

Waverly-Shell Rock Community Schools
Survey Frequently Asked Questions
Jere Vyverberg, Superintendent

Waverly-Shell Rock Schools conducted an online survey to solicit community input relative to facility use short and long-range goals during the week of October 5th. The final results of that survey can be found on the district's website at www.wsr.k12.ia.us and by clicking on "Community survey results" on the right side of the home page. Additionally, the district informational handouts and power point presentation given during the community meetings on September 29th and 30th can be accessed on that same homepage.

There were several frequently asked questions that came from that survey. This paper is meant to answer those questions. If district patrons want to discuss their question personally, they are invited to contact district administration or a board member. The questions that emerged fell into several categories.

Facility questions

Has the possibility of a preK, -3, 4-8, 9-12 configuration been considered?

Yes, this was discussed at length during the Facility Task Force meetings and with the board of education. There are many possible configurations that could be used but information received from the community shows a great deal of support for the current K-4 elementary neighborhood style facilities. Offering specials including art, orchestra, and chorus programming work more efficiently with the current configuration.

How will K-4 space issues be dealt with?

Waverly-Shell Rock is continually discussing resources to improve student/teacher ratios and space issues. Additional classrooms may be necessary to meet growing needs and it's hoped the district's funding resources would be used instead of putting all needs on a bond referendum.

With a 5-8 school, how will the diverse curriculum needs be met (e.g., media resources for different levels)?

Programming to meet diverse needs would be maintained with a wider spectrum of materials to cover the additional grades in media centers. There are many common resources that could be shared but not at the same time. Keeping 5-6th and 7-8th separate would be a priority and could be done by how a building would be laid out. Media, computer, guidance, physical education, could be used efficiently and effectively.

Is the High School of adequate size?

The high school administration highlighted several concerns in the handout prepared for the community meetings. That handout can be found on the district website. Four years ago when the new high school gymnasium and auditorium were approved, the urgent need for additional classrooms was not as pressing as it is today. It should be noted the gym and auditorium are also classrooms that are used by hundreds of students daily during physical education and the arts. That classroom space need had been expressed and solutions explored for the past 15 years. The Iowa

Core Curriculum and 21st Century Skills Project were developed in response to needs identified by the Iowa Department of Education and the State Board of Education through an intensive high school information and data gathering process undertaken in the spring of 2005 and the passage of Senate File 245 during the 2005 legislative session. SF 245 requires the identification of a model core curriculum and establishes a statewide core curriculum completion rate goal to be implemented by 2012 for high school and 2014 by elementary and middle schools. That means schools will need to require 4 years of English and 3 years of science, mathematics, and social studies as well as other classes to ensure literacy in other designated 21st century skills areas. This year also marks the first year of the new trade skills classes at the high school called Project Lead the Way. Two new classrooms have been added using the old wrestling room and the enrollment is expected to grow. The new law also requires districts to develop for each eighth grader a core curriculum plan and report progress on the completion of that plan to parents/guardians annually. The addition of classes and possible teaching staff along with the full utilization of the current facility places the adequacy of the current building in question. Another consideration identified by those responding to the survey is that we should prepare for future needs by planning facilities that will be adequate for years to come.

What will happen to the existing schools – Irving and Junior High School?

Those decisions would have to be made after any decisions for a new facility are made. There have been many suggestions including a community center for non-profits, recreational facilities, and meeting space. A specific plan will have to be developed.

How will students and grades be configured within the new 5-8 building?

There are many current plans accessible by educators that could specifically meet the needs of WSR. Many have expressed their desire that the 5th-6th grades be separate from the 7th and 8th grade students. That would be something that could easily be incorporated into a structure with separate entrances and parking as well as green space. Inter-grade interactions would be limited just as the 5th-6th grades are currently maintained. It is felt that if a new building is decided on by the board, that building should also be “green” and be as environmentally friendly as possible.

How will the new building, as well as the surrounding houses, be affected by the water-way that runs through the land? Will the new building be safely located?

There have been some informal discussions about that question. During the past three floods, that land was not adversely impacted. There is a small stream that provides runoff from the CUNA property to the west but that has not flooded the property and it is not identified as being in the floodplain. Some have suggested planning is needed to make certain potential runoff does not cause problems by the use of retention ponds, landscaping, and drainage.

What size of school can be built on the land that has been purchased? Is it large enough to build a school and sports facilities?

