

August 25, 2005

Dear Board of Education Members and Residents of St. Cloud Area School District 742

An ambitious group of District 742 staff and community members first convened on February 16, 2005 for the purpose of engaging in long range facility planning. The committee consisted of 13 community members, one student, three board members, eight district staff, and was co-facilitated by Superintendent Bruce Watkins and GLT architect and parent, David Leapaltd. Our challenging task was to develop a flexible facilities plan that would serve District 742 in both the short term and long term. We knew that student enrollment would drive part of our plan because Minnesota school funding is based on student enrollment.

Many long range facility plans often sit on the shelf because of their inflexibility and their singular view of a "rosy," growing future. Our plan compensated for this and came together through the examination of three different scenarios that would provide flexibility for any future reality. These scenarios were steady, declining, or growing student enrollment.

We soon recognized that we could not project any one of those scenarios for the district as a whole. Our discussion led to the realization that there were four distinct "regions" within District 742 and each one had unique differences in projected population growth or decline. Our nine maps included in this report reflect each of the three scenarios (steady, declining or growing enrollment) for the four regions relative to short, mid- and long term planning.

The plans for all three scenarios show many similarities. Guiding principles, established at the beginning of our work, kept the task force focused on where students would be located, efficiency, and flexibility. We also noted the idea of "campus" emerging as the task force sought efficiency, maximum flexibility, and convenience for parents. The campus concept leaves options for PreK-8 buildings or clusters of elementary, middle and possibly high school buildings on the same site. In six months plans came together through the exemplary dedication of task force members and diligent coordinating skills of Marj Hawkins.

As this plan is presented to the community and to the Board of Education, attention is already being paid to the immediate needs of the district. The disposal of properties which are no longer needed, located poorly, or not of essential educational value is now being considered or implemented. We are focused on academic vision for our schools, so that we can redesign current spaces and design new spaces that will meet the learning needs of all of our students. Attention to the maintenance and care of our current buildings will reflect long range planning and current efficiencies.

Our committee wanted a plan that can go in different directions depending on where student enrollment grows or declines. To that end, we created a document to help guide the district in their future planning. The "larger-than-average-shelf size" of the document reflects this desire and promises not to collect dust on any district shelf.

Our sincere thanks to all members of the committee for their insight and dedication to this task.

Co-Facilitators

David Leapaltd  
GLT Architects

Bruce Watkins  
Superintendent