

# Alternative High School Facility Study Group Report

March, 2009

**Root Questions....**Is this the appropriate time to consider relocating the Walnut Creek Campus? If so, where do we begin with what the new campus should include such as a new look at curriculum and/or optional offerings?

**Decision/Direction:** will allow the specific Project Architect to re-plan an existing building to accommodate program. These changes will determine the costs for relocating Walnut Creek.

**Study Group Members:** Kim Davis (Principal WCC), Doug Nepl (Transportation), Kristen Reed (Counselor Stilwell Jr. High), Judy Card (parent), Eric Traynor (Counselor VHS), Dr. Gordon Dahlby (Teaching and Learning), Shane Christensen (Facilitator, Principal Indian Hills Jr. High), Barb Goetchel (Team Leader, Associate Principal VSW), Sally Heaberlin (WCC teacher), Ciel Friess (parent), and Drea Boyd (At Risk Advisory Chair, Principal Phenix Early Childhood Center)

## **Meeting Dates:**

Monday, February 16, 6:30 at LRC—Purpose and organization  
Monday, March 2, 4:15 at WCC – Best Practice, Best Practice Implication on Facilities  
Tuesday, March 10, 4:30 at Clegg Park— WCC Pro/Con list, Pro/Con list for Clegg Park  
Monday, March 23, 4:15 at IH—Other sites/New site Pro/Con lists

## **Best Practice**

The committee divided up available best practice research on alternative education in pairs. The pairs reviewed together before reporting out to the group. Below is a review of common themes.

### I. Types of Alternative Schools

- A) Type 1: Separate building that is developed around the needs of the students (WCC)
- B) Type 2: Area or building whose purpose is to reform students over a short period and integrate back into a traditional school(4 Oaks)
- C) Type 3: Building or area whose purpose is to fix students over a longer period of time and integrate them back into the traditional school (Orchard Place, Woodward Academy)
- D) Type 4: Magnet or Vocational Schools
- E) Type 5: Spaces within a traditional school (School-within-a-school, Alternative Classroom)

### II. Need for Alternative concepts and/or schools

- A) 25% of all students drop out of traditional k-12 settings
- B) Limited spots are available nationwide in alternative schools.
- C) Only 5% of all out-of-school youths enroll in some type of alternative education program.
- D) While graduation rates of traditional schools have decreased, the rate of individuals obtaining an alternative credential has more than doubled.
- E) Nationwide, 48% of Hispanic students and 50% of African American students do not graduate from a traditional high school. 3.8 million students are not in school in the U.S.
- F) The demand for alternative education is definitely higher than the supply.
- G) Referrals statistics from VSW and VHS concur with this trend.

