

## **Jeffco Facilities Usage Committee- Meeting Notes**

Meeting held July 13, 2009 from 1:00-4:30 pm.

### **Opening/Review of Previous Meeting**

Justin Silverstein opened the meeting by reviewing the previous meeting's work. At the last meeting committee members completed individual and group surveys about possible evaluation criteria. He explained that the individual results tended to vary more than the group survey results, which were more homogeneous and based on compromise. He said that committee members would be reviewing the results of the surveys today. Additionally, at this meeting, committee members will be examining how criteria can be applied to actual schools. There will also be a presentation on some new data, which are costs per pupil for each school; the committee will look at how these costs vary by size and grade configuration. He added that the main goal for this meeting will be to decide on criteria so that the recommended criteria can be included in the interim report.

Justin then asked if committee members had heard any rumors that needed to be addressed. There were none.

Justin informed the committee of a change to the agenda; the committee will be reviewing survey results first and then looking at per pupil costs.

### **Survey Results**

Carolyn Staskiewicz presented the survey results. She asked committee members to follow along with the survey results summary and the PowerPoint handouts. There were 23 individual surveys completed and 3 group surveys completed. She noted that in some places, the totals add up to more than 100 percent because individuals could select more than one option. She also noted that when documenting the comments they tried to reflect any emphasis, i.e. underlining, bolding or exclamation marks, so the summary reflected committee members' responses as accurately as possible.

Questions 1-4: Committee members preferred elementary schools of 350-500 students, middle schools of 600-800 and high schools of 1,200 to 2,000.

Questions 5-7: Broader options (like virtual schools, more specific programs) were well regarded at middle and high school, while committee members preferred neighborhood schools at the elementary level. Committee members also wanted more tuition-based preschool to be available. They thought that changing the grade configuration at schools, looking at transportation, consolidating schools, and duplicating successful programs in under-utilized schools were all possible options for dealing with uneven enrollment.

Questions 8-11: The majority of committee members thought a good school utilization rate was 80 to 90 percent. Preferable bus times varied, with the biggest variation in middle school with a range of 15-45

minutes. Most committee members thought that temporary buildings should be used for no more than 5-10 years. Choice out triggers varied, again with responses for middle schools varying the most (20-50 percent).

Questions 12-14: All criteria included in the survey were ranked as very important by the majority. Suggestions for improving efficiency, that were supported by the majority of committee members, included school closure, school consolidation, program consolidation, and changing grade configurations. There was not significant support for creating sister or partner schools, or doing nothing.

Carolyn concluded by encouraging committee members to read the additional comments for each question. She then asked for any questions.

A committee member asked a question about survey question #11 and was wondering if the committee's opinions about high school choice out were presented correctly. The committee member said that there was a lower percentage for the given range when looking at individual responses, but it was higher in the group. Carolyn said she used the group answer since the percentage was higher. Justin added that these results from these surveys will be in the interim report, but these are only a tool to use in their discussion as a starting point; committee members can change any of the criteria. These criteria will also be used as part of dialogue at the first public meetings to solicit public response in these areas.

Justin said that committee members will have the opportunity to discuss the criteria later in the meeting. The criteria will be addressed in order of importance based on survey results. They can change their prioritization of criteria as they discuss them.

### **Per Pupil Costs**

Justin then presented on operating costs, which committee members considered to be an important area for consideration. These costs were calculated on a per pupil basis for each school, but in the slide presentation have been grouped by size and grades. Fixed costs are costs for each school that would not carry over if a school was closed, while variable costs would likely follow the students to whatever new school they attend. Chart shows fixed costs in red variable costs in light blue and how they vary by size.

Elementary schools were looked at first. There is a small increase in costs at the 401-450 size level, which is because the schools in this group have a higher at-risk population so they are receiving additional federal funding and as a result spend more. It is also worth noting schools stay flat until around 350 (which is at the lower boundary of the range suggested by committee members as the ideal size for an elementary school), so this chart shows where it gets significantly higher as schools get smaller.

A committee member asked if the increase in costs for the highest enrollment group indicated that costs would start to increase at some point as schools got larger. Cindy responded that this

could be the case as it is possible that costs increase above 650 because at that level they may have an assistant principal or additional secretarial staff that smaller schools would not have.

Another committee member also noted that costs could also be lower per pupil once you are at capacity because costs (particularly fixed) are spread out over more students, so that school capacity utilization could be more of a cost issue than just school size.

A similar chart was presented for middle schools. In this case, schools are less costly starting at 500 students and up.

