

Valley High School Program Committee Minutes -- September 23, 2003

Present: Whitney Beaver, Fred Bell, Anjana Chandran, Jackie Crawford, Jean Doerge, Mandy Dorff, Jamie Ehlert, Ruth Henderson, Taylor Johnson, Melissa Lersten, Randy Mead, Nick Nelsen, Teresa Paulson, Vicky Poole, Rob Schebel, Sherry Snider, Mary Whitaker, Donna Wilkin

Support Members: Jeff Blosser (RDG), Dave Blum, , Gordon Dahlby, Eliz Erbes (RDG), Phil Hodgkin (RDG), Jody Ratigan, Kay Rosene, Phyllis Staplin

Donna Wilkin welcomed all to the meeting. Vicky Poole expressed appreciation to group members for making the commitment of time to the task. Committee members then introduced themselves.

Eliz Erbes reviewed the timeline leading to the work of the program committee. She noted the process began in August 2001 when the 10-year master plan for facility improvement was adopted. The Design Down Committee worked with consultant Bruce Jilk through June 2002. Erbes then summarized the results of each of the 11 steps in the Design Down process: learning context, learning audience, learning signature, learning expectations, learning process, learning organization, learning partnerships, learning staff and staff development, learning environment, learning celebration and learning finance. She then presented images from school tours that occurred as part of information gathering during the Design Down process. The narrative featured comments on the ideal learning environment for Valley High School.

Dr. Poole reviewed the work of the Connections Committee, charged with developing recommendations on the structure for three smaller learning communities. She then discussed the grounding statements, which provided the foundation for discussion and decisions by the committee:

Valley High School by the design and organization of its smaller learning communities...

- Will enhance the connectiveness among all members of its learning environment – students, staff, parents and the community
- Will encourage student voice
- Will promote greater flexibility in the development and delivery of curriculum and the scheduling of courses
- Will provide a foundation for students to pursue a wide variety of post-secondary opportunities
- Will address the needs of all learning styles in a population with changing demographics
- Will incorporate ongoing technology improvements in all areas that enhance teaching and learning
- Will provide opportunities for each student to demonstrate competencies and intellectual growth in all courses

The Connections Committee agreed that the Personal Adult Advocate groups would be the organizing structure for the three learning communities. The group also agreed that continued breadth of curriculum is important. A number of design features were cited: learning spaces to facilitate experiential learning, a multi-media studio, meeting spaces for teachers, newly designed cafeteria, social spaces. The committee also discussed several possible ways to reorganize the daily schedule to best meet the needs of students. The Connections Committee concluded that new learning spaces were needed at Valley High School.

Phil Hodgin reviewed the timeline from the adoption of the 10-year plan to the scheduled completion of the construction project at Valley.

Hodgin said the Site Design Team was appointed last spring to work with the conclusions from the Design Down and Connections committees and criteria from the Board of Education to reach consensus on a design concept for the Valley project. He then explained the concept for the project. The new three-story academic area would be located south of the fieldhouse. A student commons area would also be added. Some existing areas of the building would receive extensive remodeling and portions of the current academic wing would be demolished. Approximately 262 additional parking spaces would be part of the project. All sections of the building would receive fire sprinklers and other safety improvements. Significant sections (fieldhouse, pool, auditorium, kitchen, etc.) would receive no additional improvements as part of the current project. Hodgin presented examples of student commons areas in schools visited during the Design Down process. He also showed the group ways that natural light could be incorporated into the academic addition. He described the “fat C” concept for arranging classrooms around a larger common learning space. In response to a question, Hodgin discussed ways to reduce sound in a multi-purpose student commons area.

Magazines were distributed to committee members to identify appealing design features.

Dr. Wilkin talked about the development and application of the district’s shared vision statement:

Dr. Poole reviewed the committee charge and parameters:

VHS PROGRAM COMMITTEE

WDMCSD Shared Vision

The West Des Moines Community School District will be a caring community of learners that knows and lifts every child. We will inspire joy in learning. Our schools will excel at preparing each student for his or her life journey.

Committee Charge and Parameters

1. To develop recommendations for space allocations and changes in teaching and learning that support the district goal: to close the gap between current reality and the shared vision.
2. To utilize the following set of parameters established by the three previous committees in all recommendations:
 - To enhance connections among all members of the learning community.
 - To strengthen interdisciplinary opportunities that allow students to have authentic learning experiences.
 - To provide a learning environment that better supports the interests and learning styles of all students.
 - To develop a program that allows for new ways to deliver instruction and better ways of integrating technology into instruction.
 - To provide for a safer, healthier and more pleasurable learning environment.
 - To create an environment that has high expectations and a meaningful and engaging curriculum for all students.
 - To provide a foundation for students to pursue a wide variety of post-secondary opportunities.

Dr. Poole invited committee members to post ideas that may be outside the current budget, but should receive future consideration.