### III. Best Practice

- A) Good communication between traditional and alternative high school
- B) Systemic alternative education structure with early warning signs and supports at elementary, middle and high school levels.
- C) Systems of Recovery—counseling, parenting classes, poverty, life skills, recover from academic failure, recover from being academically behind, drug prevention, forced to be adults too soon supports, and need for up-to-date resources.
- D) Academic structure—Focus on academic learning; relevant; applicable to life outside of school; tied to state standards and accountability systems; individualized and personalized learning plans; hands-on, project-based, and experiential learning; opportunities to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills; access to college coursework, online classes, and self-pacing; credit awarded for competency not seat time
- E) Relationships, Rigor, Relevance
- F) Instructional Staff—Positive discipline techniques, positive relationships, high expectations, certified in content area, innovative and creative.
- G) Professional Development—academic focus, enhance teaching strategies, understanding of different learning styles and intelligences, develop alternative instructional methods, differentiation, methods to teach several classes at one time, involves teacher input, work with colleagues, opportunities to visit and observe teaching in other sessions.
- H) Mission and Purpose clearly defined and strong
- I) Leadership—strong, dynamic, engaged, competent principal, students and staff have a voice, rules should be few and simple and consistently enforced
- J) Size—Low teacher/student ratio (12-15 to 1) and small enough classes that encourage caring relationships in a building with 175-250 students.
- K) Facility—Clean, well-maintained, fosters emotional well-being, sense of pride, safe, located away from high schools (neutral territory), close to public transportation.
- L) Community Relationships—link a variety of community organizations including city and other public agencies and the business community to provide assistance and opportunities/partnerships, develop positive relationships with community, especially in close proximity to the building
- M) Career development, vocational training, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, transition planning and support
- N) Real World, Real Work, in Real Time
- O) Significant Parent Involvement
- P) Pacing—flexible schedule, year-long (Day, Night, and Summer School), with different options for different student hours.
- Q) Access to non-core activities and classes
- R) Support funding needs—high poverty rates, racially diverse, high special education numbers—should be funded above average per pupil rate. WCC is 46.26% Free and Reduced. VHS is 11.84% free and reduced. Currently, 25.56% of WCC students are diverse. This is up from 17.76% in 2005. VHS is currently 14.46% diverse.
- S) The alternative school should not be made to feel inferior, receiving hand-me-downs from other buildings. Stay away from negative connotations—accentuate the positive.
- T) Student-centered environment—social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of students addressed with a family-like atmosphere of respect (Climate and Culture)
- U) Advisory Program

#### IV. Data, Assessment, and Evaluation

- A) Multiple assessments used to assess student learning to accommodate a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences.
- B) Program Evaluation—implementation ratings, student outcome data, and surveys
- C) Extensive data-collection system
- D) Develop data-driven accountability measures

#### **Facilities Implications of Best Practice**

- A) Gym/Multi-Purpose/Performance Space/Fitness Area (Big enough for whole school)
- B) Science Labs
- C) Kitchen for foods
- D) Bigger Library
- E) Technology Lab
- F) More stalls in bathroom
- G) Some lockers
- H) Student services/support area (counselors, caseworkers, administration, community service, career/job resource person, AEA, etc.)
- I) Conference Space
- J) Commons Area
- K) Classrooms with walls and doors
- L) A few open areas for team teaching (flexible, with partitions)
- M) Parking
- N) Access to Public Transportation
- O) Good Location (Southeast area of West Des Moines)
- P) Small Size
- Q) Staff Lounge/Workroom
- R) Natural Light
- S) Good Temperature Control
- T) Vocational/Technical
- U) Daycare with reliable workers
- V) Circle Room
- W) Not hand-me-down furniture, etc.
- X) Art Room
- Y) Multi-Media: “Creating” area
- Z) School Store

#### **Walnut Creek Pro/Con**

##### **D) WCC Staff Input 2/20/09**

#### **1. What classes/programming do we not offer because of our facility, that you wish we did?**

- a. Vocational programming
- b. PE in alternative form – may be as an elective
- c. Art facilities – a kiln, photo shop
- d. Music space-where kids could play instruments/guitar/keyboard, etc...Recording studio
- e. Career, voc-tech training (some sore of specific niche-print shop, for example)
- f. Theater (a stage)
- g. Gym for more physical activity-wellness approach
- h. Science Lab-we can't do lab work because of the lack of ventilation, etc...
- i. Kitchen
- j. Garden greenhouse
- k. Flexible space for teaming
- l. Teen Center
- m. Departments together-close proximity
- n. Community services sharing: health center, mental health/therapeutic space, daycare
- o. Wide open spaces-kids are cramped on our current building-teachers can't circulate
- p. Lunchroom
- q. A place designated to conduct restorative circles

