School closure plan up for discussion once again as PPS board decides if it wants to move forward

Jordan Cioppa
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PITTSBURGH — It's a new year, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools Board of Directors is taking a fresh look at the proposed plan to close nine schools.

"It was important for us to have an open discussion about areas where we felt the plan was adequate and areas where we felt there was more work to be done in order to satisfy the requirements of the board to move forward," Board President Gene Walker told Pittsburgh's Action News 4 Reporter Jordan Cioppa.

Back in November, the board voted against the "Future-Ready Facilities Plan." Last month, they decided to reintroduce the plan for consideration, which led them to Tuesday's lengthy discussion meeting.

"I think tonight's conversation is really to bring closure to that back-and-forth process to make sure that anything that hasn't been addressed, you have an opportunity to raise it," said Dr. Ray Hart. "For those of you who are new to the board, you'll have an opportunity to raise questions, get clarification on what's been shared."

Dr. Hart is the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of "82 of the nation's largest urban public school systems," according to the organization's website.

He served as a facilitator during the meeting. At one point, he said if the board wants to make changes to the facilities plan, it must be a collective decision.

"I think there should be, there could be slight revisions. To think that we as board can say we should close this school and not this school, takes us from the board work into the superintendent's work," said Walker.

The directors each went around the room and shared their individual opinions on the plan and what issues are most important to them as they decide if they should move forward or not.

Later in the meeting, the points made by the board were narrowed down into a shorter list to give to the superintendent.

“Because there’s a belief of the board that we have to do something, it makes sense for us to clarify what those missing items or insufficient items are and give the superintendent an opportunity to rectify it,” Walker said.

The board president said the discussions will continue in March and April.

While an exact timeline remains up in the air, Walker said the board hopes to decide on the plan before the end of the school year.