A committee member asked whether options schools were included in these charts. Justin indicated that they were not included and neither were charters.

A committee member asked how many schools are in each category. For instance, at the middle level only one school was less than 300. She would like to see the number of schools in each category added to the charts.

Finally, a third chart was presented on high schools. High schools costs start to level off at 1,300 students or more. There are no schools that are between 1,000 and 1,300.

A committee member requested that different language be used instead of saying a school is a "small school." She asked that these schools be referred to as "small enrollment" schools because they could have unused capacity, so they could become less costly if a change is made to increase enrollment at that school.

Another committee member suggested that a certain school's enrollment was slightly off. A committee staff member responded that it was because these figures were based on 2008-09 enrollment numbers they budgeted on, not the most recent figures available. This was done so that figures presented since the first meeting would be consistent. As a result, enrollment may have increased or decreased since then.

Again, operational costs are just one piece of data that needs to be used in conjunction with other criteria.

### **Other Districts' Criteria**

Justin then presented on what other districts in the area have set as criteria. Committee staff members are looking to get representatives from these other committees to come to a future meeting to explain their choices, how board received, etc. to help this committee. Denver and Littleton have both closed schools, but that's not necessarily the only choice that can be made.

#### *Littleton*

In Littleton, they convened a very similar committee which used a similar process and was made up of a mix of educators and community members. Some of their criteria included school size, capacity utilization, and if the school had primarily full or part time staff. Justin noted that the committee chose

to consider not only schools that are less than a certain percentage of capacity utilization, but also schools that were at over 100 percent because they thought these schools were pulling students and resources away from under capacity schools. Having more full-time than part-time staff was also included as a criterion because it is a morale issue. Additional criteria used in Littleton were academic, enrollment and choice trends, financial information, geographic considerations, and employee satisfaction. Cost/benefit was also considered but not ultimately done. An employee satisfaction measurement tool was also developed.

A committee member asked whether Littleton took out programs when they talked about capacity. Special programs were considered and discussed if schools hit trigger, specifically how programs impacted that school's enrollment and if that school should still be considered.

The Littleton chart presented shows all the schools in that district and have cells highlighted if the school is not meeting the criteria for each area. Later in the meeting, a similar spreadsheet will be shared that applies the criteria that came out of the survey to Jeffco schools.

Tracie noted that just because a school that is under enrollment and capacity, it might still be a good operational school (good building condition, etc) so it might be a matter of moving students into that school and not closing it.

Justin also reminded the committee that the interim report will be process oriented to facilitate better public discussion. Solutions will not be presented in this report, nor will actual schools be discussed.

#### *Denver*

DPS was already at 70 percent capacity at all of its schools when the committee was created, so dealing with a large scale issue of low enrollment in its schools. This committee looked at criteria in several areas- academic, facilities and additional criteria related to the demographics of the school and the neighborhood impact. Academic criteria considered included: low growth, choice ratios, schools rated "unsatisfactory," schools with declining CSAP, and low retention, stability and attendance rates. Facilities criteria included building utilization, area enrollment trends/predictions, programs that could be grown and moved into larger facilities, facility conditions and costs. This committee identified 33 schools that could have been closed, but they did not ultimately close that many. The district still has many low capacity schools, so they are looking to revisit this issue.

Justin asked if there were any questions; there were none.

#### **Interim Report Expectations**

Justin told the committee that they will be able to review the interim report before it goes out and that nothing will ever be sent out without their review and approval. He said that Jeffco has done a great job communicating with the public, but there will still be the majority of people that do not know what is going on. As such, instead of presenting results in the interim report the purpose will be to explain who the committee is and what they have been doing, as well as letting them know that they will be

identifying schools later and the criteria that will be used to do so. The goal will be to solicit their opinions on these factors.

A committee member asked how the community will be notified. Committee staff responded that they will be going through a number of channels, such as through the Web site, local newspapers, information passed out through the schools- newsletters, take home materials- as well as other media outlets and the superintendent communiqué.

A committee member was worried that we need to be sure to communicate to parents that this is information that they need to act on because parents often experience information overload. Committee staff responded that they will be very careful about using the right language to get the community engaged but not scared; they do not want to spark any rumors.

Another committee member asked for materials so that they could publish pieces about the committee's work and upcoming meetings, like through their PTAs. Justin said that talking points are included in this week's materials. He added that the committee staff could also come up with additional materials specific to her request. The Web site does have all materials so this would be good to refer people back to a common information source.

