in the Marathon County Transit Workgroup?
- What change regarding elementary students riding MetroRide? When did that change?
- What is the percentage of students at each school that walk, parent drop-off, or bus?
- What is the walking distance to the bus stop by grade?
- Which schools/combo of schools would result in the greatest cost savings for the WSD?
- Have other districts found a way to have childcare be a revenue generator?
- What is the percentage of students at each school that are eligible for bussing but do not bus?

### **Individual member written meeting evaluation responses (following meeting):**

#### 1. What do you think went well at this meeting?

- I love learning about all the components of how this works. What considerations need extra processes on how digest these pieces; what impact our decisions will be in the overall picture.
- Interesting and important topics. Presentations were organized and well presented. Moderator kept everyone on topic.
- It was good to get all of the information shared tonight. Gives me a lot more to think about.
- Great presentations by WSD Staff!
- Clear, concise, but comprehensive presentations
- Very important information shared AGR/Title 1/cafeteria/gym/please include in matrix



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- Pacing from phase to phase of the meetings was tighter than previous meeting
- Great presentation about budget - it a tough topic to understand; Mark does a great job keeping us on track ; we need to have a solid vision for the public
- Valuable information about number of studnets, and how the budgeting system works
- I really appreciated the information provided
- Info was very educational, especially AGR and Title 1. How budget works, etc.
- Good info presented
- Outpouring of information - questions answered and explained. How bussing works. Learning about the open spaces (gym/lunch room) at each school. Funding sources
- Agenda was clear. District presenters were clear and transparent. Time management facilitation was accurately down. Clarification on referendums.
- Helpful presentations on budget and elementary policy
- Good discussion around bussing. I feel First Student is a good partner.
- Nice having speakers present.
- Way to keep the questions/presentations on task. It's very easy to go down rabbit holes.
- About right mix between presentation and Q&A

### 2. What could have gone better? How?

- Guest presenters could have anticipated some general questions that might be asked. Maybe some handouts to see what was being delivered.
- Nothing
- I think it went very well
- Some task force members tend to dominate the conversation for their own personal agenda
- Use of/review of parking lot
- Questions and feedback can be focused better yet the next meeting... capacity? Feed questions to facilitator to (sticky notes? Text message?) vet for whether it's relevant
- More group discussion
- I still feel we need more information - we need more specific numbers attached to each school (facility study)
- Maybe one break
- All good
- Every week it gets better and better
- First Student could have supplied more information that is transparent and accurate. Several schools have had major bussing issues for the last several years.
- Curtail repeated questions on child care and school start times, etc.
- Keeping on track on topics. Childcare is important but not our focus.
- Nothing really. I think its hard for people to understand how this process should work and some need to just wait to see it, right now we need to absorb, not solve.



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3. Any questions we can answer before or at the next meeting?
  - But I sleep on it. A lot of information shared.
  - None. Looking forward to seeing everything discussed in chart form.
  - None that I can think of right now
  - More details about a Bell Time Task Force
  - If schools consolidate, encore staff will have to still travel to some degree (at least the way I envision it would work due to class size)
  - Use of facility by community (playground, etc.)
  - Any discussions coming on other ways to provide school - year round school, evenings, etc.? Have you discussed consolidation with DC Everest to use some of our empty space and their growing district needs?
  - Nothing
  - How much is each building costing a year in repairs? What is being repaired and how often are these repairs happening?
  - How many schools have sensory spaces? Is this a district priority to have these sensory areas in each elementary school?
  - I enjoy charts and organized info. Can we have a summary of criteria for the schools?
  - Post it notes
  
4. What future elementary school facility option - or option component - would you like us to consider at an upcoming meeting?
  - Could the district become a landlord type of entity if some of the buildings were refurbished as possible rental units? When you sell the building you get paid once. Having rents come in create a passive income stream.
  - Current class sizes
  - If 4K were to be moved all to one site, would that building have to be renovated specifically for them? Example, 4K moved to Franklin. Would having 4K all at one site and having Wausau Child Care available all day in a part of the same building be an option?
  - Move 6th grade back to elementary; group 5K with EC and 4K in their own building with option for wrap around care; Divide elementaries into 1st-3rd and 4th-6th in different buildings. Close John Marshall and Hewitt-Texas.
  - Discussion of how delivery of services (spec ed, multilingual, at-risk, etc.) would be impacted by consolidation; impact of pupil services staffing on consolidation (many staff members to support many buildings currently)
  - Utilizing one building for EC and wrap-around; potentially building out day care revenue stream by partnering with NTC education programs and meeting critical needs for families (for elementary students too); Wausau area has a significant shortage and need to consider how to support families and safety for students
  - None come to mind



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- When I look at #5 of the criteria - I feel that closing any one of our elementary would take away the "walking" for "close to" home school. When looking at closing options, my thoughts go to: Hewitt-Texas --> kids go to Riverview; Between Franklin, Marshall, Hawthorn, one or two need to close due to enrollment
- Closing Red Granite
- Close Maine, Rib, and Hawthorne
- Can land at Thom Field be used as a possible building site? Football is dangerous. Soccer fields can be elsewhere.
- Consolidation based on numbers of students to building ratio - with least amount of bus time
- Expanding outer/rural schools (Maine)
- I feel the info provided is leaning towards closing 2 schools and pushing those kids in less capacity schools.
- What about relocating the admin building into a school that is less occupied? Maybe East?
- I like the idea of starting high level, how many schools do we need as a district, then how many do we have? Now what?
- A busing radius around each school would give a vision of neighborhood gaps (with each proposal)