There is no minimum size stated by the Department of Education but the 30 acres of land available is adequate to build a building and have areas for parking, co-curricular activities, and green space. If a building is approved, the district would contract with companies with experience with such issues. For comparison, the high school campus is 35 acres and includes a baseball field, a softball field, two large

green space areas, parking lots for students (not needed for middle level students), and a football stadium.

How can we limit the number of transitions for students?

Currently, WSR students have four transitions (moving to a different building) from PK to 12th grade. They include PK-4, 5-6, 7-8, and 9-12. A 5-8 facility would mean students would have one less transition.

Financial questions

What are the costs and details for a Bond? What is our bonding capacity?

Before the board would ask the public to approve any bond referendum, all details would be given prior to the vote. How much the district is able to use from the FEMA settlement for the repair of Irving, the state penny for sales tax, and any funds from the Physical Plant Enhancement Levy will determine the amount of any referendum. Last year's school district assessed property valuation was listed at approximately \$449,000,000. The current property tax levy for the district is \$12.38 per \$1000 of assessed valuation. At current district assessed valuation, each dollar increase would yield \$449,000 per year to pay for the bonds. The FEMA settlement that was on appeal for the repair of Irving has now been approved for just over three million dollars. An alternative project to mitigate future loss could be eligible to be addressed by those funds. The current bonding capacity of the district is over \$44,000,000 which is far more than would be needed to build a 5-8 facility and meet other district needs.

Will the community be able to support a Bond with the state and national financial situation?

There are several factors that can be considered when answering this question. Realizing this is a difficult time locally and nationally, the school district would need to be very cost conscious. In meeting with the Iowa Association of School Boards, it was stated this is a good time due to that very fact. There is considerable savings possible while construction is low and interest rates are "extremely low" (possibly 3-4%) according to the Iowa Association of School Boards Financial Advisor.

Construction costs are projected to go up 8-12% yearly so building now would save money. Their feeling is that this is the "best time" to build. Additionally, during the survey and the community meetings, many expressed their feeling of a sense of urgency.

What is the current budget situation?

Current district financial data can be accessed on our website by clicking on "handouts" on the main page. The flood did impact the district but money obligated by FEMA and the Iowa Homeland Security would help maintain the school's excellent reputation of fiscal responsibility. In discussions with the Iowa Association of School Board's Financial Advisor Larry Sigel, he stated the district is in good financial condition and able to use funds generated from the state penny, PPEL, and FEMA dollars. It should be noted the district could meet bond obligations and keep some funds from the state penny to meet future facility needs the district may have.

How can we justify what is spent on athletics at the expense of the whole child?

Waverly-Shell Rock values the educational needs of the whole child. This can be seen in the number of co-curricular offerings in addition to athletics. Current and proposed legislation underscores the value of exercise and co-curricular offerings. Research has shown that participation in co-curricular activities including sports and the arts is an essential part of educating the “whole child”. WSR has enjoyed substantial participation in co-curricular activities. The new “personal fitness” and nutrition curriculum at the high school is an example of the importance the district places on “lifelong learning”.

Future projection questions

What are the future trends/predictions for district/region (e.g., enrollment, growth, space)?

Historically, the district has been growing slowly but steadily. This year, there are 73 more (head counted) students district-wide while the certified enrollment (resident) increased by 22 students. Enrollment figures and trends can be seen by viewing the handouts and the PowerPoint presentation on the home page of the district website. Actual projections are difficult and they were not accurate the past 4 years. Many feel WSR will continue its growth.

Is there a possibility of consolidation between surrounding districts?

That possibility exists but there are no discussions currently being held. The Iowa Model Core Curriculum mandated for all districts will make it more difficult for individual schools to meet the demands of expanded curriculums.

What are the possibilities of changing the boundary?

Boundaries within the district have not changed substantially for a number of years. Currently, those boundaries for students attending the various elementary schools are used loosely since the district tries to place new students with a consideration of building enrollment balance. School district boundaries cannot be changed by Iowa code unless both districts agree to the adjustment through consolidation. Boundaries within the district should be reviewed to make sure the intended enrollment balance is maintained or improved. The rough boundary for Shell Rock Elementary attendance is just west of the 218 bridge over Highway 3.

Shell Rock questions

How can the district balance the equity (e.g., students' physical, mental, social, emotional aspects) between schools?

That is always a challenge. When new students come into the district, balance is always a prime consideration. Keeping a balanced enrollment that maintains equity is a concerted effort by all elementary principals. Where a family resides does play a part in the balance when enrollment at the district's Shell Rock facility is considered. As Shell Rock continues to grow in population, keeping an equitable balance is a goal.

