

Fine Arts Study Group
West Des Moines Community School District
February 16 – March 24, 2009

Members

- Kent Abrahamson, Valley Southwoods Freshman High School Principal
- John Clarke, Parent
- Phil Hodgin, Parent and Consultant
- Tracy Klein, Elementary Teacher
- Cal Murdock, Rebecca Harless, and Jim Wallace, Facilities Scheduling Team (one representative attended each meeting)
- Phil Peters, Secondary Teacher
- Dr. Vicky Poole, Valley High School Principal
- Lisa Remy, Associate Superintendent for Human Resources
- Jennifer Rose, Parent
- Carol Seid, Elementary Principal
- Dr. Phyllis Staplin, Teaching and Learning Services
- Dr. Lori Diebel, Facilitator

Meetings

- Monday, February 16th, 6:30-8 p.m., Community Room, LRC
- Tuesday, March 3rd, 6:30-8 p.m., Fairmeadows Conference Room, LRC
- Tuesday, March 10th, 6:30-8 p.m., Fairmeadows Conference Room, LRC
- Tuesday, March 24th, 6:30-8 p.m., Stilwell/Indian Hills Conference Room, LRC

Goals

- Identify fine arts facility needs in our district (size, space, use)
- Consider fine arts facility possibilities for remodeling or new construction, with pros/cons
- Consider fine arts facility possibilities for location, with pros/cons
- Present list of fine arts facility needs, possibilities, and pros/cons to the Superintendency on or before March 30th

Question: What do you think our district needs in terms of fine arts facilities (size, space, use)?

**Size
(number of auditorium seats needed)**

- "Big Hall" - - 1000-1200 seats
- Blackbox Theater - - up to 300 seats
- Junior Highs - - 400-500 seats
- Elementary Schools - - around 250 seats

**Space
(types of rooms needed)**

"Big Hall"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stage/stage floor with traps • enlarged classroom spaces (orchestra, vocal) • warm-up room • dedicated rehearsal areas (small, large group) • storage space (piano, risers, costumes, sound shells, instruments) • professional dressing rooms • green room/make-up room • ventilated room to build sets • lighting technology, acoustics, sound system • sound/light booth with ability to open the booth to the theater and with ability to operate from wings • wing space/backstage area • fly space above stage/fly system to accommodate acoustical shells and scenery • restrooms • orchestra pit with lift • lobby for ambiance with permanent ticket booth, seating retail areas, display areas for artwork • outside fire exit for audience and actors/musicians • parking
Blackbox Theater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • floor space adequate for performance area and 300 seats • two rooms able to turn into one room • production booth • light booth • storage • adjacent spaces (see "Big Hall")
VSW Theater/Staging Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lighting and acoustical improvements • portable staging • storage
Junior Highs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanded stage • expanded seating
Elementary Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flexible space for rehearsals and performances (beyond the gym or cafeteria) • light/sound technology • storage (risers, instruments, stands, props)

Use

<p>“Big Hall”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 orchestra, band, vocal concerts (depending on location) • K-12 drama performances (depending on location) • community events (speakers, guest artists, large group presentations) • school assemblies (depending on location) • youth orchestras • dance school performances (e.g., School of Classical Ballet & Dance) • all district teacher meetings • large class groupings for special presentations (depending on location) • Sixth Grade Honor Concerts
<p>Blackbox Theater</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smaller drama productions • speech • Chamber Music • classroom lectures • TV/radio/video/movie production
<p>VSW</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drama • music
<p>Junior Highs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • larger space for multiple purposes • concerts • drama • staff meetings • community use
<p>Elementary Schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school groups • concerts • drama programs, class productions • assemblies • staff meetings • clubs (e.g., Chess Club) • parent groups • community use

Question: Given these needs, what options might our district consider for remodeling or new construction?

Brainstorming...pros/cons to follow.

New Construction Options

"Big Hall" [includes performance hall and rehearsal spaces]

- VHS Campus
- VSW Campus (green space toward pond)

VSW Theater/Staging Space [lighting and acoustical improvements, portable staging, storage]

Elementary Schools Performing Arts Rooms

- Additions using green space

Remodeling Options

"Big Hall" [includes performance hall and rehearsal spaces]

- VHS Cafeteria/Auditorium/Foyer area

Blackbox Theater

- VHS Auditorium
- VHS North Gym
- VHS Cafeteria
- VHS Combined Orchestra and Vocal Music Rooms
- Rex Mathes Auditorium

Music/Drama Suite [enhanced performing arts rooms for VHS Orchestra, Vocal Music, and Drama]

Junior Highs [expand stage and seating in current auditoriums]

Question: What are the pros/cons of each option for new construction?

