

**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF LA CROSSE  
DISTRICT WIDE PARENT COMMITTEE**

**DATE: Tuesday, October 11, 2022**

**TIME: 7:00 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.**

**LOCATION: To be held virtually**

**Google Meet link:**

[meet.google.com/xkh-ftwo-ueg](https://meet.google.com/xkh-ftwo-ueg)

**A G E N D A**

1. Call to Order - Anna Stindt

2. Land Recognition Statement: *We recognize that the School District of La Crosse occupies the land of the Ho-Chunk people. Please take a moment to celebrate and honor this ancestral Ho-Chunk land, and the sacred lands of all indigenous peoples.*

3. Showcase (30 minutes) Referendum Q & A

For Today's Showcase, our group has requested Referendum Q & A. Dr. Engel started this time by sharing his Referendum Presentation with the DWP. **All following questions and responses posed during the Q & A are included at the end of this Agenda.**

4. Administrative Updates (30 minutes)

a. Superintendent & Associate Superintendent Updates

- A more "normal" start to the school year in regard to COVID
- It is budget season, so that takes a lot of attention this time of year. We are facing a budget deficit that is largely due to declining enrollment. Our team is thinking about how to become more efficient in the future and ensure that we're investing in the right things, which is programs for our students and our wonderful staff.
- It is also National School Lunch Week, so be sure to thank those people who work hard to provide our schools with healthy school lunches!

b. Elementary Update

- Ocktoberfest Royal Family came out to Northwoods, State Road, and Spence, which was very fun for our elementary students
- Also, field trips have started again (i.e., Perot Park, Madison - Capitol Building & Zoo, etc.), which has been great for learning and building community within our elementary schools
- Other fun events, like Science Medicine Day, Careers on Wheels, Foster Grandparents, etc. have supported school culture and community this year
- There has been a lot of giving from community partners so far this year (too many to name!), which has been felt by our schools and so appreciated!
- PTOs have also been busy, including Family Fall PTO Carnival, Family Movie Nights, Fun Runs, etc.
- GROW Gardens are also in harvest season, and many of our elementary schools are busy with getting students involved our gardens
- The end of this month, we will start fall conference season at the elementary level

c. Secondary Update

- The Secondary level is busy and feeling back in our groove at this point!
  - We know that our middle schools may need to prepare for a consolidation, so we've been working on that. In August-November, we've been working on a three-phase plan to support the potential for consolidation.
  - One of the focuses for this project has been Lincoln Middle, which may potentially be closing to support consolidation.
  - If the referendum goes through, we would move into phase 2 to actually start the logistical planning for all students and teachers.
  - Our Future Center at the high school level supports our students in preparing for life after high school. On October 30th at 5:30pm, Kathy will be hosting an event for parents and students to explain the financial aid project. Like this, we're so excited to have some events coming out of our Future Center again.
  - The Attendance Matters campaign has brought together our administrators to work on building partnerships with our community to support student attendance at the secondary level to support increasing student motivation.
  - The high school level is seeing a record number of students who are applying for Early Start college credits. For any questions, parents or teachers should reach out to their high school counselors.
- d. LPEF Update (La Crosse Public Education Foundation)
- There is increased funding for our STAR Grants this year, and many teachers apply for these grants to support projects within their classrooms. Applications are due this month!
  - PTOs are asked to reach out to the LPEF if they have their own grant program and are curious about how those grant timelines align.
  - If you'd like to contact Nell, or join their email list, you can contact her here: <https://lacrosseeducationfoundation.org/who-we-are/contact-us/>

#### 6. Sharing Concerns (15 minutes)

- None shared this meeting.

#### 7. Joys & Shoutouts (10 minutes)

- State Road Elementary has their annual Chicken Q coming up Thursday, October 20th. Thanks for your support!
- Many schools have fall fundraisers going, and are getting such supportive responses from the community. Thank you!
- We have our high school bands playing in an upcoming performance together, and we're looking forward to seeing our bands collaborate!
- Kelly Galvan and her daughter are in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, so that is highly recommended!

