



PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



SUPERINTENDENT'S FACILITIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

APRIL 1, 2026 INSIGHTS REPORT

Equity-Centered Facilities Planning Commitments

Prepared for Pasadena Unified School District
Prepared by RSS Consulting Services

Introduction

Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) has partnered with RSS Consulting Services (RSSC) to develop a comprehensive update to the District's existing Facilities Master Plan (FMP), creating a long-term framework to guide facilities planning, capital investments, and future improvements across the district. This work represents an opportunity to reflect on how facilities decisions shape student experience, community trust, and the long-term stability of school communities throughout Pasadena, Altadena, and Sierra Madre.

The Facilities Master Plan update comes at a particularly sensitive and complex moment for the district. Conversations regarding potential school consolidations and employee layoffs, ongoing facility needs, enrollment shifts, and the aftermath of the Eaton fire have heightened community concern and uncertainty about the future of schools and neighborhoods across the district. *For many committee members, these conversations carry real fear about displacement and the future of their school communities.*

PUSD began this phase of engagement through the **Superintendent's Facilities Advisory Committee (SFAC)**, established in 2026 to support long-range facilities planning efforts and provide guidance related to bond programs, including Measures O and R. RSSC met with the committee on April 1, 2026, for an online working session focused on transparency, equity, communication, community engagement, and the conditions necessary to build authentic public trust throughout the planning process.

Throughout the session, committee members expressed a strong desire for a planning process that is transparent, accessible, and *grounded in meaningful community participation, while also acknowledging the urgency and responsibility of the work ahead.* They reflected on longstanding challenges related to trust, communication, and inconsistent engagement across different parts of the community, noting that participation is often uneven and that the communities most impacted by facilities decisions are not always the ones most represented in public conversations. Members emphasized that meaningful engagement requires more than invitations to participate; *it requires relationship-building, clarity of purpose, shared understanding, and visible accountability,* even as the district must make informed decisions, steward public resources responsibly, and move projects forward to support students, families, educators, and the broader community.

This report begins with a brief overview of equity-centered facilities planning and then moves into a synthesis of insights shared during the SFAC discussion. **The synthesis includes three components:**

- 1) a summary of key discussion themes
- 2) direct participant reflections and quotes
- 3) a set of emerging planning commitments intended to guide the Facilities Master Plan update moving forward.

The report closes with a reflection on why equity-centered facilities planning matters, particularly in a district committed to educational equity, community trust, and long-term sustainability.

What is Equity-Centered Facility Planning?

Facilities planning is often understood as a technical process focused on buildings, infrastructure, enrollment projections, budgets, and long-term capital improvements. Equity-centered facilities planning expands that definition by recognizing that facilities decisions also shape student experience, community trust, access to opportunity, and the long-term stability of school communities. Schools are not simply physical structures; they are places where students develop a sense of belonging, families build relationships, and communities locate identity, memory, and continuity across generations.

The Facilities Master Plan provides PUSD with a physical assessment of its current facilities, guidelines and standards for learning environments and sustainability, and a critical path for modernizing facilities within available resources. An equity-centered approach asks not only what decisions are made, but also how decisions are made, who is included in the process, whose voices carry influence, and how communities experience the process itself.

In practice, this approach includes:

- **Using site walks and a rigorous evaluation of every building**, the planning team identifies the degree to which facilities are or are not safe, healthy, well-built, and maintained.
- **Using empathy interviews and co-design workshops**, students, families, and staff design a vision for learning environments where every student and every employee have the conditions to thrive and be successful, and a vision for sustainability where every facility provides comfortable temperatures, fresh air, and daylight with minimal energy use and lasts for decades using durable materials.
- **Using co-planning workshops**, the facility planning committee determines the types of investments needed to best deliver on and be held accountable to the community's vision.



Equity-centered facilities planning assesses the current state of facilities, co-creates a vision for the future, and determines how to move toward that future in ways that are transparent, inclusive, and accountable.

