

June 9, 2005 edition

A News and **SCHOOL BOARD BRIEFS EDITION OF...**

THE INSIDER



High expectations,
High achievement
For all.
No excuses.

Spring Lake Park School District 16

Proudly serving students and families in Blaine, Spring Lake Park, and Fridley

"The Insider" is published about once per month to promote and encourage two-way communication and to highlight the joys, successes, and challenges of educating learners. View "The Insider" and other news about District 16 at www.springlakeparkschools.org. Printed copies are available in school and department offices.

Exerpts from the June 9, 2006 issue:

MAY 24, 2005 BOARD BRIEFS: Regular School Board W Meeting



Facilities Utilization Study Update

Dr. Helmstetter reported that the Facilities Task Force has met twice since the last School Board meeting. John Ryberg, Department of Education's Facilities Specialist, met with Dr. Helmstetter, the architect, and engineer.

He visited the high school and was struck by how well-maintained the structures and facilities are for their age.

He concurred with the report from the architect and engineers and said that a number of district facilities have "exceeded their expected life span."

He suggested the old portions of the high school be removed. Any new or remodeled structure costing \$500,000 or more must have the approval of the Department of Education.

Ryberg expressed concerns that the Spring Lake Park High School complex as too many uses for the size of the land. While the land the high school sits on was originally planned for a high school alone, it now also includes an elementary school, district offices, Community Services/Education Center, and the Learning Alternatives area learning center.

With guidance from the Department of Education, Dr. Helmstetter, said, the District will develop a plan that will take us 10 years or more into the future.

MAY 24, 2005 BOARD BRIEFS: School Board Work Session and Special Meeting



Facilities Utilization Study Update

Dr. Helmstetter said district demographics are among the key elements that will impact future facilities planning. He introduced Hazel Reinhardt, former demographer for the state of Minnesota, who conducted a study of the district and shared a summary of the results with the Board.

Reinhardt said District 16 is a relatively small district with a complexity of issues to consider in making plans for the future. A summary of her presentation follows:

Three major findings

- Blaine is markedly different (average age of residents is younger, current and future growth is dramatic) from Fridley and Spring Lake Park. The percentage of District students and families in Blaine continues to rise. In 2004, 56% of district households were in Blaine as was 58% of the district population.
- Open enrollment has played a major role in K-12 enrollment since 1995.
- Future growth will occur in the district's north side where, at this time, the district has no schools.

Recent Enrollment trends

- K-12 enrollment has been flat since 1995
- Resident K-12 enrollment decreased since 1995
- There has been rapid enrollment growth of Learning Alternatives programs

- Learning Alternative growth affects “components” of enrollment change
- Kindergarten enrollment has been relatively flat since 1995
- The largest grades in 2004 are in grade 9 (359) and grade 6 (340)
- When based only upon 2004 grade profile, flat or declining enrollment is projected in the future

Choice / Competition

- Non-public schools: 11% of district residents are in non-public settings, a percentage considered low for the Twin City metro area.
- Open enrollment: the district is a net importer of students (+189). Over 400 students, slightly over 10% of the total student body, are open-enrolled students.

Dr. Helmstetter said that there are a number of intentional factors attributed to the large number of open enrollment students, including: 1) a strong gifted/talented program, and 2) a growing Learning Alternatives program which includes typical alternative education programs as well as a gifted/talented program, online learning school, treatment program, and recovery program.

Slightly over 10% of the total student enrollment is open-enrolled students. Students and families are attracted to the quality of our educational programs.

Enrollment Projections

- School enrollment is declining in Minnesota. The largest graduating class since 1978 will graduate in 2008.
- Minnesota school-age population per household will decrease this decade.
- However, in District 16, in Blaine in particular, there is dramatic growth.
 - ◆ 1,786 units between 2004 and 2006
 - ◆ 200 units after 2006
 - ◆ This pattern of development is likely to result in a spike in elementary enrollment.

