

March 13 Community Meeting Responses to Questions on Design Down Process

Please respond to the questions below. Your input and opinions are an important part of the current conversations on providing programs and services to best meet the needs of our high school students. The information will be used by the Design Down Committee in upcoming meetings.

1. What would you add to the lists on learning context, expectations and process?

- The process seems to have lost sight of the fact that the principle role of a school is academic performance. The expectations trend toward “touchy feely” goals & omit character & leadership objectives, self-reliance, etc.
- Keep better track of all students. Let students have as many and varied experiences in HS as possible. Know who is not. Don’t try for a college environment at the HS level.
- I think it is important that the committee is willing to think about & acknowledge “weaknesses” or area of improvement needed. I don’t feel VHS will be able to improve until these issues are discussed & acknowledged!
- I commend the district at looking at the big picture.
- Leadership development opportunities.
- Learning Context – Clearly define the terms: size, time, space, site are all subjective. – Several terms seem to over-lap one another, taking responses or scores away from each other (in my opinion). Example: are size and site the same? Learning expectations - Again terms are subjective. Compassionate takes on a different meaning for various people.
- The Design Down Committee needs to be continually reminded of its purpose.
- High expectations – high achievement -- academics is much more important than activities/participation.

2. What are your questions or concerns related to the design down process?

- The participants in any effort similar to this are highly self selecting and generally do not reflect the community as a whole. How is this being addressed?
- It concerns me that there is no representative from the City of West Des Moines on DD when in their extended plan, there are options we could be partnering with that could be advantageous to both the school and the community. It concerns me that there are people on DD who live outside of the district and they will be voting on the options. I think it would be beneficial to have a large group discussion during DD. We have had Q & A sessions but no large group discussions. I would like Admin. to reassure the community and staff on the number of curriculum offerings that would remain in the event of two high schools in the district. I repeatedly continue to hear from students & staff that they are in fear of losing up to half of the current offerings and someone from admin. needs to put an end to this false assumption. We need to reassure the staff & students, not frighten them.
- Not sure there is enough time in current schedule to study all possible scenarios and options. Still not sure why time wasn't taken before DD continued to redesign and rework the process after petition came in, i.e. finding split schools to visit right away, change text of documents, etc.
- The meeting dates & times need to be front & center in the weekly letters coming home from the elementary schools – not just buried in the Informaline attached every couple of weeks. Also: junior high weekly letters. This should increase participation.
- I really am confused about the process. I don't understand the process and how this process is going to come to some kind of result. It is very unclear to me!
- This is a huge undertaking! I would like to see a straight forward presentation on pros and cons of large vs. smaller HS. Please address the issue from both sides. I feel it is a big enough issue for a referendum.
- Too much staff & student input, not enough parent & tax payer input. Not enough critical evaluation of the options (such as seeing other school districts).
- I want to hear more concrete information – What do we get or gain with two schools? What are the trade offs to two schools? What do we lose by adding a high school? Sessions so far are far too general – talk about pros and cons
- So far, few students have been polled or interviewed. Their opinions are valuable. **SPEAK TO THEM. THEY ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PART!**
- Will the DD process be used to address the needs of the district's buildings other than at the high school level?
- I'm concerned that in your process calendar, the "general" community does not get a say after the DD Committee reaches its conclusion. They make a recommendation to the Superintendent, but we have no opportunity to respond before they do that.
- The DD process has a great deal of integrity. I am not sure some of the committee members have the same honesty and commitment to the process. It seems they are continuously looking toward a win/lose situation rather than a win/win situation.
- Too heavily laden with two high school advocates.

3. What aspect of the Design Down Committee's work would you like to know more about?

- How do the expectations map to measurable outcomes?
- Everything! All reports and school visit summaries should be available on school web site.
- When will we get specific about: Do we agree with the research indicating smaller (i.e.: 600 students 9-12) is better? If not, why not? Why can't we have a general idea of how much operational costs would be affected by having two equal sized schools?
- Discussions & results of the meetings. I think it would be helpful to have some statistics.
- Tours & impressions & why beyond bricks & mortar but operations, stuff, etc. Facility structures are only part of the success of a school. The facility is a component that can aid or destroy success of learner expectations.
- We need details of where this is going. I don't want to see a repeat of several years ago when community discussions about Southwoods strongly encouraged the building of a second high school, but by the time it got down to the school board the community's input was forgotten.
- I want to know what differences there are for two schools vs. one for WDM. Are athletics a fair trade off for a second school? How many single section classes will be lost with two schools?
- I would like to see a list of criteria that are used to determine if a school is successful or not.

Additional comments, questions:

- How long must we turn the other cheek?
- Turnout at these forums & meeting is so small – ultimately- for you to know what the community wants to support your need to hold a referendum.
- Valley needs an innovative plan to get students involved and interested in learning!
- The commons area seems to be a popular idea in newly built schools. How much actual time do the students spend in the commons area, and if it is a low amount, does focusing on a commons area make sense architecturally?
- We need to trust the process. If we do not reach consensus on what we want for our students we won't have options from which to choose.
- We need openness & some assurance that the concerns of the community will not be ignored.
- What is being done to address the students that do not meet or fit the "mold" of VHS. All students are not connected to learning.
- It's almost impossible to say what we want without tying into whether there's any chance we can afford it. We still need some idea of this: If we build two equal high schools, 1) what are the minimum things that must be at BOTH schools? How much? 2) How much will be left over to fund the extras?
- Need community referendum to see what community will support. All the DD work will only go so far if community doesn't support it.
- Please make the spring 2000, NCA survey of VSW available to the DD group. This survey contains 20 areas of assets but more of concern is the 20 listed areas of concern on the survey. DD needs to be made aware of these results. I would like to see the latest NCA done at Valley that is similar to the one done at VSW. It may be helpful.