Dr. Poole outlined the roles and responsibilities of the committee:

- To listen and share with the group
- To facilitate the flow of ideas to and from the committee

She asked committee members to talk to others between meetings to provide ongoing feedback during the program development process.

Dr. Poole reviewed the predetermined aspects of the design project:

- A classroom for each full-time teacher
- Media center and student services areas connected to the student commons area
- Footprint of building and general space configurations of instructional spaces
- Inclusion of a multi-media center

She noted the recommendations from the Program Committee will go back to the Site Design Team as a final proposal is developed for action by the Board of Education.

In response to a question, Dr. Poole and Dr. Wilkin outlined assumptions about learning in the future that would be helpful for the committee to know about:

- Prepare students for a variety of post-secondary options
- Community partnerships that enhance learning
- Opportunities for self-directed learning
- More self-advocacy by students
- Ongoing need for up-to-date technology

The Program Committee will first address the use of the space, Dr. Wilkin said. Later work will address teaching and learning matters in more detail.

Jeff Blosser reviewed options for use of the space in the three-story academic addition.

- Option 1: labs located along one wall, classrooms organized in a “fat C”, assigned classroom and teachers’ desk, some teacher work area, academic commons
Questions and comments: Where would lockers be located? To be determined.
What size would the classrooms be? Classrooms would be approximately 825 square feet.
Need both classroom and commons space. Academic commons area was used for computers at Valley Southwoods. Would a commons area be utilized at Valley?
Group will be gathering feedback on the best use of space. Should pay close attention to average class size and size of classroom.
Should the classrooms be sized differently depending on the subject area? Flexibility considered in sizing labs and special education classrooms.
Can the building be designed for possible future expansion? Options were explained.
What space can be allocated for part-time teachers? As Valley curriculum grows, more part-time teachers may be needed for specialized courses.
“Porch” concept allows for interdisciplinary teaching/learning opportunities and use of computer workstations. Future technology may not require the workstations, but the common academic space would have multiple applications.
Accommodate opportunities for large as well as small group learning opportunities.
Flexibility is important. Be sure to include small classrooms for special needs students throughout the building.
What would happen if the two “C”s faced each other and there was a larger commons area on each floor? Consider the challenge of providing natural light to classrooms.
Be sure to avoid isolation of students in “fat C” areas.

- Option 2: teacher work area/office space, unassigned classrooms, conference and shared storage in the “fat C” commons, classrooms sized at approximately 825 square feet
Questions and comments: Do all three floors have to be the same? Configuration could differ on each floor and may not be permanent.
- Option 3: teacher work area in a single cluster on the floor, unassigned classrooms, classrooms sized at approximately 825 square feet

It was noted that the areas that would receive Level 3 remodeling also may be configured differently than the current layout.

Comment: “Fat C” configuration – with large group area -- works better if department classrooms are located together, rather than interdisciplinary grouping.

Dr. Wilkin asked committee members to focus on function of the space, then move back to more design specifics. How do we see the courses relating to one another? Nick Nelson described the interdisciplinary class (American Literature and US History) he is teaching this year. He said “natural” connections should be emphasized.

Small group discussion --what kind of curriculum connections do we want to build? Family and consumer science lab would most likely stay where it is. Physical education and music would not change location in the building. Group was asked to consider new terminology for the “fat C” and “porch” areas.

Small group reports

Interdisciplinary connectivity requires common teachers, kids and times. Many implications arise, considering broad curricular offerings, scheduling, etc.

Science teachers could share common classroom and the labs could be larger.

Academic commons area – equivalent to 2 ½ classrooms. Over three floors, may be too much commons space. Perhaps one commons area per floor would be adequate.

Do not limit interdisciplinary connections.

Utilize academic commons area for large group learning in same subject.

Have academic departments together. Also have area where teachers can discuss their course activities and disciplines can then identify ways to work together.

Potential curriculum connections: art/history; business education/computer science/journalism/art/photography; language arts/every other subject; math/science

Discussion of departmentalism or integration: would like to see more of a department arrangement. Concern with forced connections.

Discipline-based classroom arrangement with short-term interdisciplinary projects. Chemistry of teachers determines how well they work together. Consider a single commons area.

Sequencing and content-specific course work may need to stay together. Arrange along disciplinary lines, but identify courses where content could be integrated. Disciplines should talk about ways to configure academic commons space.

Dr. Poole and Dr. Wilkin presented the following follow-up task to each committee member:: talk to at least 10 people about the use of common instructional space, interdisciplinary opportunities.

At the next meeting, committee members will share feedback and continue dialogue about instructional space and relationships among departments and courses. Information about the work of the committee will be posted on the district web site (www.wdm.k12.ia.us). Copies of minutes and meeting handouts will be available at the “Planning Place” in the Valley Media Center.

Next meeting: October 7 7:30 a.m. Learning Resource Center