Reinhardt said there is explosive growth, which is “very fast and very dramatic.” In an area of the school district where there are no schools.” She called this a “major challenge” and one that could provide a fertile environment for families to migrate to neighboring school districts.

She added, “District 16 is in a very unique position because it does not have facilities where the growth in the district is occurring. Since you are studying your facilities needs and your demographics at this time, she said, “a school in the high-growth area of Blaine really must be considered.”

Dr. Helmstetter said that historically, in fact, as long as the district has existed, it “has built its schools where the families and students were most concentrated.” If at all possible, he added, “we will continue to do this in the future. The facilities study is the perfect time to examine all possibilities.”

Task Force Consensus and Considerations

Dr. Helmstetter provided the Board with a Facilities Utilization Study Update handout and reviewed the Task Force Consensus Considerations and Issues Affecting Task Force Considerations. This information included the following:

- All schools need to be updated and equipped for this generation of students and the generations of students to come.
- There should be a school district presence in Blaine, Spring Lake Park, and Fridley, and ideally a presence in the new high-growth area of Blaine. We will continue to use the latest and best-available demographic data to guide our decision-making.
- We need additional classrooms at Westwood Middle School due to enrollment growth and changing and expanding academic programs.
- We must update and “re-zone” the high school for safety and educational effectiveness. This includes additional security measures, additional parking space, and a turf field to vastly increase usage by Phy. Ed. classes and sports teams in a complex with too-little space.
- The oldest parts of the high school complex should be demolished, especially the fifty-year-old sections, currently used by Early Childhood and Learning Alternatives programs, to provide additional, up-to-date space for the high school.
- Services in the Board of Education Building should be relocated and the building demolished to provide more space for the high school facility, for parking, and/or athletic fields in this land-locked complex.
- We must have academically and physically appropriate schools. In a competitive educational environment, we also recognize that facilities must be up-to-date, well-maintained, and aesthetically pleasing.
- The benefits of a bond referendum must be visible and must benefit each school.

Issues Affecting Task Force Considerations

- Our present structure utilizes four elementary schools. The District cannot efficiently utilize five elementary schools. Depending on the size of our elementary schools, we could effectively serve our students with three.
- Closing a school is not desired but may someday be necessary. Utilizing a school building for other district departments, programs, or services is an option.
- If the oldest sections of the high school are demolished and rebuilt, we should retain the Fine Arts Center, the present two-story structure, and the football complex.
- Due to the probability of a large bond project, consideration should be given to multiple ballot "questions" or even two separate bond referendums. Although the facility needs are great, the District should assure the public that the cost of a proposed bond referendum would not exceed \$15-\$20/month for the average homeowner.

Dr. Helmstetter reported a marketing survey began last week and will conclude this week. The survey is a benefit of the district's membership in the NMISD 916 consortium. Survey results will give the District some idea of the public's tolerance level for a bond levy as well as provide indicators of areas of concern. Survey results will be a useful tool as the district develops a plan for the future.

Dr. Helmstetter said among the considerations for future planning is the exploration of available land in the northern part of the district. At this time there are three available options worth pursuing.

However, within the next few months one or more of the options may no longer be available and with the possibility of a new stadium in Blaine, the district's chances of obtaining one of the sites may be further diminished. He said at the time the district schools were built, they were built in areas of growth.

With growth occurring in the northern part of the district, a facility in that area of the district is an expectation.

Based on the Minnesota Department of Education criteria, an elementary school must be built on at least 10 acres of land. An elementary school with 500 students would require 15 acres and a minimum of 40 acres are required for a high school. It would take at least 18 months to construct a new elementary school.

Dr. Helmstetter reminded the Board the district's buildings are very old and have out-lived their life cycle. The infrastructure (electrical, plumbing, roofs, etc.) are all in need of replacement.

The Facilities Utilization Study Task Force will review results of the survey and analyze information they have already gathered and discussed before presenting either a preliminary report or an update to the School Board in June.