The pros/cons were submitted individually by Study Group members and are listed in no particular order. The Summary/conclusions/new ideas statements represent a general consensus of Study Group members based on a review of pros/cons and subsequent conversation.

New Construction Option: “Big Hall” at VHS Campus

Summary, conclusions, new ideas:

- A priority. Keep this potential alive by considering creative solutions to “do it all” at the VHS campus.
- Build it in phases and enhance over time.
- Enhance the site with all-weather turf on the football field and possibly other areas (for P.E. classes, football practice, and Marchmasters practice). Water costs would be reduced.
- Look for relocation options for the tennis courts.
- Demonstrate ecological concepts in the new construction to minimize filling green space with concrete. Utilize the SE corner of the VHS site creatively. Consider use of bio-swale, underground water retainage, and parking tiers.
- Consider adjacent off-site acquisitions.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of use during the day for VHS music and drama students and directors; best place for VHS students to be able to use the space • Storage possibilities of instruments and costumes on site • Primary control of facilities by VHS staff and administration • The WDMSCD’s flagship school would have access through the day for rehearsals and evenings for performances. • A larger performing venue would allow all groups to perform on stage. Currently band does not. • Attaching enlarged practice rooms for vocal and orchestra would better accommodate the growing numbers and would put them in proximity to the band practice areas. The orchestra will have class on the stage due to large numbers. • Drama could build sets during the day and could practice as well. • Adequate space for other concerts and programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would lose green space for Hall and parking. • Would become VHS auditorium, and possibly lose the sense of community. • The “Big Hall” will serve more than VHS; it will serve the entire school district for performances. Each of the other 13 schools presently travel to the VHS auditorium for rehearsals and performances. There are a total of 2875 students in music performance ensembles for the 2008-2009 school year.: 2457 K-9; 427 10-12. The hall will be used by multiple schools throughout the year. • Ecologically, the increase in cement for parking spaces from Woodland to Ashworth would not be appropriate for this location. Aesthetically, it would destroy the beauty of the VHS campus. The feeling would be more of an urban school, rather than the aesthetic look of the present campus. • Athletic teams and PE classes would not be able to use the green space.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve educational opportunities at VHS. • Scheduling easier for VHS use. • Easy access from highway, Valley West Drive, Ashworth Dr. • Would provide a great ‘learning’ space for students interested in theater management, set design, lighting & sound. • Would provide the type of facility that would allow students to shine in all performance areas – equal to that of the sports teams. • Additional parking spaces would ease the problems VHS has with student parking issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and arts groups would not be as receptive to using a “school auditorium” as compared to an auditorium on a city/school campus. • The history of the tennis courts is well established and an important part of VHS legacy. They need to remain at Valley. • The “barn” is historically significant, as is the farm house on the corner of 39th and Ashworth. This is a residential area and increased traffic and a parking lot across the street does not support the residential feel • We would need to look for adjacent properties to accommodate parking as we would lose some P.E./athletic practice areas. • The track may need to be moved. • Other students less likely to use space due to HS having it scheduled most of the time • City would require 250 additional parking spaces • City could require that other parts of VHS be brought to code
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New Construction Option: “Big Hall” at VSW Campus

<p>Summary, conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seems reasonable and may be a simple solution - - there’s space and parking, and VSW needs an auditorium - - but it is difficult for VHS students to use. • Uncertainty about the City’s interest in a partnership for a Fine Arts facility on the School/City campus. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parking lot space. • Would complete quite a community hub - - Stadium, Library, City Hall, LRC together. • Could use for VHS performances without needing to practice daily by enhancing the existing VHS auditorium so that the acoustics would mirror the “Big Hall”. • The original plan for a Big Hall has been a vision for the City/School campus area back to the 1990’s. The presence of the Big Hall on this campus, along with potential Recreational facilities will complete the plan. • VHS students can prepare for concerts on site in the remodeled existing auditorium and perform in the Big Hall with adequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VHS teachers would not use it (time to transport, cost of bussing, moving instruments, moving set designs for drama, students need to practice in the same place they perform) • Not ease of availability for VHS directors and students. Class periods are shortened on Monday, Thursday and Friday. • Expense of supervision of the Big Hall, including reservations, custodial services, etc. • Transportation of VHS students to the Big Hall. District will need to pay to transport students or equipment for rehearsals in the space. • Not with flagship school. Valley groups

