

Facilities Planning Task Force

A Report to the Community

We are fortunate to have strong community support for our school system. Some of our facilities, however, need improvements to ensure that every student experiences a safe, healthy, and effective environment that will prepare them for life in the 21st century. After spending the past three months learning about the physical condition of our campus, buildings, and transportation fleets, our Facilities Task Force is ready to share our current ideas...

...and to hear what YOU think!



ABOVE: As an integral part of our greater community, each of the three district buildings, Methow Valley Elementary School (MVES), Liberty Bell High School (LBHS), and the Independent Learning Center (ILC) serve our students in unique and different ways.



mvschools

Every Student Shines

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Task Force Background

The Facilities Task Force, co-chaired by community members Sarah and Erik Brooks, is made up of more than 20 members, including students, parents, staff, community members, and alumni from the Methow Valley.

Building on the detailed work of previous Facilities Committees, we were charged with recommending a Facilities Improvement Plan to the Superintendent that identifies high priority needs and projects for our schools in the next four to six years.

AND HERE'S WHAT WE LEARNED:

- Fiscally responsible investments that we can make though this process will save the district and our community funds in the long run;
- Significant improvements are required to make all of our schools safer and to protect our community's investments in our buildings and grounds; and
- We have opportunities to enrich teaching and learning for all students.

Before we make our recommendation for a levy to put before voters possibly as early as fall 2014, we want to hear your reactions to our project ideas.

Task Force meeting minutes and a list of all committee members are posted at:
<http://methow.org/2014/05/14/methow-valley-school-district-facilities-task-force/>

PROJECT IDEAS

Our Task Force is considering the following ideas to improve the educational experience of students throughout our district. The first four items would be part of a **Capital Improvements Levy**, and the fifth would be a stand-alone **Transportation/Vehicle Fund Levy**.

Capital Improvements Levy

1.

INVEST IN IMPROVEMENTS TO METHOW VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Built in 1963 as the high school, MVES has undergone major renovations in 1978 and 1994. Twenty years later we also find a building that has been remarkably well-cared for but is in need of some basic attention to ensure safety, provide responsible maintenance, and enhance teaching and learning.

Among our priorities for improvements at MVES are: fixing the Cub gym heater and insulation, installing entries to the gym for public access, replacing the flooring in the school, addressing safety and efficiency needs in the kitchen, ensuring all spaces have the emergency safety notification system, dryvit/soffit repairs along the roofline, upgrades to existing technology infrastructure, and providing classroom furniture that "fits" our students and the growing class sizes. By continuing to care for this building we can protect an important community asset.

COST ESTIMATE: \$1.5 million

2.

INVEST IN IMPROVEMENTS TO LIBERTY BELL HIGH SCHOOL

Built in 1995, the LBHS roof has required a lot of attention and these essential repairs have consumed recent facilities related bonds and levies. Other improvements, however, are necessary for safety reasons, to protect our existing assets, and to further support current teaching and learning.

Examples of improvements and maintenance required at LBHS are: replacing the flooring (19 years old and never replaced), repairing cracked sidewalks, addressing the kitchen's needs for improved safety and efficiency, replacing a chiller that no longer works, providing temperature control for our district-wide technology server room, updating the weight room (which requires equipment upgrades and currently uses makeshift horse stall mats as flooring), safety updates in our tech ed classrooms, upgrades to existing technology infrastructure, and classroom furniture to support project-based, collaborative learning.

COST ESTIMATE: \$1.5 million



ABOVE: A relic from Allen Elementary, the kitchen mixer exemplifies one of many recommended improvements to kitchen safety and efficiency.



ABOVE: At 19 years old, the flooring at LBHS is well beyond its expected life and due for replacement.

3.

INVEST IN IMPROVEMENTS AT THE TWISP CAMPUS (THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING CENTER AND THE BUS BARN)

Housed in one room between the Methow Valley Community Center and the Bus Barn, the ILC's 25 current students are tight on space. We recognize that a long-term solution is necessary, but as the district contemplates future growth for the ILC, we are suggesting short-term improvements like classroom furniture, upgrades to existing technology infrastructure, and storage to improve efficiencies and increased Career & Technical training opportunities at this time.

The Bus Barn includes a wooden bus garage that is no longer useful and, in fact, gets in the way of using the repair bays efficiently. We recommend removing this structure and providing basic enhancements to the staff area in the repair bays.

COST ESTIMATE: \$250 thousand

Task Force Timeline





ABOVE: The pea gravel currently in use at MVES playground creates accessibility issues and is a major factor in the wear and tear on district cleaning equipment.



ABOVE: Our aging bus fleet sits just in front of a wooden structure that is no longer useful and limits both the versatility of our Bus Barn facility and accessibility to the ILC.

4.

IMPROVE CAMPUS GROUNDS AT LIBERTY BELL JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL AND METHOW VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

We are fortunate to have 110 acres of fields and play areas and we embrace the idea that our school campus serves the whole community. Like all homeowners know, however, maintaining this many acres takes time and attention.