We'll keep you up-to-date as the Facilities Utilization Study progresses

A message to parents, staff, and community

Greetings!

A school district where all schools are up-to-date and equipped for this generation of students and the generations of students to come. This is the goal of one ambitious endeavor of Spring Lake Park School District 16.

For over a year, we have been studying the condition and the usage of the buildings in our school district. Engineers and architects have consulted with staff and community members and have conducted their own study of each of the buildings and schools in the district, determining the needs and the usage of each site.

Then, in February 2005, a school-community Facilities Utilization Task Force began to meet to review recommendations of the architects and engineers and to make a sound determination for future School Board consideration. A timeline was developed which included a preliminary update to the Board in the spring 2005. The Task Force will make this presentation on June 28, 2005.

Although the Task Force has not agreed upon a facilities plan at this time, it has reached consensus on some major items of consideration. First, the Task Force is unanimous in emphasizing that all schools need significant electrical and mechanical upgrades, including heating and plumbing, for energy efficiency and safety. They also are unanimous in their agreement that there should be a school district presence in Blaine, Spring Lake Park, and Fridley, and that there should ideally be a presence in the new high growth areas of Blaine as well.

The Task Force also agrees that additional classrooms are needed at Westwood Middle School due to enrollment growth and changing and expanded academic programs.

In addition to the professional input of architects and engineers, as well as construction management, there are three other professional resources that have been utilized by the Task Force for this study.

■ *Hazel Reinhardt, a former demographer for the state of Minnesota, has examined enrollment trends of the district, studied relevant data on new housing projections, as well as present aging demographics of our district. In a preliminary report to the School Board, she noted the "very fast and very dramatic" growth in the northern area of Blaine. This, she said, presents a challenge and perhaps an opportunity.*

■ *Because all districts must submit their building plans to the State Department of Education for the department's "review and comment" process, the district has also consulted with John Ryberg, the Facilities Specialist for the State Department. He has already*

expressed concern that the “schools have exceeded their expected life span.”

Further, he stated that the Spring Lake Park High School complex is utilized for too many purposes. He noted, for example, that the high school site additionally hosts the district office, a multitude of community services programs, early childhood center, the high school Learning Alternatives Center, as well as an elementary school, in a land area that was originally planned for the high school alone!

■ Additionally, a professional survey of community members from throughout the school district was prepared and conducted for the school district by the Center of Community Opinion and those results will also be part of the Task Force’s deliberations.

Perhaps the items generating the greatest level of excitement and discussion among Task Force members are 1) strong consideration for a K-3 elementary school to be located in the fast-growing area of Blaine and, 2) the reconstruction of some (50-year-old) portions of the high school to produce a far more up-to-date facility, to better accommodate changing academic programs, to address space issues, and to improve security issues.

There is still much to be done before there is a completed and specific plan for upgrading our facilities. As mentioned, an update on the Task Force progress will be presented to the School Board on June 28.

Then, throughout this summer and next fall, plans will be modified, revised, and fine-tuned. Public presentations, discussions, and listening sessions will occur during the fall, and through November. Following additional modifications, a final facilities plan will be presented to the School Board possibly in December 2005.

An eventual Board-approved facilities plan will lead to a community vote on a bond referendum. This could take place as early as March 2006.

The bond project is expected to be substantial because our needs are great. The School Board, administration, and Task Force, however, want to assure the public that the cost of a bond referendum would be perhaps \$15-\$20 a month, but would not exceed \$25 a month, for the average homeowner in the school district.

A bond referendum is still some time away (the spring of 2006) but we want the public to know what we’re thinking, projecting, and planning throughout the process. We also want to be sure the public is aware of future opportunities to listen, learn, and comment as our facilities plan moves closer to completion.

A good way to stay informed is to visit our web site (springlakeparkschools.org) which we are currently re-doing. Go to “News” and then look for “Blueprint for Improving Facilities, Security, and Student Achievement.”

Have a great summer!

Dr. Don Helmstetter,
Superintendent