

Faculty now involved in facilities decisions

By Kevin Kelley

WESTLAKE

A new series of meetings on the future of school buildings in the Westlake City Schools District began last week. The 24-member 20/20 Vision committee has been expanded to 68 to include faculty and staff from the district's schools.

Superintendent Dan Keenan said the expanded committee's goal is to pick a final facilities plan that voters will be asked to fund, presumably in May. A second goal, Keenan said, is to deter-

mine what realistically can be accomplished in terms of facilities, both physically and in terms of voter support.

Ultimately, the decision to go before voters is up to the board of education, Keenan noted.

A phone survey sanctioned by the district showed an increase in public awareness of the problem of aging and overcrowded school buildings, Keenan said.

The survey, conducted at the end of September, showed "a big jump in people knowing there is a problem," the superintendent said.

A second, larger phone survey is

planned for mid-January, Keenan has said.

In January, the 20/20 Vision committee submitted two master plans to the Board of Education:

- Option A is a single-phase project that would build a new high school and renovate and add on to the middle school. This plan would see the construction of two new elementary schools — one housing preschool through first grade and the other grades two and three.

See **MEETINGS**, p. 19

MEETINGS, from p. 1

- Option B is also a single-phase project that would include a new high school and renovate and add on to the middle school. Three new elementary schools would be built under this plan; two would house kindergarten through grade three, with the third housing preschool through grade three.

Both plans move the fourth graders to

a newly constructed intermediate school and call for a new high school and a renovated middle school with additions. The difference between the plans is in the elementary grade configuration.

Steve Miller, an educational planner with MKC Associates, the consultant advising the district on facilities, said at the Oct. 7 meeting that district staff and faculty members tended to favor the second option, the one that favored the existing neighborhood configuration of

the elementary schools. The potential larger size of buildings of the first option appeared to be a concern, he said, as did the number of transitions students would have to make.

Todd Wroblewski of MKC Associates said his group also came up with a third plan that would allow for phasing and expansion for student population growth if needed. This concern over a possible growth in attendance comes from speculation that Westlake's large number of private school students may be attracted to the district after new buildings were constructed, he said.

Also to be determined is whether the district will build the new schools all at once or in stages. While the 20/20 Vision Committee called for a single-phase project, the school board decided to pursue a two-phase route when pursuing inter-

est-free bonds that were part of a federal stimulus package. However, the amount of bonds awarded to the district was not what had been hoped for, and the district declined the bonds. Acceptance of the bonds would have required voters to approve funding of new schools in the November elections.

Some school board members believe the district should pursue a single-phase plan because that will cost less in the long run. However, others have expressed concern about the political feasibility of voters passing a large funding program that could cost more than \$100 million.

Keenan said he expects a final master plan to be decided by December. The next meeting of the 20/20 Vision committee will be at 7 p.m. Oct. 21 at Westlake High School.