

The Times Leader

UL gets facilities plan

MORRISTOWN — Union Local Board of Education members have millions of dollars worth of projects to consider after hearing the results of a two-year study about improvements the district could make during the next 10 years.

Board members heard from John Jefferis, project manager with PCS & Manage of Barnesville, and David Sneed, education planner and consultant, regarding the district's needs in late December. They said their recommendations could lead to projects with an overall cost of \$47 million to \$61 million.

"We did an initial assessment of all facilities," Sneed said, adding that their work included a review of codes and standards including lighting safety, school access safety and space evaluations. "We finished that process last summer."

They have since been working on a community analysis, looking at business and industry, population, potential for growth and enrollment projections. They also met with teachers, area residents, board members and staff.

Sneed said the age of the facilities is a primary reason for recommended improvements. The elementary and high school buildings opened in 1998,

and the middle school building — the original high school — was renovated at about the same time. Priorities set by Sneed and Jefferies include school access safety and increasing science, technology engineering and math content.

“Project-based learning is going to change the way teachers deliver the curriculum,” Sneed said. “That’ll eventually require some facility alterations in order to deliver that type of curriculum.”

Sneed said it is unlikely the buildings would be replaced.

One recommendation is creation of new teaching areas for early childhood education. The consultants cited two options: construction of an early childhood center, which is more expensive, or making an addition to the elementary school.

┐ Cost breakdown

For the elementary school, top priorities projects identified by Sneed and Jefferies — such as security, lighting and HVAC upgrades — would total \$2,854,388.

Construction of a stand-alone building for early childhood education would cost \$25,570,596, but an addition and renovations would cost \$11,493,876.

Other improvements to food service areas, furniture and equipment, an additional exit door in the mechanical room and renovations for a health and dental lab would cost \$2,409,409.

All together, recommended work the elementary school would cost \$16,757,673 without a free-standing building or as much as \$30,834,393 with new construction.

At the middle school, first-priority expenses — reconfiguring administrative areas, installing new parking lot lighting and security cameras, HVAC repairs and fire alarm upgrades — come to \$1,551,260.

Secondary costs, including additional intervention specialist space and renovations to the gymnasium and to classroom walls and ceilings, come to \$4,629,318.

Other improvements such as security fencing and equipment total \$1,242,718.

Total costs for the middle school upgrades would be \$7,423,296.

For the high school, first priorities including improved parking lot lighting, additional visitor parking and HVAC replacement would cost \$1,530,272.

Secondary renovations such as sound, light and acoustic improvements to the auditorium, the art classroom studio and technology in the classrooms come to \$10,334,685.

Third priority costs such as furniture and equipment, restroom renovations and improvements to boys' and girls' locker rooms and expanded gymnasium storage would be \$2,612,101 for a total \$14,477,058 for the high school.

"We looked at everything including the ancillary facilities, and that's kind of why the numbers got bigger. Looking at the football field, the bus garage, the maintenance shop," Sneed said, noting an additional \$8.5 million is included in the \$47 million overall figure if the board wants to improve the football facilities. The total with a stand-alone structure at the elementary instead of an addition is \$61 million.

¶ Moving forward

"We'll look at options over the next year or so, talk to the community about what they want and decide when and if they want to implement portions of the plan," Sneed said.

Board members will consider the information they heard.

"We have to talk to the staff members, the administration and the community to try to figure out where our priorities lie," board member Shaun Roe said. "The fact of the matter is, we're going to have to do some

of this stuff, and we've got to figure out what the priorities (are) and how we're going to pay for it. ... I think we have to look at the safety of our students. Upgrading the safety is definitely a high priority. We've got some aging equipment from an HVAC standpoint."

"I think it's a great plan. It's a well put together plan. What I like about it is the educational plan is going to drive our facilities," board member Terry Puperi said. *"I think it's good for the students we have this plan. We're not going to be reactive anymore, we're going to be proactive."*

Superintendent Ben Porter commended Sneed's work.

"The study that we completed was about as thorough as can be, considering a number of variables highlighted by our educational needs," he said.

Porter noted several factors could be subject to change in the near future, such as population.

"There's a lot up in the air right now as we go into the future, and that's obviously predicated on industry in this area, so we don't have a definite idea of what's coming and what's not," he said.

Porter said informational meetings will take place to discuss the plan and get input from the community. Porter and board members also said implementing the plan could prompt the district to seek voter approval of levies in the future.

"That's a discussion for a little bit later down the road," Porter added.

Anyone interested in looking at a copy of the plan can see it at the district office.