<p>seating for everyone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Big Hall will take its place along side the Stadium as a gathering place for the arts and athletics on the City/School campus. • The facility will have a presence for the Community and other arts organizations to use 12 months of the year. • City and Corporations would be more likely to contribute to possible funding on a City/School campus. • District schools would have more accessibility to reservations in the Big Hall. Large school performances can take place easier on the City/School campus. • Ample open space to put the building. • Very accessible for VSW and Jordan Creek students. • Good place for concerts for all grades. • Currently a bus shuttles kids to VHS from VSW, which would help with after school practices/rehearsals without additional expense • Would improve educational opportunities at VSW • Could be open for WDM citizen usage • Can be used in conjunction with city for community center • Would be highly visible to people in the community 	<p>would not and could not use it during the day due to travel time. The expense of transporting drama and musical groups is cost prohibitive. Experience with Marchmasters has been costly in terms of money and time.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-8 grades not able to use easily (except for Jordan Creek students). • VHS scheduling would have to be coordinated with VSW (priority?) • Too far away from the students that would use it the most – music students, drama students, school-wide assemblies. • Students would miss classes for rehearsals in the space. • It would be more of a community performing space and less use by school students – the district would be funding a community center, basically.
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New Construction Option: Theater/Staging Area at VSW

<p>Summary, conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance acoustics and lighting in existing performance area. • Utilize the proposed new “Big Hall” and “Blackbox Theater.” 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A definite need. Presently all performances take place either in the Gym or the Forum. • No opportunity for VSW students to meet as a class outside of the gym. • No opportunity for drama classes to perform outside of the Forum or a classroom. • Could be used by Elementary Orchestra and Band programs for larger rehearsals, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplicating high school services. • Money.

<p>programs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Ed space. • There is definitely a need for an area for musical performances. The forum is terrible acoustically and logistically. To date, there has not been a need for drama as all drama activity takes place at VHS. • VSW got the short end of the stick in the design process due to the ongoing, unproductive conversations on a city-school performing arts complex that never materialized. 	
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New Construction Option: Elementary School Performing Arts Rooms

<p>Summary, conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance acoustics and lighting in existing gymnasiums. • Utilize the proposed new “Big Hall” and “Blackbox Theater”. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The additional spaces would meet the needs of each elementary student--all who perform vocally or instrumentally at some point in their elementary journey - - a large number of students who would benefit. • Outstanding performances take place in the elementary schools. Additional fine arts areas would enable both gym and music to take place at the same time. • Band and orchestra students would have rehearsal areas during the school day, instead of before school. • 1308 students participate in band and /or orchestra. • All grade levels have vocal music performances during the school day. • Programs wouldn't displace PE classes • Many students could use the space for plays, music performances, special assemblies, movies, teacher meetings, parent meetings • A great space for all classes to use for dramatic readings. • Perfect for single school orchestra, band, and chorus rehearsals/programs. • Community Ed space. • There is a need for space to showcase performing arts at the elementary level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of spaces where the additions would be placed. • Cost of construction. Very expensive for 9 elementary schools. • Phenix has a stage as part of the gym as does Western Hills, Westridge , and Jordan Creek. • Consider acoustically treating the gyms in support of music programming as well as improved sound amplification and lighting. • Not flagship school. • Space. • Not necessary. There won't be enough money to provide for the elementary schools with these tax dollars. There are better ways to spend the funds. • The people that use the space the most (on a daily basis) – would not have ready access. • Might limit the district-wide elementary events (e.g., festivals, concerts).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would gain back instructional time lost daily due to rehearsals outside the building. • Would recoup transportation costs. 	
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Question: What are the pros/cons of each option for remodeling?

The pros/cons were submitted individually by Study Group members and are listed in no particular order. The Summary/conclusions statements represent a general consensus of Study Group members based on a review of pros/cons and subsequent conversation.

Remodeling Option: Create “Big Hall” in current VHS cafeteria/auditorium/foyer area.

Summary, conclusions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not viable. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the facility for VHS students and directors for performance preparation. • On-site. • Easy access. • Bring facility up to “code”. • More space for audience seating. • Better facility than now. • Availability for HS students across the curriculum. • There is space to work with. • This would not impact existing green space too much. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost to raise roof and/or change auditorium floor would be extremely expensive. We would still have the shape of the existing auditorium seating 600. • Cafeteria and kitchen was just remodeled. • Not enough seating in existing spaces. • Is it feasible structural? • Not enough space to build the facility needed. • No way to correct existing problems in the current auditorium. • Expense of insuring acoustic similarity to auditorium so that it would meet needs of programs. • Non-availability of an auditorium during construction if remodeled before new auditorium is built. • Still have problem of only one way in and out of the auditorium. • Has negative impact on existing cafeteria and forum – areas used by more than just performing arts students. • Would require opening up campus for all students possibly. • Impacts special education classrooms that have just recently been remodeled.

Remodeling Option: Create “Blackbox Theater” in current VHS Auditorium.