## 2. Does our current facility meet your needs? If not, what do we need that we do not have?

- a. No-Consensus
- b. Better wiring – TV's, etc.
- c. Solid walls and doors
- d. Need more space in my classroom-can't circulate to assist students easily
- e. I like students to get up and move around or to have a comfortable circle area as part of our lessons, but that is difficult in such a cramped space
- f. I would also like a performance/stage area
- g. Perhaps caseworkers in middle of building
- h. Main office with more storage/desks that kids can't sit at – however, kids should still be able to interact w/office staff
- i. Office space for community service that is more visible
- j. We need lots of natural light (our kids work better in it)
- k. Study space for safe study
- l. Dedicated computer lab
- m. Flexible, functional technology
- n. Confidential space for therapeutic interaction
- o. Drama space
- p. More bathrooms
- q. Sunshine VAN-A vehicle we could use to get kids/take kids home
- r. Facility needs to be close to public transportation-kids take the city bus to get to school
- s. Lunchroom – no room to eat-kids eat on the floor
- t. Mounted projectors in all rooms
- u. More desktop computers in classroom
- v. Better signal on laptops (doesn't go through)
- w. Parking lot too narrow-need a bigger lot
- x. No school bus access at current site-kids walk across to get on at Hillside
- y. Office setup – offers privacy for confidential info (office staff should still be available to students)
- z. Don't want an institutional look. Want it to be warm, casual and friendly.
- aa. Too many hiding places in maze of hallways in current site.

## 3. What is the perfect class size? How many students do you believe we should serve in our school? How big is too big?

- a. 10-12 per class
- b. Students in our school in a perfect world 150-175
- c. Too big – anything over 200
- d. Lots of research says that 250 or under is ideal (whether alternative or not) for high school.
- e. "Perfect class size" depends on if it's pure or not. It's nice to have at least 6 regularly attending students in a single course so they can do group activities. It becomes hard to keep them all on task at about 14 or 15 students.
- f. 200-DOE standard; 10-15 reg. ed. & 3-6 sped
- g. 12 – gen. ed.
- h. 144
- i. 20 kids in a class if packet work-maybe have packet programming (this could be more of a drop in situation for kids with extenuating life circumstances) and then more interactive programming for all the rest of the kids.
- j. Online learning during the day

## 4. Would you like to see our next site include the following spaces? (Results are based on what the 4 groups said)

- A. Theater/Auditorium Yes, yes, yes, yes
- B. Gym Yes, yes, yes, yes
- C. Weight room Yes – but supervised & locked, yes, yes
- D. Kitchen Yes, yes, yes, yes
- E. Lunch room Yes, yes, yes, yes
- F. Commons area Yes, yes, yes, yes
- G. A "real" library Yes, yes, yes, yes
- H. More conference room type spaces Yes, yes, yes, yes

**Other:**

- a. Art Rooms
- b. Music Rooms
- c. Daycare facility
- d. Student center that is off the beaten path for kids to sit and visit
- e. Art
- f. Computer
- g. Art room w/pottery wheels
- h. Music room

**5. What would you like this initial study group to consider as they are making a recommendation about whether or not the board should take action at this time?**

**Questions/ideas:**

- a. How big can we get and still remain an alternative school?
- b. If we have more space, will we get more students? If so, do we also get more teachers as opposed to more students per class?
- c. Rex Mathes will not work – the building is too small. No parking. By the junior high. Would have to renovate on a huge scale – and that would be costly.
- d. Maximum size....it won't do any good to expand our program over 200 or 250 if that's the point at which high schools start to lose effectiveness.
- e. Access to public transportation.
- f. Review existing alternative programs with innovative programming
- g. Explore community space – sharing programs for PE/nature/culinary/music/drama/etc.
- h. Build knowledge base on alternative ed. best practice
- i. Must preserve the alternative feel of our space

