



Yorkville D115 Menu Community Engagement Report

Yorkville Community Unit School District 115 is the heart of our community. As one of the fastest-growing districts in Illinois, we are able to provide our students the benefits of a larger district while maintaining our small-town feel.

Our collaborative approach is working. Eight of our schools are rated commendable, our students have won more accolades inside and outside the classroom than we could list, and many of our teachers and staff have been recognized as leaders in education.

We've accomplished this while being one of the most fiscally responsible districts in the state. We respect our local taxpayers by ensuring we are thoughtful about how every dollar is spent—in fact, our spending is less than any peer district and considerably less than the state average.

However, our explosive growth has put us in an unsustainable position. Our enrollment has nearly tripled in the past 20 years. Every building is overcrowded, with even more growth projected in the future.

Because we have historically been among the lowest funded districts in the entire state, currently only funded at 76% adequacy, we do not have the ability to make the significant infrastructure investments needed to resolve our overcrowding challenges.

Our community has been collaborating on a plan to solve these challenges. Together, we are developing a community-driven plan that addresses the overcrowding our schools face while ensuring we are not put in this position again.

In this latest stage of community engagement, District 115 has been taking active steps to engage the public and solicit feedback on a potential solution to our infrastructure challenges. Since June, we have received feedback from 759 members of the community through in-person and virtual presentations, an online survey, and a scientific phone survey on what improvements they would like to see in their schools and how they would like to fund those improvements.

To accomplish this, using information provided by the district and the district's experts, we developed a "menu" of potential individual projects, potential infrastructure solutions, and potential funding levels. The district has been closely listening to the community as individuals considered and ranked each item on the menu to share their priorities.

During this community engagement, we developed messaging, recruited a community-based committee to lead these efforts, coordinated a discussion with the community committee, conducted a scientific phone survey, engaged key influencers, and held 4 public engagement sessions (including 1 virtually) at

different times and days of the week to ensure all community members could participate. We received tremendous levels of engagement and feedback, gathering 259 responses from engagement sessions and online feedback as well as 500 phone survey responses.

Feedback from the community was documented during this time through notes taken of all direct communications, feedback provided on paper and digital forms at the Community Committee meeting and public engagement sessions, responses to a publicly available feedback form available on the district's website, and spreadsheets generated from the results of the scientific phone survey.

Messaging

We developed messaging to properly communicate how we got to this point, what our successes and challenges have been, and how to approach the path forward. This messaging detailed recent progression and improvements as well as the district's space and infrastructure challenges and limited opportunities as a result. The eight key takeaways from the messaging are below, and a full copy of the messaging is provided with this report.

- Yorkville Community Unit School District 115 is the heart of our community.
- As one of the fastest growing districts in Illinois, we are able to provide our students the benefits of a larger district while maintaining our small-town feel.
- Our collaborative approach is working.
- We've accomplished this while being one of the most fiscally responsible districts in the state.
- However, our explosive growth has put us in an unsustainable position.
- Because we have historically been among the lowest funded districts in the entire state, currently only funded at 76% adequacy, we do not have the ability to make the significant infrastructure investments needed to resolve our overcrowding challenges.
- Our community has been collaborating on a plan to solve these challenges.
- This is our opportunity to restore pride in our facilities and give our students the quality educational environments they deserve.

Community Committee

We developed a committee of individuals to provide direct, informed input to the district. The committee is made up of a cross-section of District 115 stakeholders, including parents, teachers, taxpayers without children in the district, business owners, seniors, and local government officials. The committee has been formalized and tasked with the responsibility of actively gathering feedback from the community to determine what they would like to see for the future of District 115. The first Community Committee meeting took place August 18.

Public Engagement

The district held 3 in-person public engagement sessions and 1 virtual session at different times and days of the week to provide all members of the community an opportunity to attend. These events were promoted through direct mail, emails, and social media. These sessions presented the latest information about our schools, discussed the successes and challenges ahead, and actively solicited input from the community on potential individual projects, infrastructure solutions, and funding levels.

Public engagement sessions were held:

- Wednesday, Aug. 20 at 7 pm at Grande Reserve Elementary School.
- Saturday, Aug. 23 at 10 am at Yorkville High School.
- Tuesday, Aug. 26 at 7 pm at Yorkville Middle School.
- Thursday, Aug. 28 at 7 pm virtually through Zoom webinar.

Verbal discussions occurred during these meetings and additional collaboration opportunities were made available as well through feedback forms and the district's website.

Feedback Report

Attached is a detailed report of the feedback that was collected during this phase of the process, which includes feedback from the Community Committee, the public at public engagement sessions, and the public via the online feedback form on the district website.

Scientific Phone Survey

The district conducted a public phone survey called a "menu survey" to gauge support for each potential individual project, infrastructure solution, and funding level. For each item discussed, respondents were given information on each item as well as estimated costs. The survey was taken before the full public had been educated on the projects or fully informed of the district's needs. This was done in order to obtain an accurate representation of the public's unbiased, intuitive reactions to everything tested in the menu.

The results from the menu survey are provided with this report.

Engagement Analysis

In forming our analysis, we reviewed all data points provided by members of the community. First, through the menu survey, which gives us a scientifically accurate snapshot of the intuitive reactions of members of the community to the items being discussed. Second, through the public engagement sessions and online engagement, which give us the more passionate responses from community members very invested in their schools who have taken some time to consider these issues. Third, through the Community Committee, whose responses come after significant discussion, allowing us to track the movement of opinions as individuals become more engaged and educated on these topics.

