

Meeting Recap: Elementary Planning Task Force Meeting #2

Date: September 11, 2024

Location: Lakewood City Schools

Facilitators: Superintendent Maggie Niedzwiecki, Phil Herman (The Impact Group), Steven Ast (Director of Teaching & Learning), Kent Zeman (Treasurer), and Lisa Bruening (Director of Student Services)

Key Discussion Points:

1. Review of Purpose (*Presented by Superintendent Maggie Niedzwiecki*)

Superintendent Niedzwiecki reviewed the core goals and mission of the Task Force:

- **Facility Optimization:** Identifying underutilized buildings and recommending ways to maximize their use.
- **Community Engagement:** Ensuring that the community is involved in the decision-making process for any changes.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Exploring expanded Pre-K programs as a means of making better use of district resources while improving educational offerings.
- **Future Use of Spaces:** Considering the possibility of repurposing spaces for community use, reflecting the evolving needs of both the students and broader community.

2. Themes from Table Discussions (*Presented by Phil Herman and Christine DiSabato of The Impact Group*)

The feedback from table discussions revealed several recurring themes:

- **Capacity and Utilization Rates:** Discussions centered on the current capacity of schools and how efficiently the spaces are being used, with particular focus on under-enrolled schools.
- **Financial Implications:** Evaluations of potential financial savings, or additional costs, tied to consolidating schools or repurposing buildings. This includes an analysis of educator staffing and support staff needs under different scenarios.
- **Class Sizes and Educational Outcomes:** Concerns were raised over how different classroom sizes might impact the quality of education, including potential issues with declining enrollment leading to staff reductions or reassignments.
- **Impact on Staff and Jobs:** Changes in school configuration may lead to staff movement or changes in assignments, which could affect staff morale and the student experience.
- **School Building Use and Configuration:** Scenarios involving neighborhood schools versus centralizing students were debated, with attention on preserving the advantages of neighborhood schools while considering logistical constraints.

- **Transportation and Walking Distances:** Transportation challenges were highlighted, especially regarding the feasibility of maintaining short walking distances for students under potential new school configurations.

3. Gifted Education Overview *(Presented by Steven Ast, Director of Teaching & Learning)*

Ast provided an overview of the district's gifted education program:

- **Program Continuity:** There are **no** plans to modify the gifted education program at this time.
- **Self-Contained Classes at Grant:** The program offers self-contained gifted classes at Grant for 3rd to 5th graders, with one section per grade level.
 - Students qualify based on iReady test scores, and parents are invited to an open house when their child is accepted.
- **Cluster Grouping in All Schools:** In addition to the self-contained classes, all schools use cluster grouping for gifted students, allowing for differentiation within regular classrooms.
 - Teachers working with gifted students must complete annual professional development focused on enrichment strategies and differentiated instruction.

4. Class Sizes: Educational Impact *(Presented by Steven Ast, Director of Teaching & Learning)*

Ast also discussed the importance of maintaining appropriate class sizes and the benefits of neighborhood schools:

- **Advantages of Neighborhood Schools:**
 - Strong relationships are built between teachers and families when working within smaller populations.
 - Siblings attending the same schools and having the same teachers fosters continuity in education.
 - Research supports that neighborhood schools lead to better family engagement and attendance, and offer culturally relevant educational experiences.
- **Impact of Declining Enrollment:**
 - Declining enrollment can lead to movement of teachers between buildings, causing instability.
 - Administrative challenges arise when balancing staffing with smaller class sizes.
 - There is a potential for intervention and enrichment opportunities to improve if staff are more efficiently deployed across fewer buildings.

5. Special Education Overview *(Presented by Lisa Bruening, Director of Student Services)*

Bruening provided insights into the district's approach to special education:

- **District-Wide Services:** Special education services are available in every building, with a range of support for students needing speech therapy to those with more intensive needs.
- **Concentrating Intensive Needs:** The district clusters classrooms for students with the most intensive needs (e.g., multiple disabilities or medically fragile) at Horace Mann and Grant.
 - This allows related service providers to focus their time more efficiently across fewer buildings, providing better care to students throughout the day.
 - Specialized facilities, such as sensory rooms, accessible restrooms, etc., have been renovated to support these students.
- **Keeping Students in the District:** Lakewood does not send special education students to other districts, ensuring all students receive care locally.

6. Early Learning Overview *(Presented by Lisa Bruening, Director of Student Services)*

Bruening addressed the District's early learning challenges and opportunities:

- **Current Challenges:**
 - The district operates six early learning programs under six separate licenses, which creates administrative and logistical burdens.
 - Sharing resources, team planning, and professional development across these programs is difficult.
 - There are new state funding procedures for students receiving Early Childhood Scholarships, which complicates program administration.
- **Opportunities with an Early Learning Center (ELC):**
 - An ELC could consolidate licenses, streamline operations, and attract more families.
 - Students with disabilities would have more inclusive opportunities, as related services (e.g., occupational therapy) wouldn't need to travel between schools.
 - Additional gym space would allow for more gross motor activities, which currently is only possible at Taft.
 - More full-day and half-day program options could be offered to meet community needs.
 - The ELC could foster a stronger early learning community with increased parent engagement and support.

7. Five-Year Financial Forecast *(Presented by Kent Zeman, Treasurer)*

Zeman provided an abbreviated version of the District's five-year financial forecast:

- Treasurer Kent Zeman gave an abbreviated presentation of the District's latest five year forecast which was completed in May. Zeman discussed the potential of an upcoming 2026 levy and the reason why it is needed at that time regardless of the Board's decision after the Elementary Planning Task Force's work is done. The public can find the full

5-Year Forecast, the Overview and the Forecast At a Glance on the District website at <https://www.lakewoodcityschools.org/departments/treasurerpublic-records>.

Next Steps:

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 25, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. Future meetings will delve deeper into potential recommendations and continue gathering community input.