



# FINAL REPORT

Presented December 18, 2024

## INTRODUCTION

Northbrook School District 28 is committed to actively involving its community members in shaping its future. The Board of Education recognizes the critical importance of community collaboration and involvement in the development of a plan that will support our learning environments for the next 10 years and beyond.

In January 2024, a Facilities Master Plan was presented to the Board of Education that identified \$80 million of potential building improvements for the district's four aging buildings in the areas of accessibility, life safety, operation and maintenance, and capital improvements. However, due to existing budget constraints as well as limitations under the Property Tax Extension Limit Law (PTELL), the district can only fund about \$20 million of those improvements over the next 10 years from current revenue sources.

In the Fall of 2024, Building Tomorrow Together was initiated to gather input from various stakeholders, including parents, employees, residents and community members about the future of the school district's facilities. Hundreds of community members provided valuable input through a set of community engagement workshops and more than 1,100 responses on an online public opinion survey.

This comprehensive approach exemplifies the district's commitment to its current and future generations of students, ensuring that D28 continues to be a community that celebrates every learner's uniqueness, ignites a passion for learning, and equips them to make a positive impact on the world. Detailed information on the process and results can be found at [northbrook28.net/btttd28](http://northbrook28.net/btttd28)

## OVERVIEW

In September 2024, community members and Northbrook D28 staff embarked on the Building Tomorrow Together planning process in response to a charge from the Board of Education.

This four-month community engagement effort united those who live in the school district - community members, parents, district employees, and students - to develop recommendations on how to best move forward to implement needed facility improvements at all D28 schools.

The community engagement process involved two two-hour Building Tomorrow Together Community Engagement Workshops at Northbrook Junior High, open houses and building tours at each school and an online community survey. More than 100 individuals attended the community-wide engagement workshops and tours and 1,100 residents completed the online survey.

Additionally, the community-led Facilitating Team served as leaders of the Building Tomorrow Together program and met three times before the first community workshop, between each workshop and two more times near the end of the process to finalize their report. The information learned, and documentation of the feedback gathered at each workshop, are available online at [northbrook28.net/btttd28](http://northbrook28.net/btttd28).

Per the Board of Education charge, the Facilitating Team's findings were developed based on the participant feedback from each community workshop and the survey results.

The following overview breaks the Building Tomorrow Together program into four sections: purpose, participants, process, and product.

## **PURPOSE**

In order to develop facilities that better align with the Future Focus Strategic Plan, the District embarked on a community-led public engagement process to help map a path forward to address facility challenges and needs. The goal was to involve the D28 community developing next steps for addressing needs identified in the Facilities Master Plan.

This plan aims to enhance student learning experiences and environments in a financially responsible manner, demonstrating D28's dedication to both educational excellence and fiscal sustainability.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHARGE**

In January 2024, a Facilities Master Plan was presented to the Board of Education that identified \$80 million of potential building improvements for the district's four aging buildings in the areas of accessibility, life safety, operation and maintenance, and capital improvements.

The 528-page plan was compiled with input from specialists in mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems; civil engineering; demographics; roofing; and building security. The firm collected input on learning environments and priorities for improvements from parents, students and staff in spring 2023.

With the existing budget constraints and limitations under the Property Tax Extension Limit Law (PTELL), the district can only fund about \$20 million of those improvements over the next 10 years from current revenue sources.

The Board of Education recognizes the critical importance of community collaboration and involvement in the development of a plan that will support our learning environments for the next 10 years, and beyond. Therefore, the Board authorizes the formation of a Facilitating Team consisting of parents, community members and staff to provide a broad perspective for the path forward.

The charge of this committee is to:

- Closely review the Facilities Master Plan to develop an understanding of the needs and challenges of our schools aligned with the Future Focus Strategic Plan.
- Gather input on our community's perceptions, priorities and aspirations.
- Create a final report for the Board of Education with recommendations based on community feedback, facility needs, and financial responsibility.

The committee should maintain transparency and frequent communication with the community throughout the process and present a final report to the Board of Education in December 2024.

# PARTICIPANTS

Participation in the Building Tomorrow Together process occurred in a variety of areas — Facilitating Team (FT), Building Tomorrow Together Community Workshops, building tours and an online community survey.

*Building Tomorrow Together* FACILITATING TEAM (FT)

As its name suggests, this team was responsible for facilitating the Building Tomorrow Together process. The 19-person team met seven times, three times before the first Building Tomorrow Together community workshop, once between each additional workshop and twice after the building tours and online survey.