*Please send any future meeting topic suggestions to your DWP Chairperson, Vice Chair or [kgalvan@lacrossesd.org](mailto:kgalvan@lacrossesd.org) .*

#### **SHOWCASE Q & A: REFERENDUM**

**Question: My understanding from having friends working at that building is that they have leakage problems and problems with roaches. How does the school district plan to correct that?**

Yes, that tends to happen with older buildings and structures, and we're aware of those issues. We have architectural plans and other things. We will also be doing a complete renovation essentially down to the studs so it'll be functionally brand new for kids so any existing problems right now will be addressed in that complete renovation.

**Question: What about any potential transportation concerns with consolidating campuses?**

Yeah, we've been fortunate to be able to meet with the city since March of last year. So, well over 18 months at this point we've been working on appraising some of our progress and our thoughts. We met this last summer specifically about the Trane site once we knew that we had an option to purchase that site. We understand that site can accommodate 800 cars a day, so we know that the infrastructure is capable of handling the traffic that would come with the school. The intersection on board and Pamela Creek is not ideal, and there's some room for improvement there. Subsequently, we'll be working with the city on what that looks like to potentially improve that with a traffic assessment that will be done as a part of our project. Some people have been concerned with elementary kiddos crossing the street there as well as with other high-traffic areas, whether it's George Street or Losey. To address that concern, we do have crossing guards, and that's a strategy we'll probably continue to use there as well to make sure that kids coming from those local neighborhoods can get across the street safely.

**Question: Does it pose some benefit to elementary students to have more of a campus feel with State Road Elementary?**

Yes, I think there is an opportunity there with the high school being able to maybe do programs or something with a State Road. When you start getting that campus feel, the opportunities there to partner for a different type of learning is there. When we talk to West Salem, which has all their kids kind of on the same campus, they're high schoolers are able to walk right over as a part of their educator rising club and shadow in classrooms and work with teachers and provide new opportunities for students and vice versa. Elementary kids can walk over to see the greenhouse or the or use the gymnasium if they've got a particular unit so there would be some unique opportunities there.

**Question: Can you talk about any potential problems with all those 800 vehicles on the road heading to the high school?**

Yeah, I think we have fewer than that right now. Parking is relatively limited at Logan High and Central High. And so we're accommodating the combination of both daily traffic as well as what we anticipate for kind of like high volume events. And so one of the things that we think about with the parking capacity is let's imagine that we have, you know, a JV basketball game or a tournament on the weekend and drama production. And so we want to be able to kind of accommodate that kind of max volume to the best extent that we can. And so that 900 is really kind of a high estimate for what it would mean if there are all of these things going on at once. We don't anticipate there to be 900 cars there a day. It's probably closer to 600. Potentially, you know if every kid you know who was eligible decided to drive, we may hit our limit, but we currently limit parking right now at both high schools, so if needed, we could return to that strategy in the future as well. Fortunately, we provide transportation for folks that live outside the walking radius.

And so every kid has an opportunity to jump on free public transportation, get to school safely and quickly that way too.

**Question: What about the equity of the location near the south side for families that are on the North side?**

Yeah, great question. You know, if we have a single high school instead of two, you know, fewer students will be within that walking radius. We already have a lot of kids that are bused to our high schools from communities across our school district. We have kids that live in the Hamilton elementary boundary and get bused up to Logan. And we have kids that are down south by Southern Bluffs and get up to Central from St. Joseph or Coon Valley or De Soto. Because of this, we've already had lots of opportunities to think about how those students will be able to participate and interact. You know, certainly having that bus route is helpful for day to day, but as you mentioned there's also interest in ensuring that kids are able to participate after school as well. I know that in the other school districts that I've worked in and lived in, we've often had late buses that run just so that students can get home after an event. It's not something we're financially able to offer right now, but would probably benefit a lot of our students already. It's something that we will intend to put in place if we have this larger volume of students who need to get back to a neighborhood and be able to get home. Transportation is something that we've been working with for a long time and trying to alleviate any and all equity issues. We anticipate it would be about three bus routes on the north side in order to accommodate those high school students. We also know that pretty quickly they find rides from friends or other methods of transportation as well. And if we go from five buildings, transporting kids two to three, we don't know that it will even necessarily take new bus routes, but maybe just repurpose ones planning on new routes. Jeff Helsing, our new transportation director does a great job. We've been able to ensure that there's more access for parents during parent teacher conferences or extracurricular events. And we'll continue to work with the city to create better access.