A committee member then stressed how important timing is and that it is essential to get these meetings on people's agenda's early. Another committee member similarly asked that principals be notified well in advance so they are prepared. Committee staff agreed with both of these points and said that communication materials will be sent out as soon as possible and that there will be many opportunities to get people to attend since there are multiple meetings and it's a big district.

### **New and Updated Data**

Cheryl passed out the draft spreadsheets that summarized data for each school in each of the criteria areas. These drafts will be collected at the end of the meeting.

Cheryl first noted that there is still a \$35 million dollar budget shortfall in the district over the next 3 years. As such, the impetus for forming the committee still exists. She then highlighted where new data is being presented. She noted that they have added kindergarten classrooms in several schools which is reflected. Additionally, the spreadsheets now include each school's free and reduced lunch count (column D); mobility rate, which is student movement during the year (column E); enrollment projections (Column V); and average operational data, which is the average of the range that they are in for each of these levels (Column N).

A committee member noted that Alameda HS has an IB program which is not shown. Cheryl indicated that this is a draft document so that each school should be reviewed.

Another committee member noted that Moore Elementary has only two temporary buildings, not nine.

## Criteria Discussions

Justin then led the committee through a discussion of criteria. The parameters were set by what was in the survey to be used as a starting point for their discussion.

### 1. Capacity

A committee member started off by suggesting that she does not like the word “capacity” and would prefer that “utilization” be used because capacity seems to mean size, utilization means how effectively space is being used. Another committee member disagreed and said that capacity and utilization are saying two different things. Justin proposed using “capacity utilization”, meaning how well you are using the space you have. Capacity is presented as a percentage, which may make this clearer. Another committee member thought that no matter what term was used, it was more important that it be clearly defined in the interim report; it is enrollment to permanent capacity ratio.

Another committee member would like to see schools that are over 100 percent capacity also highlighted in a different color.

Cheryl pointed out that in addition to highlighting schools that were below the set capacity point, that they also have highlighted places where schools are under permanent capacity but are using temps, if they are below 100 percent. Some of these were accidentally not highlighted, but they should be (there appears to be an issue of highlighting if the line was underlined).

Justin asked the committee whether capacity (regardless of chosen term) should be used as a criterion. There appeared to be group consensus that capacity should be a factor.

A committee member questioned how temporary buildings were being used and why it was important to specifically look at temporary buildings. Justin said that this was included because temporary buildings have been brought up as an area that the committee wanted to look at before due to safety and maintenance costs associated with them.

Another committee member thought it might be important to consider how the temporary building were being used, saying that there is an important distinction between sites that use temporaries for storage or for classrooms. Committee staff said that this could be looked at more closely during the analysis phase to check out the individual reasons.

Committee members generally seemed comfortable with schools being highlighted if they had under 80 percent capacity or if the school had portables, if they were under 100 percent, and highlighted if they were over 100 percent capacity.

A committee member expressed that she was concerned that 80 percent was too high, but another committee member thought this was the widest funnel for looking at schools, so that it was fine.

## 2. *Building condition*

Cheryl noted that this column is currently blank, but that the Facility Condition index will be available in the fall. In this area the schools' energy usage and maintenance ranks were included and schools with the highest ranks were highlighted.

## 3. *Operating Cost*

In this area, schools are highlighted in relation to their peer group. A committee member was concerned with how this was done and questioned whether they should be comparing all elementary schools together, all middle together, and all high schools together. A committee member was concerned that this would create a bias against smaller schools. Justin said that smaller school size and higher costs are correlated. He said that they need to determine what is most valued by the committee and if this was an area that they wanted to explore more. The committee decided that costs were an area that they should be considering, so they decided they should keep this for now, because they have not highlighted schools by size yet.

## 4. *Safety and Security*

There is no data in this area yet and it was suggested that they might need to define what they meant here. A committee member questioned whether there was really enough variation in the district to use this as a criterion. Another committee member said that when her group was filling out the survey, they struggled with how to think about safety and security. While they felt that this was obviously an important area, they thought that if any school had a major safety or security issue that someone in the district would already be aware of it and doing something about it. Bob suggested that this is outside the scope of this committee. Cheryl added that this should also be addressed in the facility condition index that is being considered by the other group. She said that the committee could ask for a list of schools with the highest safety and security issues.

It was decided that this would be removed as a criterion, but that in the report it should be noted that it was an area considered and that it is addressed in the facilities condition index.