**II. WCC Student Input 3/6/09**

**Pros**

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Allowed to eat and drink in class          | space as far as room configuration (specifically                  | 26. Not too small                       |
| 2. Alternative feel—open/decorated/supportive | not the standard desks all in a row and teacher up front set up)  | 27. Not Valley                          |
| 3. Big windows                                | 15. It's small  | 28. Openness                            |
| 4. Classes                                    | 16. Like not feeling closed in-more open                          | 29. Pretty windows                      |
| 5. Close to home                              | 17. Like the non traditional classrooms (not four walls and door) | 30. Relaxed, casual atmosphere          |
| 6. Comfortable                                | 18. Location  | 31. School store                        |
| 7. Comfortable environment – not huge         | 19. Location= In a neighborhood                                   | 32. Single bathrooms                    |
| 8. Cozy, homey                                | 20. Neighborhood/Neighbors  | 33. Size means everyone knows everybody |
| 9. Doesn't feel/look like a school            | 21. No desks  | 34. Small, community feeling            |
| 10. Good air conditioning                     | 22. No Doors  | 35. Some rooms have walls and doors     |
| 11. Graduation wall-hand prints on wall       | 23. No set classrooms   | 36. Stage                               |
| 12. High ceilings                             | 24. Not a lot of people   | 37. Tables and chairs, not desks        |
| 13. Homey Feel                                | 25. Not actual classrooms with doors                              | 38. The “feel of the building”          |
| 14. It is a different environment with open   |   | 39. The lobby                           |
|   |   | 40. Unique rooms                        |

## Cons

1. All rooms need walls and doors
2. Asbestos
3. Bad ventilation
4. Bathrooms
5. Bathrooms suck – not enough plus they're dirty and stinky
6. Bathrooms too small/smelly
7. Bldg could be a little bigger
8. Classrooms w/o walls
9. Crowded
10. Don't like not having walls/doors
11. Don't like unisex bathroom
12. Gym
13. Little space
14. Lobby is too small
15. Lobby too small
16. Need better library
17. Need bigger computer lab
18. Need bigger library
19. Need common room for kids to hang out and talk when not in class (earn right to be there with good behavior)
20. Need garden/Outside area
21. Need more space
22. Need more space (gets too crowded during passing/lunch time)
23. Need more/better furniture
24. Need real classrooms
25. Needs a bigger commons area
26. Needs better actual classrooms
27. Needs more space
28. Needs new ceilings
29. No commons area
30. No lunch room
31. No lunch room
32. No lunchroom
33. No student center
34. No walls
35. Not a school building
36. Not enough bathrooms
37. Not enough lunch space (echoed by nearly everyone)
38. Not enough room to sit
39. Old
40. Parking lot too small/not functional
41. Run down ex: carpet, walls, ceiling
42. Small lobby
43. Smells
44. Some classrooms too small
45. Temperature control upstairs (too hot or cold, no air moving)
46. Too small

## What does our current building not have, that you wish it did?

1. A cafeteria so our meals would be prepared on site
2. A commons area/lunchroom
3. A gymnasium or weight room
4. A lunch room
5. A music/performance area that allows them to play throughout the day
6. A stage or auditorium
7. A student lounge
8. Air conditioning
9. Art room
10. Auditorium
11. Better air and heat regulation
12. Big library
13. Bigger cafeteria
14. Bigger classrooms
15. Bigger lobby
16. Bigger lobby area to eat/serve lunch in and as a student area
17. Boxing area/gym to do physical things in if you want to (not required)
18. Boxing ring
19. Coffee shop
20. Common area
21. Computer lab (not a classroom)
22. Daycare--reliable workers
23. Foot stools
24. Fozzball
25. Fresh air
26. Gym
27. Gym
28. Gym but optional PE
29. Kitchen
30. Lunch room
31. Lunch room
32. Lunch room
33. Lunchroom
34. Lunchroom with small tables
35. More and better bathrooms with stalls
36. More bathrooms (something I hadn't really thought of, but they said they are tired of waiting in line and then getting in trouble for taking too long)
37. More classrooms so we can have more varied classes offered
38. More room
39. Need it's own bus system
40. Not VHS
41. Ping pong
42. Playground (blacktop, field space, swings)
43. Pool
44. Punching bags
45. Rec room