As is so essential in engagement programs, community members provided the leadership for the FT and the entire Building Tomorrow Together process. District administrators and staff members also served on the FT team, providing valuable insights throughout the process.

The primary role of the FT was to provide leadership and coordination for the entire process. The group helped with decisions regarding process, strategy, and communications. As outlined in the charge from the Board of Education, the team also worked closely with the District and its architect to understand the needs and challenges facing D28 schools.

*Building Tomorrow Together* COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Since the Community Workshops were the central component of the Building Tomorrow Together process, there was a tremendous effort to communicate their importance to the entire community. Throughout the process, the goal was to use every means possible to reach out and invite District stakeholders to participate.

Attendance at the Building Tomorrow Together workshops varied, with more than 80 individuals attending and participating in at least one Building Tomorrow Together Community Workshop, with more than 20 attending both workshops.

Topics	Dates	Number of Participants
Engagement Process Overview District Overview Finance and Facilities Overview Master Plan Improvements and Costs Renovating vs Replacing	Oct. 14	60
Funding Facility Improvements Referendums and Cost to Taxpayers Options for Facility Improvements	Oct. 28	45

Building Tours and Open Houses	Nov. 13 - Nov. 21	15
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At each workshop, participants signed in and checked if they were a community member, parent, former district parent, alumni, staff, student or business member. They could check more than one option. Throughout the process, participants selected the following categories:

- Resident - 21 participants
- Parent - 65 participants
- Staff - 7 participants
- Other - 12 participants

***Building Tomorrow Together BUILDING TOURS***

Building tours were held at each school to provide the community with an opportunity to see firsthand the challenges at each of D28’s schools. Attendees were also encouraged to provide feedback about their experience at the end of the tour by completing an evaluation form. The tours were scheduled as follows:

- Nov. 13 from 6-6:30 p.m. at Westmoor School
- Nov. 14 from 6-6:30 p.m. at NBJH
- Nov. 20 from 6-6:30 p.m. at Greenbriar School
- Nov. 21 from 6-6:30 p.m. at Meadowbrook School

***Building Tomorrow Together ONLINE SURVEY***

Nearly 1,100 people participated in an online survey about the community’s thoughts and perceptions about the District, priorities for facility improvements and a potential referendum.

*Facilitating Team*

<b>Name</b>	<b>District Affiliation</b>
Gauri Brown	D28 Parent
Krista Paradiso	D28 Parent
Jenna Dickson	D28 Parent
Sarah Higgins	D28 Parent
Rebecca Bennett	D28 Parent
Cari Raymond	D28 Parent
Kathy McNamara	D28 Parent
Kristin Ware	D28 Parent
Steve Szumowski	D28 Community Member
Tamara Reese	D28 Parent
Megan Watters	D28 Parent
John Barry	D28 Parent
Erin Dineen	D28 Parent
Bruce Ahlborn	D28 Community Member
Nicole Woods	D28 Parent
Jean Viviano	District Staff
Jason Pearson	District Staff
Terry Ryan	District Staff
Jessica Donato	District Staff

## PROCESS

Two Building Tomorrow Together Community Engagement Workshops were held in October 2024 with Facilitating Team meetings throughout the process.

### **Step 1: Board Charge**

The process began when the Board decided to move forward with the planning initiative and adopted the charge. This set the direction and parameters for the planning effort.

### **Step 2: Building The Team**

The next step was to build the Facilitating Team, which provided the leadership and guidance for the entire process. The first task in building this team was identifying and enlisting key community members to serve as chairpersons for the effort.

### **Step 3: Process Identity**

The Facilitating Team developed an official name for the process — Building Tomorrow Together— and a project logo. This logo was used on all communication and meeting items.

### **Step 4: Informing The Community**

The next step in getting the process underway was building participation in the community-wide Building Tomorrow Together effort through an extensive communications program, which is detailed later in this report.

### **Step 5: The Schedule**

After thoroughly inviting the public to participate, it was time to begin the actual planning effort. A schedule was developed to plan for the workshops and also meet the deadline provided by the Board in its charge to the Building Tomorrow Together Facilitating Team.

### **Community Engagement Workshops**

The first Building Tomorrow Together Community Engagement Workshop was held on October 14, 2024. The purpose of this meeting was to provide a thorough orientation to the process and an introduction to Building Tomorrow Together. Feedback from participants at that meeting was tabulated and summarized. This provided direction for topics at the second workshop.

Each Community Engagement Workshop followed a specific, timed agenda. The workshop began with a review of the materials in the agenda packet. Following these explanations was an informational presentation on the designated topic for the evening.