**Question: In doing all these community forums, I'm wondering if you can share with us what are the strongest arguments against this plan. Could you also share if we can come up with solutions for those concerns to help get more people on board?**

Yeah, I think the things that folks bring up that resonate with most people are those concerns about access highlighted in an earlier question. I think we're working on some good solutions for transportation and other access issues already. I also think there are some community members that are just really challenged by the identity piece. People feel very strongly about their schools. And, in part, that's a problem of our own making. The staff at Logan High School has done a great job building community and creating an identity and that's a good problem to have. It's what we want our schools to do. At the same time, I would also say that identity and those feelings come from the teachers and the kids that are in that building. A school as the physical structure means very little compared to the amazing staff, the teachers and the families that are a part of that. And so whether it's two high schools or one high school or four high schools, you know, those people will be present, that feeling will be there just maybe in a new location. So there's no getting around the fact that this does change folks' identity, but the things that make our high schools special will be present at a new high school as well. The other thing I would mention is some people just don't want to invest in public education. They don't want to pay more money to help students grow and learn and I understand their logic. Taxes are more important to them than

investments in the future. I know this community has always supported public education, and really wants a thriving public school system. I hope that folks can see that as a potential opportunity for kids not just more taxes

**Question: Will the current middle schools be able to have the space and capacity to keep class sizes around the same size with the consolidation plan?**

If the referendum passes or if it doesn't, we have identified that we need to move down to two middle schools in the future. This is a necessary step along the way to balance our budget, and have the ability to invest in programs and staff. The exact timing of that consolidation is based on the referendum. We know that Longfellow and Logan could accommodate all of our middle schoolers today and into the future. We have targets for class sizes. We know that when there are too few kids things can get weird in classrooms, and we're not efficient with our teaching and learning. We also know that when there are too many kids it can be disruptive and challenging for kids to get the attention they need. So there's a sweet spot that we're always looking for, somewhere around 25 kids at the secondary level. It allows for good small groups to mix up kids from time to time to get diverse viewpoints and allows us to be efficient with the work that we do. In short, we'll be able to maintain our class sizes. If we're unable to pass the referendum, that is where we may see class sizes affected for a period of time while we try to balance the budget and cut other costs.

**Question: If the referendum doesn't pass, is there a chance that a new referendum could go forward at a different time?**

All of our Long-Range plans call for consolidation on all levels. It's really what's necessary for us to balance our budget. An influx of capital dollars certainly helps us do new things for kids, but it's really our operating budget that requires us to consolidate at all levels regardless of a referendum moving forward, or a referendum failing. In terms of other referenda, you know, there's not going to be another site for a new high school available in our city. This is really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a new high school for all of our students. There is just not 40 acres available in the city. We've explored all of them, including the Mobil Oil site and The Forest Hills Golf Course. One was already spoken for by developers, and the other has a deed restriction on it because it was donated as a part of the Hixon forest. There isn't really going to be another opportunity for a new high school. Our options are left to consolidate in other ways, you know, elementary school consolidation is certainly something on our radar in the future, regardless of what happens to the middle schools in the short term. In five to 10 years, we'll be able to fit into our existing structures for one high school. For example, Central holds about 1600 students and would be able to accommodate all of our students in five to six years. Really, at this point, we need to reduce the number of buildings we have, and so there isn't really another high school option that works. The options we have are all consolidation. There's not something we have now that we can build up to make it work. Our middle school sites are all too small and they wouldn't support a comprehensive Middle School experience that we can't already provide with the old buildings that we have. It's really about how do we become as efficient as possible as we move forward?