How can Shell Rock's SPED percentage be lowered?

That has been a priority for the past three years and the district is making headway. Resident students need to be served as much as possible close to where they live, as well. Special education enrollments can be viewed on the district's main page by clicking on the handouts and presentation links. This year, greater balance has been realized by the single section 5th and 6th grade classes being moved

from Shell Rock to Irving. This was one of the recommendations given to the board from the Facilities Task Force.

How can we integrate the SPED pre-school with regular education students of their same age?

We integrate as much as we can where possible. In some cases, there are not enough classrooms available to integrate with. This is the case with pre-school special education at Southeast Elementary. Unless additional pre-school classes are available within a building, that integration will be difficult. We do integrate at that level when we can and if appropriate.

Does Shell Rock need its own administrator?

Some have suggested that and it has been discussed off and on over the years. As most know, Shell Rock, Irving, Carey, and West Cedar have an administrator for half of the time as they are shared administrative duties. Budget constraints and the enrollment of the neighborhood schools over the years have made full time administrators available difficult. Other methods of providing intervention are being discussed.

How will SPED students be more evenly distributed throughout the district?

This question is closely related to the one above. We have been working to balance those enrollments when possible. We will continue to look at ways to improve that balance even more. One discussion item has been “what if we use the portables we purchased” and place them at attendance centers for specials such as music or art? That would free up classroom space for a better balance of special education enrollments.

How can we support all buildings based on their needs (e.g., principals’ time at elementary buildings)?

One method of support would be monetary as we would need two additional administrators (or administrative assistants or interventionists) in order for buildings to have an administrative presence during the entire day.

Do we need a full-time K-6 interventionist?

As in above, that has been discussed administratively. Discussions have involved the board but no decision has been made at this time. Restructuring administrative duties will be discussed after a one year transition if a new facility is built. Budget constraints make this a difficult challenge as the district’s allowable growth directly impacts property tax levies.

Staffing questions

How many of the Jr. High teachers have a Secondary Endorsement?

At this time, approximately 50% of the junior high school teachers have secondary endorsements. In Iowa, under certain stipulations, teachers can teach at that level with an elementary or secondary endorsement. Teachers who received their license prior to 1985 are “grandfathered in” to teach multiple areas at the middle level.

What would happen to current staff (e.g., Irving, Jr. High, media, and specials)?

If this question refers to any staff reductions, that would not be an option since any approval of a new facility would still mean we would serve the same number of students thus needing the same number

of staff. With enrollment increasing across the entire district, utilizing less staff would not be a wise choice. There are no changes anticipated. As in the past, attrition (retirement or moving) would be the preferred method should that ever be needed.

Can guidance counselors be a part of the planning of the building?

All staff members would be part of the planning of any new facility.

Can we add art education for K-2 students throughout the district?

Curricular changes, additions, or revisions have a prescribed method to be followed. Building teachers, administration, and parents are an integral part of any revisions. While many offerings such as foreign language, expanded art education, and technology have and will continue to be explored, there have been budgeting concerns.

What level of importance does the district place on specials (e.g. guidance counselor, physical education, art, music)? What is the priority for each special?

All curricular areas of the district have been developed over a long period of time and are under constant review by staff and administration. All levels enjoy priority since they all serve the needs of students. Students have varied interests, skills, and stages of development. For that reason one should not place a higher priority on one special over another. All are valued at WSR.

How can we meet the needs of top students?

Meeting the needs of all students is important as is "creating a passion for learning that will sustain students for a lifetime." There will always be fiscal challenges to overcome and the balance of interests and abilities of all students must be taken into consideration. Having a greater grade span within a building would allow greater opportunities for students to be accelerated if appropriate.

How quickly can we make this happen?

There are several steps to take before a decision by the board would be possible. Costs, district financial impact, student, staff, and community needs all will have to be considered before a final decision. All decisions of this nature rest with the board of education. If you have particular feelings to express, you could contact any board member. It would most likely take 2 years plus to finish construction on a major project. With the 1 year plus 2 optional years of lease for Willow Lawn, a decision before that time would be best. If everything were to move quickly, we could be in a new building by the fall of 2011.

For more answers or to ask additional questions, please contact Jere Vyverberg at 352-3630 or jere.vyverberg@wsr.k12.ia.us or contact a WSR board member.