Professionals and experts in each topic area gave the presentations. A copy of each presentation is provided on the Building Tomorrow Together website. All presentations were rehearsed and critiqued by the Facilitating Team in advance. The Facilitating Team continuously evaluated the Building Tomorrow Together process.



A specific work activity followed the formal presentation at each meeting. Participants completed the activity in small groups (three to eight individuals per table). Participants were randomly assigned to a small group as they arrived for the workshop. The intent was to create an opportunity for participants to meet new people each time and hear different perspectives from a variety of individuals.

Each small group selected a facilitator and spokesperson. The facilitator was instructed to complete the worksheet based on the consensus or general agreement of the group. Following the small group work, the spokesperson from each group was invited to share the main ideas from the group with all the participants at the workshop. The worksheet was then collected from each table for documentation. The first Building Tomorrow Together workshop concluded with a preview of the topic for the next workshop.

All presentations and meeting documentation were available at the Community Engagement Workshops and online at [northbrook28.net/btttd28](http://northbrook28.net/btttd28).

## DOCUMENTATION

Transparency and documentation are critical components of a successful community engagement effort. The Building Tomorrow Together process and the feedback received throughout were thoroughly recorded with the following documents, which were made available to the public following each community engagement workshop.

- Verbatim responses: A document of responses transcribed directly from the worksheets turned in by each small group at the community engagement workshop.
- Executive summary: A summary of the verbatim responses.
- Consensus points: The points of general agreement of participants based on the executive summary.
- Sign-in sheets: Each participant was asked to sign in at their table at each engagement workshop.

### *Building Tomorrow Together ONLINE SURVEY*

An online survey to learn more about the community's thoughts and perceptions about the District, priorities for facility improvements and a potential referendum was conducted in November 2024. Around 1,100 community members completed this survey.

## Building Tomorrow Together COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SCHEDULE



## COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Several strategic communication tools were used to create awareness and encourage participation from key audiences, including parents, employees, and community members. A strong recruitment effort by FT members and District leadership was also conducted.

Communications tools included:

### *Email*

Multiple emails and newsletters were sent to parents and staff before each Community Engagement Workshop. Emails were also sent to all community members who attended a previous Community Engagement Workshop.

### *Website*

A section of the District's website was developed to share information and documentation and gather RSVPs throughout the process.

### *Social Media*

Information about the process and Community Engagement Workshops was shared through Facebook posts and events.

### *Flyers and Handouts*

Flyers were developed throughout the process and distributed to the schools and at community

settings.

### *Direct Mail*

The Facilities Master Plan and challenges of the district was featured in the August 2024 D28 Update community newsletter that was mailed to all households. A postcard was sent to all households promoting the community engagement workshops with a QR code to access the full BTT website. A postcard was also used to invite people to take the survey.

### *Text Messages*

Two text messages to mobile numbers of registered voters in the community. One was to promote the BTT workshops and the other was to invite participation in the online survey.

# PRODUCT

## FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As charged by the Board of Education, the BTT Facilitating Team has compiled feedback and analyzed the community's perceptions, priorities and aspirations related to the District 28 learning environments for the next 10 years and beyond. The team has developed recommendations based on community feedback, the district's facilities needs, and financial responsibility.

## COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

This section reflects the community feedback gathered throughout the BTT Community Engagement Program, including the community survey, the community engagement workshops and the building tours.

### Community Workshops

A total of 100 parents and community members attended Building Tomorrow Together workshops held on October 14 and October 28. The following describes the information presented at each workshop as well as the activities and consensus points.

- **Community Workshop #1** - More than 60 people participated in the first Building Tomorrow Together community workshop. Nine small groups worked together at Northbrook Junior High School to discuss surprises and concerns about the District's facilities, considerations about renovating vs replacing schools and additional information they would like presented at the next workshop. The following are consensus points from the first workshop:
  - Attendees felt both a sense of urgency to address facility issues and uncertainty about the best path forward.
  - Participants agreed on the need for thorough planning, transparency, cost efficiency, and a focus on creating schools that are safe, functional, modern, and comparable for all students across the district.
  - Attendees emphasized a strong desire for more detailed financial, demographic, and logistical information, as well as transparency about the decision-making process for renovations and funding.
  - There was also significant interest in equal distribution of resources across schools and ensuring that community needs and concerns are fully addressed in the facilities master plan.