**Question: One question I've heard raised by those opposed is about the mill rate after year one? How will the interest in debt be paid after year one within the operating budget?**

So the way referenda work is that once that's approved, the debt is paid for through the referendum. It's above and beyond the operating budget. So, you know, theoretically a school district, could pass a referendum for \$100 million, and they could levy it all in the first year. The impact of taxpayers would be atrocious. Nobody in their right mind would do that. But our taxpayers want us to invest in our facilities and so they understand that we've got to pay it off over time. Twenty years is generally the the range that people look at for borrowing. People also accept that if we're going to do it over time, there's going to be some interest involved. I would love if the state would give us interest free loans, but that's not the case. We're just like a homeowner except we use municipal bonds instead of a private loan to purchase and then pay that back over time. So, there's a immediate impact in terms of what the mill rate is from one year to the next. We know that over time, property values generally increase so that mill rate generally goes down over time, even if we're borrowing the same amount of money every single year or paying off the same amount of money every year. Therefore, we know that the impact of this referendum is if we keep our borrowing the same, will continue to go down over time. In addition, in the state of Wisconsin, school funding changes every two years because our state legislature can do what they want in terms of school budgets. And they might say this year, school districts are gonna pay more locally, or the next year, they might say the state is going to fund more, and so that mill rate might move around based on what the state does. However, this is entirely out of the control of local school districts. Even so, the impact of the referendum will stay consistent throughout that period of time.

**Question: I can see the pros and cons as a teacher and also a parent. We just have so many needs in our buildings. We have academic needs, we have so many behavior needs. I just worry that if we put all these kids in the same building, is that going to be safe with the amount of staff that we have? And if we consolidate, are we going to have the same number of staff that we have now but in one building?**

The great thing is that when you get to build a new school building, you get to build it with safety in mind. You get to design it from the ground up in the ways that create relationships with students and in ways that support your ability to lock down buildings to create secure entrances. And so by building new, we essentially also earn the opportunity to create the safest building.

As far as staffing, the efficiencies that we gain from reducing some staff over time are planned to come through attrition and retirements. The benefit of having more staff in one place is that there are way more opportunities to cover for each other more easily because you have more resources located there. And then you have more opportunities for relationships and students have more options to find a staff member that they truly connect.

**Question: The new site appears to be in the town of Shelby, which means they will have to provide first response for an emergency and the SROs for the school. Is that correct?**

I thought the site was also in the Township of Shelby, but it's actually in the city of lacrosse. I think both properties used to be in Shelby, but they were transferred over when those properties were improved many years ago. We know that we've got good response times at the building site because of response times to State Road Elementary for both our SROs and the fire department. We're confident that that

property won't have any issues with fire and police.

**Question: How many SROs Are you planning to have in the school if you have to consolidate High School?**

To ensure that when we don't have legitimate legal or safety issues, we have three specially paid police officers there to address the needs at that level. We're not exactly sure about the future, but it could be very much similar. We could potentially even have an SRO on site full-time.

**Question: What about students on the North side having to catch buses? What if they miss their bus? How will they get to school at this new site? And will the bus stop at each house or at designated spots?**

We anticipate it will look a little bit like MTU where there'll be stops along a number of streets. So it'll go up a neighborhood street and then down another one. Students will have multiple opportunities and stops to get to school each day; if they missed one, they could likely still catch another. Right now, kids on the northside walk to get to school in an average of a 16-minute walk; with the buses it will be about 20 to 25 minutes on average to get to school. In addition, we already experience kids that have trouble getting to school. We're fortunate to have great partnerships with the Boys and Girls Club and the good fight club for rides. We also have social workers and others who are helpful and can support strategies for students.