- |  |   |                                    |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| 46. Science lab                            | 50. Swing sets/outside active area                        | 53. Walls and doors in classrooms  |
| 47. Shelter (for kids w/o a place to stay) | 51. Vending machine for when the school store is not open | 54. Woodworking/shop/utility class |
| 48. Small auditorium                       | 52. Video games   | 55. Work out room                  |
| 49. Student lounge                         |   |                                    |

**III. Additional Concerns from ALT HS Committee:**

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| a. Age (built in 1924)           | g. Windows rotting/not energy efficient                    |
| b. ADA Compliance                | h. Insulation bad (caseworkers can hear other caseworkers) |
| c. Heating/Cooling               | i. Not designated/private meeting spaces                   |
| d. Flooding/Sewer                | j. Small SPED rooms  |
| e. Kitchen needs totally redone  |  |
| f. Bathrooms need totally redone |  |

**Clegg Park Pro/Con:**

**Pros:**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| a. Space—Classroom, Office, Meeting Rooms    | h. Bathrooms   |
| b. Windows (both to outside and in building) | i. Staff lounge  |
| c. Gym                                       | j. Lots of storage   |
| d. MPR                                       | k. Partnerships with community in basement (DMACC classes, daycare, 4 Oaks, Sp. Ed.) |
| e. In Neighborhood                           | l. Library   |
| f. Parking                                   | m. Close to public transportation  |
| g. Wired for Technology                      | n. Potential to make changes   |

**Cons:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| a. Enough Parking?  | caseworkers, administration, community service, etc), similarly, where would the entrance be if hub of services was in library area? |
| b. Bussing allow for only a few buses                                 | h. Would need to add Kitchen equipment   |
| c. Some bathrooms will need updated                                   | i. No performance space—stage, auditorium, etc.  |
| d. A lot of exits   | j. Supervision Concerns  |
| e. Science Lab  |  |
| f. Vocational area?   |  |
| g. Not enough offices in one space for “hub of services” (counselors, |  |

**Other Sites/New Site Pro/Con List:**

- 1) The committee looked at available listings. We did not visit any sites. Special thanks to Brad Hickok and Jason Lozano from Iowa Realty Commercial. WCC current square footage is 18,052. Clegg Park is 41,260 square feet including the basement. We looked for property around 30,000 square feet which would be around the footage of the upstairs at Clegg Park. For comparison, Phenix is 36,650 square feet and the LRC is 38,000 square feet.
  - a) 2430 Grand Ave, WDM 50265, 35,944 square feet
  - b) 1824 Industrial Circle, WDM 50265, 33,700 square feet
  - c) 2500 University Ave., WDM, 50266, 31,732 square feet
  - d) 1271 8<sup>th</sup> Street, WDM, 50265, 35,532 square feet on 5 acres of land.

- 2) Pros and Cons of existing sites not owned by WDMCS
  - a) Pros: These sites may be viable. They are located in areas that would work. They don't look like schools. Big enough. Remodeling may be possible
  - b) Cons: Cost of site property, Cost to remodel, no gym, no kitchen, bathrooms, technology wiring, sewage, lack of amenities, parking possibly, updating and bringing up to code, cost of possible expansion
  
- 3) Building a New Pro/Con
  - a) Pros—design your own, able to get input, follow best practice, take into consideration student and faculty needs, no additional work for many years
  - b) Con—How much would this cost? Where would be the location? Would the cost of the building be so high that we would lose key facility needs?

## **Findings**

**Root Questions**....Is this the appropriate time to consider relocating the Walnut Creek Campus? If so, where do we begin with what the new campus should include such as a new look at curriculum and/or optional offerings?

## **Committee Response:**

- We do feel it is time to consider relocating Walnut Creek Campus.
- WCC does not have enough space, needs updated, and does not meet facility needs according to best practice.
- Clegg Park, existing facilities not owned by WDMCSD, and building new are all viable options with definite pros and cons.
- Reviewing best practice and looking at current reality of curriculum and other offerings show that WCC is meeting the needs of students with current facilities. Better facilities would allow for expansion of offerings, resources, and supports for students.