Summary

***"There is an issue of trust... the access and participation is very unbalanced and not representative of our school community."** — Committee Member*

Unlike many facilities planning conversations that begin with excitement about future possibilities, much of the SFAC discussion centered on uncertainty about how future facilities decisions may affect schools, neighborhoods, and community identity. **Concerns about potential consolidations, enrollment decline, and the long-term future of school communities shaped much of the conversation.** Committee members repeatedly returned to questions of transparency, communication, and whether community engagement processes genuinely influence outcomes or simply occur alongside decisions that feel already underway.

Participants expressed a strong desire to better understand the planning process itself. Committee members questioned whether families and community members fully understood the purpose of the committee, what decisions were being considered, what constraints existed, and how community voice would ultimately influence recommendations. **Several participants emphasized that transparency requires more than sharing information; it requires building shared understanding, providing context, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue.**

Throughout the discussion, committee members acknowledged the district's responsibility to address aging facilities, enrollment shifts, deferred maintenance, and long-term capital needs. At the same time, participants emphasized that progress without trust risks deepening existing tensions within the community. Members repeatedly noted that authentic engagement must go beyond simply offering opportunities for participation. **Communities want to see how their input shapes decisions, how resources are invested, and how the district remains accountable over time.**

Underlying the conversation was a broader recognition that schools are more than facilities. They are community anchors that carry history, relationships, identity, and belonging. The discussion highlighted that the success of the Facilities Master Plan will depend not only on the decisions ultimately made, but also on whether communities experience the process as transparent, inclusive, and worthy of their trust.

WHAT WE HEARD	WHAT THIS MEANS
TRUST IS FRAGILE.	Trust-building must be an explicit objective of engagement activities.
COMMUNITIES WANT TO UNDERSTAND THE PROCESS.	Future meetings should clearly identify decisions, constraints, and opportunities for influence.
COMMUNITY INPUT MUST LEAD TO VISIBLE OUTCOMES.	The district should create visible feedback loops showing how input informs decisions.
SCHOOLS ARE COMMUNITY ANCHORS.	Facility decisions should consider community identity and belonging alongside physical building condition needs.
PARTICIPATION IS UNEVEN.	Outreach should intentionally engage communities that are not typically represented.



What We Heard

1. Trust Is Fragile.

Much of the conversation centered on the reality that **trust within PUSD remains uneven and fragile**. Committee members reflected on how past experiences, unmet expectations, communication challenges, and persistent rumors continue to shape how many families and community members experience district decision-making today. Several participants noted that trust is not only influenced by what decisions are made, but also by whether communities understand the process, see promised outcomes to materialize, and believe their participation meaningfully influences future actions.

"People have long memories when it comes to school closures, school changes, and rebuilding decisions. If those decisions aren't made thoughtfully and with enough justification, they will affect the district's reputation."

"We need to be careful about being 'tappers.' I can tap out a song in my head and think I'm communicating clearly, but the other person doesn't have the same context. Just because we're being transparent doesn't mean transparency is being received."

"It's important to remember that in past bond measures, school communities were involved in creating plans, and they didn't get what was promised."

"You've got to get ahead of rumors before they spread, or you'll never get the trust of this community."

"I voted for this thing thinking kids were going to get a nice school, and instead we got a parking lot. That's what's at stake. That's the trust of the entire district."

Participants acknowledged that rebuilding trust will require more than updates or public meetings. It will require *consistent transparency, shared understanding, visible follow-through, and authentic opportunities for communities to see how their voices influence decisions over time*.

2. Communities Want to Understand the Process.

Committee members asked for greater clarity regarding:

- **The role of the SFAC**
- **The factors shaping district decisions**
- **How community input influences recommendations and outcomes.**

They believe information is often shared without enough context, making it difficult for families and the broader community to understand how decisions are made, what constraints exist, and how different facilities discussions connect to one another.

"It's important that all data is captured consistently and that objective criteria are applied to every school site."

"How do decisions that have already been made by the Board weigh into the charge of this group?"

"We need a stronger focus on engagement—not only with our school communities, but also with the people who join our committees and advisory groups. We have to provide clarity and level-set expectations."

"One of the biggest frustrations was being sent out to look at a facility with a few numbers thrown at us and being asked what it would cost to fix it."