## 5. *Creating Equitable Opportunities*

This is also addressed in the facilities condition index, in terms of the physical space. A committee member was concerned though that this did not address programmatic opportunities, such as one school offering a certain program while one school did not. Committee members thought that this needed to be included somewhere, even if it did not come up as a criterion because it was not included on the survey. The question then became whether this should be included as a criterion or as a topic of discussion once schools were identified. The majority of committee members seemed to believe that it should not be a criterion for identifying schools, but instead should be a topic of discussion during school evaluation.

## 6. *Age of Facility*

The committee staff suggested that the building condition index will take this into account in a better way, so that it should be removed. The committee members agreed with this, but felt that it needed to be mentioned in the report that the condition index takes this into account so it does not appear as if building age was overlooked.

## 7. *Enrollment data*

In this area, schools were highlighted in yellow if they were above and blue if below initial criteria ranges. A committee member questioned whether they should really be flagging schools that are above a certain size, since they already exist and they have lower operation costs. Another committee member responded that they thought the committee's charge was to consider solutions that were the most effective use of facilities, not necessarily just the most cost efficient. Another committee member suggested that they should be looking at schools whose enrollment projections would put them over capacity.

Committee members seemed unsure as to whether size was something they should be considering, specifically schools that were on the higher end. They wondered what other districts were doing and if there was any existing research about size that could be considered. Justin said size varied widely depending on the school district. Cindy said that most research about size came back to the idea that it was the quality of instruction in the classroom that made the difference, not specifically the size of the school.

Cindy said there are stories about every school's unique situation, so they need to come up with a group of schools based on general criteria before they can consider schools individually. Staff cannot be in the position to give recommendations. They can give context to some possible choices, but will not make recommendations. The committee however, will need their feedback and understanding of school situations during the evaluation phase.

## 8. *Achievement data*

Justin recommended to the committee that achievement data needs to be addressed somewhere, however there is currently no data in this column because there has been a struggle to define success and how to measure it here.

A committee member suggested that it was counterintuitive to talk about student achievement, when the committee should be talking just about facilities. Tracie responded that this portion of the charge came from the board, so that it should be considered since this is one of the main concerns of the board and that how you define it is important. Not doing something about achievement would be a disservice to the board because they want to know how buildings are being used to support achievement and to ensure that any changes would not interrupt student achievement. The committee member however, was still concerned that any student achievement issues were not a result of the physical facility.

Another committee member asked if they had been provided student achievement data, either absolute or growth. Committee staff indicated that they had provided the committee with School Accountability ratings. Committee members requested that they be given both absolute and growth performance results. Cindy said that this information was available for each school on CDE's website. Cindy is hesitant to provide the committee with measures that boils this information down, just because the committee needs to be careful how they consider this information.

Another committee member stressed that academic achievement needed to be considered because every decision in the district is concerned with student achievement. The committee member proposed that it could be a secondary criteria option.

Justin said that for now, it will be left on the list because they would like public feedback in this area, but that they can discuss it further later.

#### 9. *Choice data*

A committee member wondered how much of the choice in and out figures were students moving within the district and students leaving or coming into the district. Cindy said that the district does track this.

Another committee member wondered whether net choice in/choice out be a criteria, or if the committee still needed to look at schools that have high choice in or out figures, regardless of if this was been balanced out in the net figure. The committee member believed you would still want to know what is going on in those schools.

All kinds of dynamics, choice is particularly interesting, for example how full day affected choice, more families shopping then getting attached to that school- variables that will affect these numbers. These numbers are a snapshot at a certain time.

The committee decided to leave this area as is and use a net choice in and out figure as a criteria.

#### 10. *Other criteria or evaluation topics*

Committee members had other suggestions for criteria that did not come out of the survey. These suggestions included looking at transportation, specifically the distance between schools and if rearranging the transportation grid could be an option; how many employees would be impacted by a school closure and if it would be convenient for them to work at another school; neighborhood impact, including in terms of ethnicity; and possible savings from closing each school (committee members were provided general figures for average savings for closing an elementary, middle or high school).

### **Meeting Closing and Final Questions**

Justin asked if there were any final questions. A committee member asked what was in the final column, "sum of highlights." This is the total number of places where a school had been highlighted as not meeting criteria, so later they will want to look at the total number of places that schools are not meeting criteria and more closely consider the schools with the highest numbers.

Justin reminded the committee that the next meeting is in this room on August 17<sup>th</sup> at 3:30 pm. He added that talking points are in this week's materials and that the committee staff will be providing them with more summary materials for communication before the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.