

MEMORANDUM

To: Facilities Committee, Wake County Public School System
Fr: Chris Heagarty, Board of Education, District 7
Date: May 27, 2021
Re: Report-Back regarding Board Input on Facilities Concerns and Strategic Long-Term Planning

At the April 14th Facilities Committee Meeting, the Committee met to (1) begin the conversation about current facility concerns and long-range planning items, (2) to consider long-range vision and planning related to facilities, and (3) to begin the discussion about big picture topics that the committee would like to explore.

The committee was divided into two groups of no more than four members at a time, who engaged in a modified SWOC analysis related to the above topics. Group A consisted of Board members Martin, Johnson-Hostler, Mahaffey, and Scott. Group B consisted of Board members Kushner, Cash, Heagarty, and Carter. Board Chairman Sutton and Superintendent Moore participated in the exercise as individuals. Members in sub-groups recorded their thoughts on paper (except for one member who participated remotely) and then shared and discussed their results as a group and then presented their group's findings with the whole Board. Recording sheets were collected for the preparation of this memorandum, to be shared with the committee at its May 12 meeting.

Opinions on issues related to facilities varied, with more shared agreement on strengths and more diversity of opinion over challenges and opportunities.

Strengths: There was strong agreement around certain strengths of WCPSS in this area. The state-of-the-art buildings and intentional design for learning collaboration was the most commonly identified strength by members, followed by the strong partnership and good collaborative relationship with Wake County government, and the security improvements made to school design. Other commonly shared opinions of strengths revolved around the conservation and sustainability elements incorporated into facility design, the land-banking strategy that assist in planning and building options for the district, the rubric created for the capital improvement process and the new SNAP and PRIMP programs to address previously unmet facilities' needs. Other areas identified as strengths are described in the comment-summary attachment to this memo.

Weaknesses: There was a little more diversity of opinion around certain weaknesses of WCPSS in this area. Three topics were the most frequently cited as a top concern of Board members. One was the problem of aging facilities, with many schools behind on their schedule for recommended system maintenance and in need of renovation. Another shared concern was the inequity in buildings and instructional space from school to school around the county, with newer schools having better facilities and equipment than older schools and schools in more affluent neighborhoods having better resources than schools in less affluent neighborhoods. Of equal concern was the need for more clear consistent data around school crowding, capacity, and facilities utilization, specifically citing the need for

improvements in the Facilities Utilization report. Also cited were concerns by the Board about inadequate funding for non-instructional space, such as the exterior and grounds of school facilities. Additional feedback is included in the comment-summary document attached to this memo.

Opportunities: Opinion was diverse around potential facilities opportunities for WCPSS. Most Board members expressed interest around ideas of sustainability, both related to energy and the environment. “Green” initiatives including utilizing solar energy, composting, school gardens, general conservation, and transportation were discussed. There is also broad agreement around the opportunities to explore more joint-use agreements for shared facilities with municipal and county governments as a way to expand access to services and amenities and to reduce costs. There are opportunities to be explored with respect to use/lease/purchase of commercial real estate to address critical needs such as swing space, or such properties may provide options for small footprint schools or other school options. It was also suggested that WCPSS increasingly explore opportunities to work with historically underutilized/minority owned businesses. Cited by many board members was the idea that slower school enrollment, as well as COVID-funding provides an opportunity to catch up on capital needs created by past growth and aging facilities. Other specific ideas are tabulated in the comments-summary at the end of this memo.

Challenges: A variety of perspectives were offered by Board members with respect to challenges facing WCPSS facilities. Many of the ideas previously identified as weaknesses were also identified as challenges. A pervasive facilities need is the lack of swing space. The availability, or lack of swing space often makes it difficult to address renovations based on otherwise established priority rankings. Addressing issues of inequity between schools and across regions was a common theme relating to a variety of specific details. These included the contrast between new and aging buildings, the impact facilities have on market share, and the ability of communities to contribute to upkeep of school grounds or to provide other amenities to schools. Substantial challenges were noted with respect to growth and development; specifically highlighted was the lag between building schools vs. the construction of residential neighborhoods which severely impacts crowding and capping of schools, and the uneven growth and affordability of residential development which creates difficulty in maintaining socio-economic diversity in our schools. Other specific ideas are listed in the comments-summary at the end of this memo.

Summary: Common priorities and concerns identified by Board members provide guidance for future work of the Facilities committee. Focusing on areas of opportunity and need, possible future meeting topics include: sustainability (energy and environmental), facilities utilization, equity between neighborhoods and in school resources, collaborations with local governments, and addressing the need for swing space.