Committee members challenged the idea that transparency is simply about sharing information. **It was emphasized that when communities lack context, it becomes difficult to distinguish between facts, assumptions, and rumors.** Several members expressed a desire for clearer explanations of how decisions are made, what factors are being considered, and how recommendations may influence future actions. Meaningful engagement requires more than transparency; it requires ensuring that information is understood in the way it was intended.

3. Schools Are Community Anchors.

As discussions around consolidation surfaced throughout the meeting, committee members reflected on the emotional and relational dimensions of facilities planning. Participants acknowledged the realities of enrollment decline, staffing pressures, and financial constraints, while also expressing concern about what may be lost when schools, programs, or communities are consolidated. Participants spoke about **schools as communities with identities, histories, and cultures that families deeply value.**

"We want our facilities improved, of course, but not at the cost of losing the community, culture, and uniqueness that make our school what it is..."

"One of the highest stakes is ensuring that students have access to well-designed, functioning schools in their own neighborhoods."

"Consolidation may bring schools together physically, but it can also lead to the loss of community relationships and school identities that families value."

"All kids should attend schools they are proud of."

Committee members recognized *the need for long-term planning and fiscal stewardship while also emphasizing that schools hold cultural, relational, and emotional significance beyond their physical condition.* Participants repeatedly expressed concern that consolidation decisions could alter the identities, relationships, and neighborhood connections that families associate with their schools. Facilities planning decisions are experienced as deeply personal and community-centered, particularly during a period shaped by uncertainty, enrollment decline, and the aftermath of the Eaton fire.

4. Community Input Must Lead to Visible Outcomes.

Committee members repeatedly emphasized that **community trust is closely tied to whether people can see concrete results from planning processes, public engagement, and bond investments**. Participants reflected on frustrations that emerge when communities contribute time, feedback, and support for district initiatives *but struggle to identify how their input influenced outcomes or where promised improvements ultimately materialized*. Several members noted that when projects become delayed, scaled back, or consumed by technical requirements that are not visible to the public, communities can feel disconnected from the process and uncertain about the value of their participation.

"What's most at stake is that we're working toward something and end up with nothing. We voted to put this money in, and now all we've seen is a 10-year lawsuit about soil. That feels like a lot of broken promises."

"What was planned and developed through previous groups should be respected and carried forward. The conversations happening with this group should be respected too. There has to be value placed on the time people are investing."

"People voted for these bonds. They want to make sure they see meaningful change."

"We just have to get to a finish line, if you will, and build facilities that really support and serve our students, employees and families."

"It's not our money. It's been given into our trust, so it needs to be respected, tracked, and audited."

The discussion highlighted that **trust is strengthened when communities can see tangible results, understand how resources are being used, and recognize a clear connection between planning efforts, public investment, and meaningful change**. Committee members expressed a strong desire for facilities planning processes that result in visible, meaningful, and community-recognized outcomes. They acknowledged the complexity of facilities modernization and the reality that significant portions of bond funding are often directed toward infrastructure improvements that may not be immediately visible to the public. At the same time, members emphasized that communities want to see evidence that projects are moving forward, commitments are being honored, and investments are improving the student experience.

5. Participation Is Uneven.

Committee members repeatedly emphasized that **equity-centered planning requires intentional outreach and engagement with communities that have been excluded, underrepresented, or disconnected from district decision-making processes.** They acknowledged that participation across the district is not evenly distributed and that some of the communities most impacted by facilities decisions may also face the greatest barriers to engagement.

"People want to see a timeline of actions, but they also want to understand how schools affected by the fire will be represented if those communities have been disrupted or displaced."

"I think we need input from teachers. There aren't many of us on this committee, and we're the ones who are with students in these facilities every day."

"My question as we've been going through this is: Why wasn't this done at the beginning? Why is it being done now and not at the beginning?"

"We were at San Rafael a couple of weeks ago. And we're talking about, should we tear it down? Should we keep it? What would it look like? What about the neighbors who have homes in that area, what would they like to see that building look like?"

"Access and participation are very unbalanced and not representative of our school community. So, the decisions tend to lean toward the parts of the community that are very active and engaged."

