

Facilities Referendum Ad Hoc Committee Report and Recommendations to the Board of Education

May 28, 2019

In the aftermath of a defeated bond referendum on December 11, 2018, the Board of Education began the process of regrouping its efforts and plans to meet its responsibilities to provide safe, secure, healthy and appropriate educational settings for the PK-12 students in all 19 schools across the district. The first phase was designed to be both reflective of the past referendum process and content as well as constructive in providing a pathway forward toward the next referendum.

The Board's approach was timely, inclusive of all constituents and multi-faceted. Electronic surveys, small group forums and the work of an ad hoc committee of the Board formed the basis for analysis of the failed referendum and preparation for the process the Board will tackle next in order to move forward with addressing the critical, pressing facilities issues.

Five public forums were held over a period of 6 weeks from February 7th to March 10th and several Board members were in attendance at each forum. Additionally, three forums were held for high school pupils in April.

Electronic surveys were designed and made available for parents of PK-12 students; residents without children in the schools; and district employees. Survey questions called for multiple choice ratings and responses to open-ended questions. In total, 1,929 individuals responded to the surveys.

The Board of Education sought interested community members to serve on an ad hoc committee that was charged with: 1) reviewing the input from forums and surveys 2) discussing all aspects of the referendum and 3) making recommendations for next steps to the Board. Twenty-eight community members made the commitment to meet three times to review all input and to generate their best ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen trust and garner support from the community:

- Lead with full transparency
- Narrate the full story for the public
- Once decisions are made, present a united front from the Board
- Organize all public documents so that they are shared, archived and easy to locate
- Maximize “W.E.”
- Tie *everything* to the district strategic plan *and* to research on what is best for students.

Short term work:

CONTENT

- ***Address the health and safety issues***
- Compare new construction to rehabilitation and renovation
- Make schools “as new” versus band aids or patches
- Create avenues for two-way input about content of bond

- Simplify the ballot question(s)
- Keep the proposal under \$200 million, if possible
- Emphasize efficiencies and sustainability impact of proposed facilities work
- Place vestibules in the larger scope of security work
- Have the experts engaged in the design of the proposed work at Town Hall meetings
- Indicate the levels or significance of health and safety issues
- Create priorities by building with hyperlinks to detailed info

PROCESS

- Apply a cycle of **THINK-DECIDE-COMMIT-SELL**:
 - THINK through the options available, concentrating on how various parts of the proposed referendum interrelate and how they should be prioritized
 - DECIDE on the best set of recommendations based on need, scope and cost of projects
 - COMMIT to moving forward with the agreed upon plan with all administrators and Board members unified for success
 - SELL, market and promote the proposed plan with a robust, easily accessed fact base and with ongoing communication with all stakeholders.

- Compare repairs to new construction cost estimates, including square footage construction and tax impacts
- Create two specific small working groups to address the safety/security work and the alternative funding work
- Define a district security plan that is well-informed and aligns with current best practices for public schools
- Check in periodically with this ad hoc committee to “test” pathway and plans
- Determine the best month for referendum success and share the WHY with the public

COMMUNICATION/GET OUT THE VOTE

- Provide multiple, frequent building tours for the public with highlights of needs in each building. Engage principals and students in this work
- Hire communication firm/consultant with expertise in school referendum work
- Comprehensive communication plan for facilities and referendum: on-line virtual tours; PTA involvement; student involvement; faculty well-informed; strengthen the social media game; clear marketing message that stays consistent; photos and videos; Q & A; more print information; information pushed out...not just on website; weekly updates; the tone of all communication should be one of engagement/partnership
- For each aspect of the bond, share comparisons of options and research; share rationale

- Communicate how work will be staged in phases or over time and emphasize any efficiencies to be captured by the work.
- Engage preschool families and alumni
- Communication must be ample even in the early stages of bond development and marketing

POLLS/VOTING

- Educate the community about voting on school issues; provide historical context on Cherry Hill referenda; provide basics on the restrictions and guidelines that are imposed on public schools
- Provide the public with comparative per pupil spending costs and #s in region
- Coordinate a campaign to promote voting, including absentee balloting
- Plan for full polling hours for next referendum
- Engage preschool families, alumni and neighborhoods
- Include one -click hyperlinks to further details for anyone who wants to dive deeper into information or details
- Inform taxpayers that the State limits/defines the dates on which referendums can be held

SIMULTANEOUS WORK

- Time to move beyond Strategic Plan 2020...what next? Two parts: Teaching and Learning; Finance and Facilities

Longer term planning/vision/tasks:

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. Seek and apply for alternative funding sources
2. Maximize public/private partnerships, independent of referendum, and tap alumni with expertise to assist
3. Activate alumni associations and encourage specific groups of alumni (i.e., athletes, theater students, etc.) to “give back” to the district.
4. Regular survey of faculty; more in-depth engagement of faculty voice and ideas.
5. Convert classrooms to contemporary learning spaces on an ongoing basis
6. Pilot content for alternative learning/contemporary learning and share outcomes and recommendations for expansion with the public
7. Support more aggressive, comprehensive annual maintenance plans. Maintenance extends the life of systems and prevents the district from landing in dire straits again with major facilities work to be done under pressure. Educate the public on the difference between what maintenance dollars can be in an annual budget and what needs to go to referendum.
8. Always have the facts on consolidation of schools: pros and cons; make a formal public statement about why consolidation is or is not a wise or viable option.
9. Be specific about all efforts to save dollars and resources: efficiencies; consortia; partnerships; technologies

10. Educate the public regarding the consideration of regular, periodic bonds in the future.
11. Prioritize timeline for needs and “wants”: Long- Range Facilities Plan
12. Prepare an Annual Report or State of the District that is distributed to all constituents
13. Regularly inform the public on what dollars come into the district from state, federal and private grants

The ad hoc committee urges the Board to move forward with the necessary measures to gain public support for funding the facilities work at all 19 schools and stands ready to further assist in the planning and execution phases for the next referendum.

Prepared and submitted by Judith Wilson, Facilitator

Members of the Facilities Ad Hoc Committee

Residents

Emily Capella

Andrew McIlvaine

Quresh Dahodwala

Colleen Spagnuolo

Parents with Students in District

Beth Becker

Kevin Muessig

Andrew Behrend

Lori Perlow

Greg Blackburn

Jeanne Rentzelas

Jennifer Brumbaugh

Nancy Ryan

Jane Freiman

Lawrence Sernovitz

Meredith Gamel

Rick Short

Brya Keilson

Kristin Viglietta

Thomas Lisse

Michael Witkowski

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