

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 625  
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

**COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD MEETING  
360 Colborne Street  
Saint Paul, MN 55102**

**February 4, 2025  
4:30 p.m.**

**MINUTES**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 4:56 p.m. by Vice Chair Ward.

**2. ROLL CALL**

Board of Education: H. Henderson, U. Ward, C. Allen, J. Vue, C. Franco, Y. Carrillo, E. Valliant

Staff: Superintendent Thein, S. Dahlke, S. Gray Akyea, T. Sager, K. Thao, L. Olson, A. Collins, E. Wacker, J. Danielson, K. Morris, S. Schmitt de Caranza, H. Nistler, N. Páez, K. Kimani, C. Green, D. Moser, P. Pratt-Cook, D. Payne, J. Williams, Y. Vang, P. Matamoros, A. Kunz, B. Schmidt, C. Anderson, C. Landreau, J. Turner, M. McHenry, A. Kunz, M. Sullivan, K. Wallace, J. Pettigrew, A. Enright

Community: S. Thao, S. Her, M. Moua

**3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MAIN AGENDA**

**MOTION: Director Ward moved approval of the Order of the Agenda. The motion was seconded by Director Carrillo. It passed by acclaim.**

**4. SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Superintendent Thein welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted this week is National School Counseling Week and recognized our school counselors in our district. SPPS has 140 counselors actively engaged in supporting our students to examine their abilities, strengths, and focusing on positive ways for their academic careers, social-emotional learning, and work with teachers and other educators to set healthy aspirations for themselves. He also recognized the award-winning counselors in our District, and thanked our counselors for all they do.

He also noted it is the beginning of Black History Month, which has been celebrated since 1976, and this month is a time to highlight the achievements of our African-American neighbors and their central role in the nation. He also shared that everyone is invited to the NAAPID events on February 10.

He went on to share the recognition of the SPPS educators named as candidates for the 2025 Minnesota Teacher of the Year awards.

## **5. TXUJ CI FACILITIES WORKGROUP: PHASE 2 – FINALIZE VISION**

Superintendent Thein introduced Kathy Wallace, Interim Director of Facilities, to present this update and report. Ms. Wallace also introduced Jonathan Pettigrew and Anthony Enright from the Facilities Team, as well as Sai Thao, Shela Her, and Mee Moua from the workgroup.

Included in the presentation was an introduction, vision report, enrollment, size, and timeline parameters, and next steps.

The history of Hmong Studies and Hmong Dual Language Immersion was shared, beginning with the first Hmong Language class in SPPS in 2002 through the presentation and long-term planning vision for a single campus for PreK-8 in Winter 2025.

The purpose of the long-term work group was shared – to find a long-term, feasible facilities solution for accommodating Txuj Ci's PreK-8 enrollment growth, and vision for a school that supports Txuj Ci academics, identity and community.

Concerns and opportunities were also discussed.

The Vision Report components were also reviewed, and included vision statement, values, characteristics/important standards, organization, location framework, size parameters, proposed timeline, conclusion, and appendix. Values include language and culture retention, identity, community, and strong, well-rounded academic program.

The Vision statement include that Txuj Ci will be a House of Learning (Tsev Kawm Ntawv); a place for intellectual stimulation and growth, working to preserve the Hmong language and culture, and strengthen self-identity for students, while uplifting and cultivating family and community. We provide multi-purpose facility spaces / programs that promote well-rounded learning and dynamic creation, fostering connection through language, culture and shared values.

Desired school characteristics details were shared in the categories of site and entry, identity, learning spaces, community/activity spaces at core, and building essentials. School organization was also reviewed. The location that is desired and alignment with our Hmong population neighborhoods and locations of Txuj Ci families for 2023-24 was also shared, as well as the desirable limits and factors.

Information was also shared about enrollment, size and site parameters.

Possible outcomes include to move the program to another SPPS building where all grades can be together, or buy/build a new school where all grades can be together.

The links to FMP decisions were also shared, including interdependence, existing commitments, articulation of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and demographics and utilization.

Timelines were then reviewed, including a possible preliminary timeline and timeline examples of previous sites AIMS and Bruce Vento.

Suggested next steps include:

- Incorporate this vision and the two options into the FMP process and timeline
- Re-engage with the stakeholders regarding a mid-term plan for Txuj Ci operations
- Request BOE direction by March

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

**QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:**

- For the timeline, is it possible to support this project without disrupting the other projects that are part of the facilities plan or promised upgrades? Response: Assuming a Gate Check 1 and included in the 5-year plan, it is possible for inclusion without displacing other projects in the plan.
- Director Ward requested information on the Board direction in march, and the details of that action.
- Do we know which buildings meet the physical requirements? Response: We have identified the buildings that meet the site size, but are not sharing at this point without engaging with those school communities first.
- If we try to build a new building, with the understanding that there are not a lot of plots of land available in Saint Paul. Response: We are working with a relator on these preliminary discussions, and we have identified a number of possibilities, some are known on the market, and others are not. None of them are immediately perfect, as some are not close enough to the heart of the East Side, or others have a need for environmental remediation, and there are issues with all of them so far.
- Are there any school sites that meet the criteria that are not currently occupied in the portfolio? Response: No.
- Are there sites within the surrounding suburbs or outside of Saint Paul proper that fit the criteria, or was the search only in Saint Paul? Response: The properties from the realtor that were too far from the core were eliminated, and some remain on the docket.
- For families, is the desire to want a smaller building that may be more feasible, or a larger building to accommodate more programming and students at the cost to potentially work harder to find a site? Response: Right now, we are looking at building a program that can grow, because our current school is full, and families want to go there, and want to come back to the district. If given the space, we are confident we will be able to fill it.
- It was noted that the renewal of the Facilities plan is a three-year cycle and there are always projects. For example, we are remodeling high schools, and while Washington Tech is newer, we would like to complete remaining work in the remaining high schools.
- For the parents and families, what was the experience in working with the Facilities team, and how do you envision Txuj Ci, and to what extent did it accomplish what was set out to do? Response: Parents noted it has been great working with Facilities, who helped to navigate the pros and cons, and to see the challenges. For the outcomes that parents discussed, it is challenging, but everyone wants to be together, and parents want their students to be together. It was challenging to have the East Hub, Txuj Ci Lower, and Txuj Ci Upper, and feedback from families has been for one building for all their children to be together. The goal was to meet with parents and families and plan, and we are still working, but hoping to come with a mid-term to guide us through to meet the challenges that are yet to come. Another parent noted that Facilities has been great, and good at answering questions. This is something we need to continue to work and work through with the Facilities work group. The timeline presented is not the same timeline that parents and community understood. When this work started a couple years ago, we were tasked to have a midterm plan, and to turn it around in a couple months, which meant we were answering difficult questions and what we can do to look at the long term. Parents also noted that with this new timeline of 2031,

