

WEST SHORE SUN

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Schools start planning for future

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WESTLAKE — Residents are concerned about the city's schools.

That fact was made clear by a recent series of well-attended public forums. Superintendent Dan Keenan said the sessions will be used to help the district devise a plan to improve school facilities.

He said the forums show that the community wants to begin the facilities process as soon as possible. The plan also must be cost effective and efficient, he added.

Although plans are still on the drawing board, Keenan said the forums allowed him to get the word out and to gauge residents' opinions.

From 2202 to 2008, Keenan said a significant number of repairs were made to the district's seven school facilities, but many problems still exist.

The school board will view some options for resolving these problems, including an incremental plan that would separate students into specific schools by grade levels. One idea might be to assign second and third-graders to one building.

"We have received split reactions from the community on the incremental plan," Keenan said. "Some of our residents like the idea and some do not. It could cut down the costs, however we do need to consider all of our options and keep the costs down."

The large-scale plan would allow the board to start the process of the master plan rather than continuing short-term repairs.

Keenan said the master plan would include a new facility. It has not been determined if all the old facilities would still be used. He said a new facility would be a nice addition to the district.

According to community input, Keenan said one of the highest priorities is the high school, which faces some overcrowding issues.

It is important that the schools continue to obtain excellence and continue to have high expectations, Keenan said.

He also said it's important to ensure that each school faculty has the flexibility to expand over the next 10 or 20 years.

"January will mark one year that we started brainstorming and gathering ideas to improve our schools. We will hold a meeting in late January to review feedback, evaluate how we can finance each improvement and to see how quickly we can try to begin the process," Keenan said.

The school board is working with the Vision 20/20 Committee to develop a plan for maintaining school facilities and supporting the district's mission to educate for excellence.

Keenan said three topics need to be considered for the master plan: ideal space needed for students, programming for 21st Century Learning and bricks and mortar.

The board and committee will have meetings and small discussions about the issues. They also will narrow down the master plans provided by Ohio Schools Facilities Commission and Lesco Architecture.

Cost will play a big role in settling on a master plan, Keenan said. Pros and cons will be reviewed for a final master plan option, as well as data and research.

The school board will focus on key issues such as approach and educational considerations like science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Keenan said timing will be an important factor as to when the master plan process will begin. The board will look at moving forward and determine what options are available to support the plan.

In addition to the public forums, the board received feedback on the issue through community research. A total of 393 parents and non-parent community members plus 187 staff members took an online survey last spring. In-depth interviews were also conducted with residents, community leaders, elected officials, business leaders and community organization leaders.

"We are receiving a great amount of involvement from the committee and the school board," Keenan said. "We want to serve the students the best we can, yet there are many variables at this time that we need to consider."