An important data point for processes like this is the favorability of the school district because the success of any future effort is tied to how residents feel about the district. Here, the phone survey provides positive news: 70% rate their school district favorably while 26% rate the district unfavorably for a net favorability rating of +44%. This is solid support for the district and the work that has been done to date.

Potential Individual Projects

All individual projects tested are supported overall by the public, including most with strong support. In fact, the average net support for the projects is +36%. This is a very positive sign.

The community's top priority is Classroom Spaces. This project is the clear top priority for every group and has the highest favorability of any project.

The community's second priority is Safety. This project is the second priority for every group and has solid favorability.

The community has similar feelings towards the next six projects. They rank in the following order, though the support for each project is very similar and there is limited difference in opinion between these projects: Music & Performing Arts Spaces, Teacher & Staff Support, Student Services & Supports, Infrastructure & Mechanicals, Programming Spaces, and Indoor Physical Education & Sports Spaces.

Music & Performing Arts Spaces ranks highly with all groups, especially public engagement session participants, older residents, and those with no ties to the district. Teacher & Staff Support is especially important to the Community Committee. And Student Services & Supports is especially important to the general public as well as younger families, moderates, and those with current and previous ties to the district.

The remaining two projects are supported by the community, but lower priority than the other projects: Parking & Student Drop Off and Outdoor Spaces.

Potential Infrastructure Solutions

In this section, we asked the community to provide their thoughts on direct questions balancing specific priorities as the district works to achieve the improvements discussed during this engagement.

The community is balanced in their approach towards transitions. They would like to see fewer transitions, but they are split in their willingness to spend more to achieve those reductions. The general public is less willing (net 15% less willing to spend more), public engagement session attendees nearly tied (net 4% less willing to spend more), and the community committee more willing (net 18% more willing to spend more).

To the community, when it comes to transitions, the priority is more towards achieving balance and fairness so all students transition the same amount. All groups agree: the general public (by a margin of 13%), public engagement session attendees (by a margin of 5%), and the Community Committee (by a margin of 18%).

There is no ambiguity in the community's feelings towards boundary changes: they strongly favor boundary changes if it means more of their desired improvements can be achieved. Again, all three feedback groups agree: the general public (by a margin of 30%), public engagement session attendees (by a margin of 61%), and the Community Committee (by a margin of 88%).

The community is willing to spend more to keep kindergarteners in their local K-5 school buildings. The general public somewhat supports this position (by a margin of 8%) while public engagement session attendees and the Community Committee strongly support it (by margins of 34% and 29% respectively).

The community is also generally willing to spend more to construct a new academic wing at the high school. The general public supports this position (by a margin of 14% when accounting for rounding), public engagement session attendees strongly support it (by a margin of 43%), and the Community Committee very strongly supports it (by a margin of 88%).

Potential Funding Levels

The public shows support for providing additional funding to improve District 115 schools, with 81% supporting one of the funding levels provided and only 15% favoring no additional funding for the district. This is another sign of positivity around this process.

In addition, the data shows the overall funding range tested during this phase is palatable to the District 115 community, though the High Funding Level is at the top of their range. While people certainly have their preferences, which we will describe next, our analysis of the feedback related to the funding levels compared to the response data from other districts shows the district is looking at an appropriate range of funding that matches the community's overall appetite.

Taking all responses into account, the three funding levels receive very similar levels of support, with all three essentially tied. The general public favors the Low Funding Level slightly over the Medium Funding Level. The Community Committee favors the High Funding Level. Public engagement session participants favor the Medium Funding Level. Averaging all the data, the Medium Funding Level is ranked highest by the slightest of margins.

It should be noted the High Funding Level has a net favorability rating of -18%, which is not insurmountable (only 41% strongly oppose this level), but still a cause for concern. This funding level is at the absolute top of the range the community is comfortable with.

Developing Final Solutions

Overall, the feedback during community engagement has been strongly positive. The community is very engaged, understands the challenges created by overcrowding throughout the district, and shows a willingness to invest to overcome that and other significant challenges.

Moving forward, we need to construct three options for the community to consider. With the overall funding level range proving palatable to the community, and with the projects tested receiving solid support, the good news is major changes are not needed to the projects under consideration.

Option 1 should be based on the Low Funding Level, achieving as many improvements as possible while maintaining the current tax rate. Option 2 should be based on the Medium Funding Level, achieving more improvements using additional funding. Option 3 should be based on the High Funding Level, achieving all improvements using additional funding.

All three options should emphasize how much of the community's top two priorities, Classroom Spaces and Safety, they are able to achieve. As funding is available, especially in the options tied to higher funding levels, the district should also attempt to achieve more of the community's desired improvements, especially Music & Performing Arts Spaces, Teacher & Staff Support, and Student Services & Supports.

Each option should identify how much improvement that option will be able to achieve when it comes to transitions, especially achieving balance and fairness for all students. Boundary changes are not an impediment, and the community would like to see kindergarteners kept in their local K-5 school buildings as much as possible. Finally, we should make it clear the major difference between Option 2 and Option 3 is the construction of a new academic wing at the high school.