their students will no longer be in school. Parents shared that they learned a new language in the process of gate checks and master plans, and the 5-year implementation plan. They shared about their children's struggles for times for lunch and other classes. With the second phase, they are disappointed and want to continue working as a group to determine ways to expediate or continue to grow. There is a need, and an understanding of where the community is at or where they might be in 10 years. If we don't grow, families may not be here in 10 years.

- Director Vue noted that he is a part of the committee, which started at the beginning of the previous year, and the direction at that time was for the first phase to find a midterm decision, and that students from Txuj Ci in PreK and Kindergarten were in the Learning Hub, which also housed students from other schools, and that was not a feasible solution for the school community, and the directive was to consolidate to two schools. By that point we voted to approve the current facilities master plan in July 2024, and the committee presented the midterm information to consolidate schools, and the timeline for Txuj Ci came about after the master plan. He also noted the disappointment and miscommunication.
- The Board requested information on the distrust felt by families and how the process has helped to gain trust again. Response: There has been trust building with the Facilities staff, and they have tried to be transparent and provide information. We both understand each other and work together respectfully. Parents noted this has been ongoing for 20 years, and then charter schools started and the District was not listening to the Hmong community. They noted they are the experts of families, students, and community need. This work is not only the work of the past year, but of the past 20 years. Another parent noted she wished the community was involved and engaged in each point of changes, and there has been no consistency. Trust is difficult to maintain and hold onto. Txuj Ci should have been a part of the previous plans, and is currently not a part of any plan, they want to be part of the plan and for implementation to start as soon as possible. Another parent noted they are students who have graduated from SPPS, and are now parents of the current generation. The community trust and partnership has not been consistent or transparent. They want to see that their community, culture, and language is valued in SPPS. Their school is bursting at the seams, but there are still limited bathrooms, sharing of classrooms, and sharing of coat hangers. We are asking to build that trust to value and work on the plan with us for our students. Our students are the future leaders of this district, and we need to invest in them and in the community to give back continuous growth and to SPPS.
- Director Franco noted that he appreciates the work of the parents and Facilities team and their relationship, and hopes for the work to continue with the workgroup.
- He requested information on the approval of the SPPS Build Plan that occurred in July. Response: It was the five-year plan that covers the next five years, because there is no clear stopping point, but always five-year implementation plans, and we will continue to make changes. There was also flexibility built in for the influence of other projects.
- He also requested information on the recommendations that will be brought to the Board in March. The finances of the current plan were also discussed as well as the work within the Facilities Master Plan, and impacts to the community of a decision on Txuj Ci.
- What are things we can do to strengthen other programs while we wait on the possibilities of Txuj Ci? Response: We are looking at different opportunities and there is the possibility of another site or splitting. Options were then discussed.
- Director Allen noted that more spaces to provide folks the opportunity to learn about their identity is the best way for trust and success. She also noted concerns about inserting this into the plan, knowing there are safety issues to address in bathrooms and concerns about air quality. She understands the frustration and the time is now for our students.

- Chief Turner then provided details on the overall timeline and the data collection evaluation, including the utilization study, work with a demographer, and the sustainability that is emerging from this program. Once the framework is voted on, there will be a standards ranking on the utilization and demographic study, and prioritization of buildings. She also thanked the parents and families in the work group and appreciates their flexibility and adaptability. We know the community feelings and values and it is in our best interest to work together on a path forward.
- Director Vue recommended that the work group continue to convene, and to answer the questions brought forth by the presentation, cost it out, and determine the impacts of it on the current SPPS Builds plan and how it will integrate with other projects.
- Director Carrillo agreed and added the emotional connection that parents shared in that their children will not be in SPPS when this project is complete, and applauded their courage to go through the process, and that we share those feelings. He also encouraged all of us to put the work forward to plant the seeds for grandkids and great-grandkids and the long-future mindset toward what SPPS should be. We ought to construct a better future for our children and grandchildren.
- The Board also noted this experience in finding ways to break down the distrust within other communities as well, as we see it in other spaces.

## **9. ADJOURNMENT**

**Director Ward moved to adjourn the meeting. Director Allen seconded the motion. It passed by acclaim.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

## **10. WORK SESSION**

The Board then conducted a work session which included the topics of a Board of Education Budget Workshop which included discussion about school staffing allocations, referendum discussion, and communication timeline; and B.I.G.G.: Board Initiated Goals Governance.

For clarity and to facilitate research, these minutes reflect the order of the original Agenda and not necessarily the time during the meeting the items were discussed.

Prepared and submitted by:

Sarah Dahlke, Assistant Clerk, St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education