

School District of Ashland

Press Release

September 22, 2015

For immediate release

Call the superintendent, Dr. Keith Hilts, with questions at 682-7080.

### **Ashland Schools are Completing Short and Long-Term Facility Studies**

The ways in which students learn and teachers teach are changing and the School District of Ashland wants to make certain that facilities support this important work. Ashland schools are innovating on many levels. In the classrooms, students have the option of project-based learning in the charter schools in grades 3-12. In other classrooms, teachers are utilizing technology to expand the students' worlds and engage them in challenging work. Teachers are exploring the use of personalized learning so that students understand their own strengths and learning needs and become more independent learners and good problem solvers.

In addition to changes in the classroom, students are also getting other needs met in school. Many of our community mental health providers are meeting students in our schools so that transportation is no longer a barrier to services and the students miss less school time. Dental services are also provided in schools. Many community members come to the schools to volunteer to read with students or share career experiences. The district continually seeks out opportunities to partner with community resource providers to meet student needs.

These improvements in our school system sometimes collide with outdated facilities. For instance, it is sometimes difficult to find spaces where students and adults can work in small groups to get the help they need for academic support or behavioral support. Sometimes the technology in the district gets overwhelmed and students are not able to access the necessary technology tools.

Beyond the demands that innovation puts on facilities, traditional demands are still in effect as well. District facilities are in good shape due to long-range planning and preventative maintenance. Each summer you can see parking lots being resurfaced and the rooms and hallways scrubbed and polished. However, with the number and size of our schools, some projects are more expensive than the regular budget can handle. Further, over the past decade, increasing energy costs have reduced the amount of money available for capital projects. For instance, the roof on Ashland High School needs to be replaced. Due to the size of the roof, the cost is in excess of 1million dollars. Also, part of the heating system in the high school is steam and part is high efficiency hot water. The existing steam system needs to be replaced at a cost of approximately \$500,000.

To address long-term needs, the school district has hired Foster, Jacobs and Johnson, Inc. (FJJ) to complete a unique facility study process. The group begins with several listening sessions

with staff and community about the desired outcomes of K-12 education. The next listening session is scheduled for tonight, September 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Ashland High School library. Stop by after work to take part in a one-hour listening session.

As well as gaining community input, we are also conducting three different assessments; our district's demographics, an assessment of how well our facilities serve our educational mission and a facility needs assessment. On October 12th, a public meeting of the school board will be held to present findings of the first two assessments.

The final phase of the process will be an evaluation of options. There will be several ways to address our facility challenges. Community members who participated in the workshops are invited to be a part of a Citizen's Task Force that will meet during the month of November. The role of the Citizen's Task Force include voicing our community's values and concerns and evaluating the range of information we receive and assisting the school board in the development of a long-range plan. That is a big job, but it is important that the community stay involved and help shape our future.

While FJJ is helping to address long-term needs, to address some short-term needs, the school board has hired energy experts from CESA 10 to review our energy needs and see where it might be cost effective to complete some energy efficiency projects. One possible project might include the replacement of the old portion of the heating system in the high school. Changing the steam system to a high efficiency water system needs to be done in the near future. Also, the school district portion of the tax levy is predicted to decrease by about a half-million dollars next year. The school board is considering whether it might be a better decision to replace the boiler now to realize the energy savings sooner rather than later. The district also wants to be respectful of the tax payer and complete the project when the tax levy is already reduced.

Ashland has great schools and experiences wonderful community support. The school board and district staff are continually striving to pursue excellence in education. We have safe and healthy facilities and a good technology infrastructure. We know that anyone who does not innovate, falls behind. We have many challenges ahead but plans are always underway to improve the educational experience for the youth of our community.