Committee members described engagement as both a logistical and relational challenge. They acknowledged that while public meetings and committees create opportunities for participation, **those structures alone do not guarantee equitable representation or meaningful inclusion.** The discussion highlighted concerns that facilities decisions affect a broader range of stakeholders than those traditionally engaged, including neighboring residents, displaced school communities, and families who may not regularly participate in district processes. Committee members repeatedly returned to the idea that authentic engagement requires intentional outreach, early involvement, accessible information, and sustained relationship-building over time.

Planning Commitments for Future Engagement

The committee's insights highlight that the success of the Facilities Master Plan will depend not only on the decisions made, but also on how communities are engaged throughout the process. The following commitments emerged from the discussion and are intended to guide future engagement, communication, and decision-making.

Commitment 1	Clearly Define What Decisions Are on the Table Future engagement efforts should clearly identify which decisions are under consideration, what constraints exist, and what aspects of the process remain open to community input.
Commitment 2	Provide Context Before Asking for Input Before seeking feedback, PUSD should help communities understand enrollment trends, facility conditions, funding limitations, tradeoffs, and long-term implications so that public input is grounded in shared understanding.
Commitment 3	Engage Communities Early Enough to Influence Outcomes Future engagement should occur early enough in the process for community perspectives to meaningfully inform recommendations and decisions.
Commitment 4	Center Communities Most Impacted by Decisions Engagement efforts should intentionally prioritize students, families, employees, and neighborhoods most impacted by proposed changes, particularly those historically underrepresented in district decision-making processes.
Commitment 5	Show How Community Voice Shapes Decisions PUSD should establish visible feedback loops that demonstrate how community input is considered, incorporated, or balanced against other planning considerations.
Commitment 6	Honor Schools as Community Anchors Future planning discussions should recognize the cultural and emotional significance schools hold for students, families, and neighborhoods, particularly when considering changes that may affect school communities.

Conclusion

Why Equity-Centered Facilities Planning Matters



Throughout the Superintendent's Facilities Advisory Committee (SFAC) discussion, committee members repeatedly returned to concerns about school consolidations and the potential impacts on students, families, and neighborhoods. **For many participants, conversations about facilities planning were inseparable from questions about community identity, stability, and what might be lost through future decisions.** This tension shaped much of the discussion and serves as an important reminder that facilities planning is experienced differently by those responsible for managing district resources than by those who call schools their community home.

The SFAC felt that PUSD has a responsibility to address aging facilities, enrollment shifts, deferred maintenance, and long-term capital needs. They understood that difficult decisions may lie ahead, and how those decisions are made, communicated, and implemented will significantly influence whether communities view the process as credible, transparent, and worthy of trust.

The discussion highlighted a reality that exists in many communities: *people want to understand not only what decisions are being made, but also how those decisions are made, who is involved, and how their voices contribute to the process.* They spoke openly about the importance of transparency, shared understanding, and visible accountability. They expressed

a desire for engagement that moves beyond information sharing and creates genuine opportunities for dialogue, learning, and partnership.

Equity-centered facilities planning recognizes that trust is built when communities are informed, engaged, and able to see how their voices influence decisions over time.

Communities want opportunities to understand the decisions being considered, the constraints facing the district, and how their input informs future priorities and investments. They also want to see their experiences, concerns, and aspirations reflected throughout both the process and the outcomes of the work.

Committee members also highlighted that schools carry significance far beyond their physical structures. Schools serve as neighborhood anchors, gathering places, and symbols of continuity across generations. For many families, facilities conversations are deeply personal because they are connected to questions of displacement, identity, preservation, and community belonging.



“Trust is built when communities experience consistency, transparency, visible follow-through, and opportunities to see their “fingerprints” reflected throughout the process.”

Equity-centered facilities planning requires engagement that is accessible, relationship-centered, and grounded in shared understanding. It also acknowledges that difficult decisions may still need to be made while ensuring communities are not left feeling excluded, surprised, or disconnected from the process.

PUSD has an opportunity to strengthen trust, demonstrate accountability, and create a planning process that communities experience as transparent, inclusive, and responsive to their concerns. Ultimately, communities will judge the success of this process through their experiences with it, whether they felt informed, included, respected, and able to see the results of the decisions that were made.