We have several grounds-related priorities including:

Repairing the tennis courts at MVES

– these courts are used not only by our tennis team and PE classes, but also by a significant number of community members. The courts have deep surface cracking and need immediate attention in order to avoid a complete rebuild.

Update the MVES playground to be ADA compliant and to provide more opportunities for children to play

– our current playground is not accessible for children with special physical needs and improving the playground was noted as a top priority by students at MVES.

Resurface our Track at LBHS

– the track was originally installed with an expected life of 10 years. Now 19 years

old, it is so damaged that at a recent home track meet, athletes could not use the regular starting or finish lines.

Add a regulation soccer field next to the Baseball field

– this field could be used by high school teams and for youth community soccer as demand for field space in the Valley rises beyond supply. Currently our soccer field is shared with football and track, creating practice conflicts in season.

COST ESTIMATE: \$1.25 million



ABOVE/BELOW: Large cracks and deteriorated surfaces put the track and the MVES tennis courts very near the end of servicable use.



Transportation/ Vehicle Fund Levy

5.

ENSURE SAFE AND EFFICIENT STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

Our current buses are an average of 10 years old. Several buses are so old that we no longer receive state support for their maintenance and repair. As a result, we spend \$30-\$40K each year out of our General Fund to pay for repair on buses that other districts would have retired or surplussed. This is money that could be better spent on teaching and learning. Our Task Force recommends the district purchase six propane buses over the next two years to start the process of updating our fleet. New propane buses will generate significant savings in the areas of both fuel and repair costs; they will also qualify for state "depreciation" funds, allowing us to continue to replace our fleet over time.

We also recognize that given our district's large geographic area and relatively small student population, having a motor pool with 10-passenger vans and vehicles would allow us to transport smaller groups of students without always having to take buses. We recommend purchasing three 10-passenger vans and three cars. These purchases can help us realize significant cost savings over sending buses for smaller group activities.

COST ESTIMATE: \$1 million

Frequently Asked Questions

The process inspired many questions from committee and community members alike. If you were unable to attend an open house, or to listen in on sub-committee presentations to the School Board, here are several of the most frequently asked questions. Discover more about the process online at www.methow.org.

Q: How would all of this be funded and how would this affect me?

A: Across the state, school facilities projects are primarily paid for by voter-approved bonds or levies. Currently, the 2014 tax rate for schools in the Methow Valley is \$1.72 per \$1,000 of assessed property value - the lowest rate in Okanogan County and the lowest among all districts in the state with a similar assessed value.

The Facilities Planning Task Force is recommending two levies to be on the ballot as early as this fall:

- 1.) A 1 million dollar Transportation/Vehicle Fund Levy; and
- 2.) A 4.5 million dollar Capital Improvements Levy.

By law, the Transportation Levy may only be used for the purchase of district vehicles and is a two year levy. For 2015 and 2016, this levy would result in a tax increase of **\$.39 per \$1,000** of assessed property value in our school district. We are also recommending a 4-year Capital Improvements Levy, which would result in a tax increase of approximately **\$.87 per \$1,000** of assessed property value.

The committee recommends a capital levy because it is more cost effective than a bond for these types of projects. Unlike a bond, a capital levy provides resources on a "pay as you go" system and therefore does not accrue any interest expenses.

Q: How have recent levies and bonds been used in our district?

A: A **2009 Bond** was used for a new roof at LBHS. A **2010 Capital Projects/Technology Levy** funded technology infrastructure upgrades, the IT Technology position, roof repairs at MVES, and the purchase of iPads, classroom computers, and Video Production/Digital Photography equipment. The **2012 Technology Levy** further supported campus technology via equipment purchases, instructional resources, and staff development. And finally, the most recent **2012 Bond** allowed for heating systems upgrades at MVES and lighting upgrades district wide - resulting in significant annual energy savings - and fire suppression system upgrades at both MVES and LBHS.

Q: Are all of these projects necessary right now?

A: Yes, the Task Force believes they are. As we have dealt with the real crises of the LBHS roof and as we have endured more and more cuts from state funding, we have relied on the patience and creativity of our staff and students to "hold off" on necessary improvements. Several deferred items have now reached a tipping point. We face significant repairs (e.g., the chiller, the buses, track, tennis courts, etc.) and without making these investments we risk either serious safety liabilities or cutting back on the options available to our students. The Task Force has carefully studied and prioritized the school district's needs. We believe that none of these recommendations are luxury items - these are basic, fiscally responsible needs. We have an amazing school system and we should take pride in it by ensuring that our facilities match the caliber of our students, teachers, staff and community.

Share Your Thoughts

We want to make sure that our recommendations make wise use of limited resources, are prioritized according to greatest need, and support our students.

Tell us what you think of the ideas we have outlined.

**Please attend the community input session on Wednesday, July 16
from 6-7pm at Methow Valley Elementary School.**

Or, submit comments and ideas online at www.methow.org by July 18.