

School facility review indicates need to expand and improve classroom space

The Springfield School District Facility Task Force considered educational programming needs as they examined data following a series of meetings and a tour of the school building earlier this year.

The impetus for the meetings was the result of a comprehensive site and facility evaluation completed in February 2016 by ISG — architecture, engineering, environmental and planning firm — hired by the Springfield Board of Education to identify physical plant needs when experiencing problems with the current heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

The evaluation included an analysis of existing conditions and considerations of the site, interior and exterior building, plumbing, mechanical, and electrical conditions, as well as security, technology and programmatic considerations.

A space needs assessment was also conducted to quantify the student/space ratio for the variety of uses throughout the facility. In addition to educational uses, the assessment also considered extra-curricular, community education, and recreational uses and schedules for the facility.

The Facility Task Force was organized by the Springfield School District to be advisory to the Board of Education as they considered ISG's assessment. The Task Force was asked to examine data and information and develop recommendations to the school board regarding various facility projects.

Educational programming needs were discussed after identifying mechanical needs, and considering school security and safety concerns. The assessment brought forward building limitations, and offered opportunities to support educational, student and community programming needs that are outlined as follows:

Career and Technical Education lab needs

Foremost in programming needs, said the Task Force, is an expanded and updated Career and Technical Education (CTE) Lab. There is a growing demand for workers in the construction, manufacturing, engineering, automotive, and design trades in our region. Currently, the CTE space does not meet today's programming standards and cannot functionally support existing equipment and provide the needed space for hands-on, project-based learning. A renovation and expansion of this space would expand course offerings to meet student interest and workforce demands, incorporate the latest tools and equipment, provide more job-like, project-based experiences, and improve safety.

Gym space demands and programming needs

The current gymnasiums do not meet the district's physical education, indoor recess and co/extra-curricular program needs. When the 1961 gymnasium was built, the district offered only a few boys sports and there were no youth programs. Minnesota State High School League girls athletics came in the 1970s. Youth and developmental programs are now normal and expected and sought by the community. Today, academic, co/extra-curricular and youth programming engages many more students than ever before, most of which have gym space demands. As the result of the lack of gym space, youth and community programs for our youngest learners need to be held late into the evening throughout the school year and many gym usage requests cannot be accommodated. The small gym, often referred to as the Elementary Gym or the Little Gym, built in 1926, regularly needs to be used for indoor recess, housing more than 120 elementary students in the small space, and is utilized for junior high extra-curricular activities and youth programs. The functional use of this one-court small gym is limited. This gym lacks volume and height to allow for multi-use. Spectator viewing for many parents and grandparents is greatly limited and uncomfortable.

The 1993 auditorium addition has been a wonderful addition as scheduling for fine arts in the current gym space would not be practical and perhaps even impossible. The auditorium also provides space for meetings, student assemblies and a variety of academic programs.

The Facility Task Force suggested that the gym project could be expanded to include an indoor walking track for school and community use. This walking track would improve the multi-purpose of that space and be accessible to the community during the day and evening throughout all 12 months of the year.

Repurpose 1926 gym to serve as CTE lab/shop space

The Facility Task Force reviewed and discussed the functionality of the 1926 gym for today's needs. If the community supports expanding and updating the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Lab and adding gym space, the small (1926) gym could be repurposed for CTE space, and gym space could be added to the southeast end of the school. A two-court gym could be built with a dedicated entrance to allow the space to be used outside of the school day.

Expand fitness/wellness space

The school's fitness/weight room does not adequately allow physical education classes or an athletic team the capacity to utilize it at one time. The space lacks natural lighting and limits equipment within it. A new, expanded fitness and weight room would allow for cardio equipment (stationary bikes, treadmills, ellipticals) to be added as well as needed space for physical education classes and athletic teams.

Expand the cafeteria

The size of the school's cafeteria presents certain challenges to appropriately serve students around the noon hour. The cafeteria has served most students who attended Springfield Public School for the past 50 years. It has been undersized and widely utilized from the onset. Due to the lack of seating, lunch is served beginning with kindergartners as early as 10:45 a.m. and the oldest students as late as 12:55 p.m. Today, salad bars are offered and must be located outside of the kitchen, taking away more floor space for seating. In addition, the cafeteria's current size does not work well for large group activities/ instruction nor for use as a community early childhood and parent education gathering space.

The cafeteria could be expanded by pushing out into the adjacent choir classroom; and, with flexibility in design, it could serve as a commons area for student collaboration and studying after school; and could also be used for large group activities by the school and community.

This would, however, create a need to relocate or add a new choir space on campus.

Build new music classrooms

The current music classrooms are too small, including the band room that is used for both the elementary and secondary bands, causing teachers to set-up and take-down equipment multiple times a day. The classrooms lack adequate storage and proper acoustics. The district is considering a plan to repurpose the current band room to serve as large equipment storage that currently has to be stored in a hallway.

Then, larger band and vocal music classrooms could be added near the auditorium and include space designed for general music, choir and band with proper acoustics and flexible seating, as well as practice rooms and storage space for instruments and equipment.

Add theatre support space

The auditorium is used by both the school and community and lacks support spaces including storage and dressing rooms. As a result, classrooms are used as makeup stations, dressing rooms, prop storage, etc., impacting classroom space.

The school's plan is to provide flexibility of space, add value to the project and make it family friendly. For example, add a walking track for community members to walk at their convenience, a place where parents can wait for their child(ren) or people with alternating schedules, and provide an area for students to study or relax after school while waiting for parent pickup, etc.

Engage every family in decision-making

The school is genuinely inclusive in its approach to decision-making. There is a clear recognition from the school that the greater community plays an integral role in the educational success of the school. It recognizes that this type of process creates a sense of shared responsibility among families, students, community members, and educators. It is the intention of the Springfield Board of Education and the Facility Task Force to make community involvement a priority in the final decision-making process regarding capital improvement projects. Plans are to disseminate information through the newspaper, electronic media, face-to-face community

meetings, site and building tours, informational booklet and print pieces, community survey, etc. Watch for more information in future issues of the Springfield Advance-Press.

The School District Facilities Goal: the school facility is a vital community asset and the school district must ensure the community's investment in the facility is maintained and that the infrastructure and the school facility are designed to optimize student achievement staff performance, and the needs of our school community in a safe, sustainable and modern environment.

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