<p>Summary, conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viable - - and a priority. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed for student productions, small ensemble presentations, experimental theatre, Mimes. • Use during the school day for drama classes, with improved acoustics and lighting. • Keep as Blackbox/ Small Theatre, possibly in the Round! (A bit larger than Fischer Theater at ISU or Sheslow at Drake... but similar concept.) • Great use of existing space IF the new Big Hall is built. • New seats, ambience created. • Make it safe for use. • Improve existing space for 21st Century. Students can use for their own drama creations, Scholar presentations, possible TV use. • Large group lecture area for visiting teachers, consultants, faculty meetings. • There is definitely a need to completely refurbish this area. So many students have begun their careers on this stage. There is historical significance to the VHS auditorium. • On site. • Cost. • There is space to put it in here. • IF the auditorium is remodeled first, with the intentions of it becoming a black box theater upon completion of the new auditorium, it would be the best of both worlds. • Instructional facilities would be improved and utilized for some productions. • After conversion to black box, some space could be recaptured for other needs (storage?). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would just be a “fix ‘er upper.” • Have to alter the existing space a great deal. • Costs would be high to remodel this area with concerns for floor plan, safety, acoustics, lighting. • More difficult to create a flat floor.

Remodeling Option: Create “Blackbox Theater” in current VHS North Gym.

Summary, conclusions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not viable. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On site. • Parking places already there. • Roof already high enough? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed for PE classes. • Historically significant, part of the original VHS plan. • Not in best place for English, Drama classes. • Lots of remodel/ construction to change space. • Creates additional problems. • Negative impact on a facility that is used for PE, community events, parent/teacher conferences.

Remodeling Option: Create “Blackbox Theater” in current VHS Cafeteria.

Summary, conclusions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not viable. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On site. • Great proximity to other drama activities. • Great proximity to doorway for audience access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost. • We have spent hundreds of thousands in remodeling and air conditioning. • Lots of work to do to change space. • Creates additional problems. • Where would the cafeteria be located? • Open campus for all?

Remodeling Option: Create “Blackbox Theater” in current VHS Orchestra and Vocal Music rooms.

Summary, conclusions:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not viable. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A decent location. • Some additional electricity and lighting already exists in room 404. • Minimal impact on other areas of the building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited space exists. • Creates additional problems. • Vocal and orchestra classes must have a home first.

Remodeling Option: Create “Blackbox Theater” at Rex Mathes Auditorium.

Summary, conclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not viable. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historically significant. • Used by a small community theatre group presently. • Currently owned by district. • It could possibly be less expensive to renovate than the current VHS auditorium. • Could be used for elementary, and junior high productions. • Good for community use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could be incorporated into the Big Hall, Small Black Box theater. • Cost of maintenance, • Not used by Stilwell presently. • With Mathes’ closing, not as popular a venue for booking. • It is not convenient for use during the school day. • There is no transportation currently to the facility. • Scheduling concerns. • Too far from HS; Would be used by HS groups rarely, if at all.

Remodeling Option: Create VHS Music/Drama Suite (enhanced performing arts rooms for Orchestra, Vocal Music, and Drama).

Summary, conclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A priority. 	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suite of rooms similar to the existing band hall complex. • Over 300 students use these rooms daily. To have a flexible design for daily classes and rehearsal would be ideal. • Some additional electricity and lighting already exists in room 404. • Minimal impact on other areas of the building. • Need for storage of robes, concert dress, musical instruments, music, technology, AP Theory instruction, risers, sound equipment. • Need space with growing participants. • Need improved acoustics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited space exists. • Creates additional problems • Vocal and orchestra classes must have a home first.

Remodeling Option: Expand stage and seating in current Junior High auditoriums.

Summary, conclusions:

- Enhance acoustics and lighting in existing auditoriums. Low priority to expand the stage or seating in current auditoriums.
- Utilize the proposed new “Big Hall” and “Blackbox Theater” for performances where stage size and seating needs differ from what is available.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve sound and lighting in both auditoriums. • Better fit on campus needs for more audience seating. • Better space for growing ensembles for rehearsing and concerts. • Could be good space for drama, English classes for choral reading, movies, play development. • There is a huge need for this at both junior high schools to accommodate performance opportunities for the students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stilwell and Indian Hills already have a dedicated space with a stage for performances. • Cost. • Parking. • Space for expansion. • Not necessary. There won't be enough money to provide for the junior high schools with these tax dollars. There are better ways to spend the funds. • Timing of renovations to minimize impact on student programs. If the work takes place during the school year, the junior high programs will have to take place at other locations. This will put a crunch on scheduling of already busy rooms.