- **Community Workshop #2** - About 45 participants joined the second Building Tomorrow Together community workshop at Northbrook Junior High School. This session focused on prioritizing facility improvement options developed by the Facilitating Team, and gathering feedback about ways to improve and potential roadblocks on the top two options. The four options considered were:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPTION 1</b> <b>Status Quo</b> <b>\$20M in Funding from District</b> <b>Timeline to Completion: 10 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maintain buildings with current funding levels.</li> <li>● \$56.4 million in FMP improvements not completed.</li> <li>● Costs continue to increase</li> <li>● Defer modernizations, updates and maintenance.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPTION 2</b> <b>Renovate</b> <b>\$56.4M Bond Funds</b> <b>+ \$20M in Funding from District</b> <b>Timeline to Completion: 3-5 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fully fund renovations and updates recommended in FMP:</li> <li>● Adds classroom space at all buildings</li> <li>● Safety &amp; security updates</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPTION 3</b> <b>Renovate/Replace</b> <b>\$94.9M Bond Funds</b> <b>+ \$20M in Funding from District</b> <b>Timeline to Completion: 3-5 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Builds new Meadowbrook Elementary</li> <li>● Fully fund renovations and updates recommended in FMP for other schools</li> <li>● Starts long-range replacement cycle of our schools</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPTION 4</b> <b>Renovate/Replace/Preserve</b> <b>\$110.5M Bond Funds</b> <b>No Additional Funding from District</b> <b>Timeline to Completion: 3-5 Years</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Builds new Meadowbrook Elementary</li> <li>● Fully fund renovations and updates recommended in FMP for other schools</li> <li>● Starts long-range replacement cycle of our schools</li> <li>● Preserves district savings or operating funds</li> </ul>

- Participants worked in 10 small groups to complete three tasks. Here are the consensus points from their work:
  - Option 3's (\$94.9M referendum) emphasis on essential improvements while developing a replacement cycle for aging buildings resonates as a balanced approach, making it the attendees' preferred choice.
  - Transparent and accessible communication about tax impacts and funding strategies is crucial to gaining widespread support.
  - Highlighting property value benefits and community-wide advantages is key to engaging residents without school-age children.

- A few groups suggested a middle ground between Option 3 (using \$20 million in operating funds from the district) and Option 4, which used no operating funds from the district.
- Future-proofing facilities and aligning them with long-term curriculum goals are priorities for many participants.
- Maintaining the status quo of fixing the highest priority needs as the district can afford it with no future plan was the option that the most attendees felt should be removed from consideration.

### **Building Tours**

A summary of the building tours was not generated due to the limited number of people who attended the building tours (only 17 individuals submitted evaluation forms). Those attending the tours were asked to share their thoughts on challenges, concerns and hopes for D28 facilities. The verbatim responses from each evaluation form are included in the appendix of this document.

**Survey** - Around 1,100 community members completed an online survey. The purpose of the survey was to better understand area residents' perceptions of and priorities for the District and to test support for Option #3 (\$94.9 million referendum), which was both the preferred option identified at the second community workshop and the option supported by the BTT Facility Team. The survey also tested facility improvement priorities and statements about a possible D28 referendum. An overview of data and executive summary for the survey can be found in the Appendix.

- The District is viewed favorably by its community.
- There is general support for the concept of improving schools, but less support to financially invest in the cost, which could make an April 2025 referendum an uphill battle.
- Survey respondents want to do right by their schools, but do not understand the need for financial support beyond what is already budgeted.
- A good portion of the community is not aware of the facility needs in D28 schools.
- Taxpayers already feel they are getting what they pay for and good value for the taxes they pay.
- Survey data does not provide a clear path forward with support for a \$94.9M referendum at 45.8%.
- The demographics of the survey (55% of respondents are 55+) mirror voter turnout from 2021 and 2023 (61% of voters were 55+).

## **FACILITY NEEDS**

The following statements reflect the BTT Facilitating Team’s analysis of D28’s facility needs:

- Each of D28’s schools has notable and major needs that would benefit from a successful referendum.
- There are major consequences over the next decade if D28 is not able to improve its schools in the next few years including aging and obsolete mechanical systems, increased day-to-day maintenance costs, and continued space issues.
- Individuals who participated in the BTT workshops are more vested in the need to improve schools. Conversely, those who did not participate in the BTT workshops or tours do not have an awareness of the true nature of the district’s facilities needs.
- The community wants additional clarity and specificity on how the funds for facility improvements would be spent and how each school will benefit from improvements.
- Survey data indicates that there is general support for projects that will:
  - Improve safety/security
  - Increased accessibility
  - Address infrastructure needs

## **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

The following statements reflect the BTT Facilitating Team’s analysis related to financial responsibility:

