Facilities Portfolio Analysis Task Force: Phase 1 Process Summary

Saint Paul Public Schools

Purpose and role

As part of implementing the new strategic plan and in response to projections for declining enrollment, Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) convened a task force of parents, board members, students, staff, and community partners to create an analysis approach for the district's school buildings and facilities. The task force does not decide which schools to restructure, consolidate, or close. Instead, the task force reviewed data to design the criteria that district leadership will vet through community input, and eventually use to evaluate the full facilities portfolio.

Phase 1: Meeting process

Meeting	Topics and Tasks
1 · Jun 4	Introductions, charge and process overview, working agreements, first equity learning session, and nomination of group shared values.
2 · Jun 10	Dot-voted on values; met in role-based workgroups; drafted guiding principle statements; second equity learning session (bias, power, cultural humility, inclusion, Dignity Index, regional equity framework).
3 · Jul 20 (virtual)	Selected final guiding principles by online vote; first review of facilities portfolio data; opened a shared digital whiteboard for gathering reactions and questions.
4 · Aug 3	Oriented to online data resources (resource hub, facilities map, SPPS data center). "Criteria Design Studio" part 1: individual brainstorming of criteria, then groups weighted them with a 100-point allocation.
5 · Aug 24	Overview of neighborhood data (Social Vulnerability Index, Minnesota Compass). Groups narrowed to 10–15 criteria, aiming for at least one per category, and began writing criteria statements.
6 · Sep 14	Seven tables each presented criteria statements (5 minutes each); whole-group discussion by category; groups refined statements.
7 · Oct 5	Reviewed homework - testing statements against the guiding principles; dot-voted (green to advance, red for concerns); discussed contested statements; "world café" refinement and gap-spotting.
8 · Oct 26	Discussed how the criteria will be used and adapted; worked through open questions on the draft statements; closing reflections on what members were most proud of.

What the group produced

Working agreements:

- Assume positive intent.
- Suspend judgement.
- Speak your truth, even if it's a dissenting opinion.
- Focus on the meaning, rather than the technical language.
- Listen to understand, not to respond.
- Share the space.
- Build on ideas positively.
- Stay solution-focused.
- Respect diverse perspectives.
- Maintain confidentiality of materials and perspectives shared

Guiding principles:

- Ensure cultural humility and inclusion in decision-making to intentionally disrupt historical marginalization of people.
- Strive to be transparent and forthcoming.
- Foster future growth and development.
- Center innovation and creativity, including through flexibility of space, restrictions, and calendar, and pursuing ideas that are different from historical perspectives.

Standards for strong criteria:

- **Measurable**: You can count it, time it, or verify it with clear data.
- **Specific**: It uses precise details rather than vague, open-ended words.
- **Relevant**: It directly connects to the ultimate goal of the project.
- **Achievable**: It sets a realistic standard that can actually be met.
- **Understandable**: Every person on the team interprets the criteria the same way.
- **Sensitive**: There is enough variability to meaningfully differentiate between buildings.

Final criteria statements

Characteristics of the building

- Buildings will be prioritized to remain open if they are considered in good or excellent condition based on the SPPS facility's condition index[1], meaning that they require minimal maintenance and repairs.
- Buildings will be prioritized using a safety metric based on: safe loading and unloading zones, structural safety, safe access to indoor and outdoor spaces, and accessibility.
- School buildings will be prioritized if they have the capacity and flexibility for future changes, including the ability to accommodate future growth and/or new existing programs (such as spaces appropriate for science, technology, arts, physical education, extracurricular activities, and career pathway programs).
- School buildings will be prioritized if more than 70% of the available seats in the building are filled by students. This rate of use is standard across comparable districts to maintain important efficiencies for buildings and resources.

Characteristics of the program

- The district will prioritize schools that, in addition to the SPPS core curriculum, provide access to: science, technology, engineering, visual arts, performance arts, physical education/athletics, libraries, mental wellness, language learning, early learning, and career pathways/enrichment.
- The district will prioritize schools with the ability to accommodate diverse learning needs (e.g., federal Setting I-III special education, multilingual learners, small group engagement, and accelerated learners).
- The district will prioritize schools that have evidence of being a school of choice based on current waiting lists, retention data, choice data, and enrollment trends.
- The district will prioritize schools that serve higher proportions of students from low-income households (qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch) and/or from immigrant, refugee, and other minority communities.

Characteristics of the location

- The district will prioritize keeping neighborhood schools open if they are located in areas in which there are larger current student populations and evidence of sustained student population rates (e.g., historical trends) or expected growth (e.g., new housing developments).
- The closure of a school should not require students located in areas with the highest social vulnerability index score to travel more than two miles to a community use facility, such as another school, recreation center, library, or public park.

[1] **Facility Condition Index** is the ratio of a building's deferred maintenance needs compared to its current replacement value, calculated by dividing total repair costs by the cost to build the facility new. A ratio of 0.0 to 0.10 is considered "excellent" and is defined as: the building is structurally sound, highly functional, and requires only routine maintenance. All major infrastructure—such as roofing, plumbing, and HVAC systems—is operating efficiently within its normal lifecycle. A rating of 0.11 to 0.20 is considered "good," meaning the building is safe and operational, but components are beginning to show wear. It requires minor capital renewal, meaning certain secondary systems (like localized flooring, lighting upgrades, or minor mechanical fixes) are approaching the end of their useful lifespans and need targeted repairs to prevent further deterioration.

Group accomplishments

Task force members present at the October 26th meeting shared what they were most proud of the group for accomplishing. Direct quotes are included below.

- "I am proud that people were so open to hear the thoughts of others and willing to compromise and come to agreement."
- "Most proud of: Working together and considering each other's opinions and input and developing criteria as a team."
- "Multiple perspectives were valued through the process."
- "I am most proud of this group for working so hard to consider the needs of all those in SPPS, even those not represented in the group."
- "Proud of a diverse group of community members with different connections coming together to have honest conversations."
- "For asking deep questions, being vulnerable, and bringing curiosity."
- "Resilient conversation."
- "I am most proud of our group's commitment and dedication to the controversial conversation."
- "I am proud of us for really thinking hard about how to use financial resources in the best possible way, AND for understanding that schools are important and that these decisions should not be made lightly."
- "I am most proud of being able to show up as parents and teachers to support community and students."
- "I am most proud of how we fought for what we all felt is best for SPPS while hearing everyone's voices."
- "I am most proud of this group for the fact that EVERY person stood their ground."
- "I'm proud that we were able to come up with thoughtful criteria and strong agreement."

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