- The Facilitating Team has consensus that renovating Meadowbrook is not a good investment due to the high cost of renovations and still facing more costs in the future.
  - Taking a “Band-aid” approach to addressing facility needs will cost more in the long run due to inflation and increased costs of maintaining aging buildings and deteriorating infrastructure.
  - Asking for a smaller, \$56M referendum does not seem as responsible as moving forward with the \$94.9M option preferred by those attending CEW#2.
  - The D28 community needs to better understand that this is the first time since the 1980s the District is asking for funding to support facility improvements.
  - The district needs to explain that it does not have authority to borrow money without taxpayer approval and bonds are like a mortgage, providing financial stability for projects/improvements.
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### **Findings Related to Moving Forward in April 2025**

As part of their deliberations, the BTT Facilitating team developed the following list of pros and cons related to placing a referendum on the April 2025 ballot:

- **Pros**
  - An April 2025 referendum is able to capitalize on the momentum built during the BTT program.
  - The April 2025 election is likely to have higher-than-usual voter turnout due to the D28 Board of Education election and the Northbrook Village Board election.
  - Asking voters to consider a referendum in April 2025 allows that election to happen before the next triennial property reassessment in Cook County.
  - Addressing facility improvements now allows them to be completed without any additional cost escalation.
  - Once a referendum is placed on the ballot, it allows the community to decide if it is time to move forward.
  - The D28 community understands (based on feedback from the workshops and the survey) that investing in our schools is one of the best things that can be done to protect property values.
  
- **Cons**
  - Survey data shows that only 45.8% of the community would favor a \$94.7M referendum, short of the simple majority needed for a successful referendum.
  - A campaign, whether it's the District's informational effort or a vote yes effort by an advocacy committee, will require considerable resources in a short period of time with a unified voice on the key issues in an information campaign by the school district and advocacy from a citizen's group.

### **Findings Related To Moving Forward in March 2026**

- **Pros**
  - Waiting until March 2026 will allow for more direct communication about needs and provide time for additional community engagement, communication and education.
  - The benefits to homeowners as identified in the survey (improving schools, protecting home values, etc.) are the same whether it's April 2025 or March 2026.
  - Delaying the referendum provides the opportunity to re-evaluate plans and assemble a referendum package with additional community feedback.
  
- **Cons**
  - A March 2026 election will likely occur right after homeowners receive their triennial property reassessment from Cook County.
  - It is unknown whether a D28 referendum would be on the same ballot with other referendums that could also affect D28 residents.
  - Continuing with additional engagement ahead of a March 2026 election could create issue fatigue for our D28 community.



- Delaying the referendum could result in losing the momentum created in the BTT process.
- Facility needs will only increase with time.
- The longer the District waits to address projects identified in the Facility Master Plan, or to start a replacement cycle to address aging schools, the more it will cost.

### **Final Statement**

The BTT Facilitating Team spent its final two meetings reviewing data and community feedback, evaluating the pros and cons of an April 2025 or March 2026 referendum and deliberating on the best next steps. The Facilitating Team wrestled with this decision in light of the survey data but ultimately concluded that there are more advantages than disadvantages to moving forward with a \$94.9M referendum in April 2025. The BTT Facilitating Team recognizes that this is ultimately the Board of Education’s decision and that the Board must now deliberate on next steps.

In the event D28 does move forward to propose a facility improvement referendum, BTT Facilitating Team recommend that the Board considers:

- The D28 community needs to understand any proposed referendum (and the path BTT used to get to this option) so they are able to see the value they will receive from voting to increase property taxes.
- The entire D28 community needs to be able see the same sense of urgency to address facility needs as those who attend the BTT Community Workshops.
- Further information, whether in the form of communications about a referendum or additional community engagement, needs to provide *specific and illustrated* details about improvements at each D28 school.
- D28 needs to ensure it has the pieces in place to implement an effective informational campaign, which includes
  - Educating, listening to, and involving D28 administration and staff.
  - Engaging with individual school communities and PTOs to build understanding and urgency as their support will be necessary for a successful referendum.
  - Supporting the campaign with clear information, enthusiasm and creative ways to engage with the community at large.
- Continue and enhance the following communication efforts:
  - Providing comprehensive information to the community about the district's finances, budget allocation, long-term priorities, and the correlation between school finances and the quality of education and facilities.
  - Providing opportunities for community engagement at both the district and school levels to collect meaningful feedback from the community regarding the future of D28 schools.
  - Increasing awareness and knowledge about District programs.
  - Continue to highlight the strength and quality of our District and how modern facilities will only make our district stronger.