

## Executive Summary

The Community Project Review Committee (CPRC) is a group of Beaufort County volunteers who responded to invitations from Board of Education members, school principals and district staff. CPRC members came from all areas of the district and included a wide range of personal and professional experience.

In total, CPRC members invested approximately 900 man-hours in producing the recommendations that were sent to Interim Superintendent Berg. They met 10 times – and visited 19 district schools and seven schools in Charleston and Lexington counties – as they worked to achieve five goals:

1. Review the school district's Capital Improvement Plan project list published December 2018.
2. Review architects' reports on projects to add to the list.
3. Discuss equity issues as they relate to projects.
4. Review the basic standards for all district classrooms.
5. Finalize a district-wide project list and report to Interim Superintendent Herb Berg.

CPRC members received presentations from a safety and security consulting firm, a demographer, four architectural consultants, the Town of Bluffton, a playground equipment vendor, a furniture vendor and district staff.

After making school site visits, reviewing presentations from outside experts and evaluating potential projects across the Beaufort County School District, CPRC members identified a total of \$629 million in district-wide facilities needs.

The CPRC also assigned overarching priorities to those projects based on their importance to ensuring student and staff safety, maintaining equitable school facilities in all parts of the district, improving student achievement and enhancing educator effectiveness. In descending order of emphasis, those CPRC-identified priorities were:

1. Safety and security
2. Replacement schools
3. Additions
4. Renovations
5. Technology infrastructure
6. CATE
7. New school
8. Furniture
9. Athletics
10. Playgrounds
11. Parking lots/driveways/sidewalks
12. Riverview Charter School gym
13. Land for a future school

## Site visits

- Charleston County – CPRC members toured an elementary school renovation as well as two schools – one a traditional elementary and the other a K-8 Montessori – that shared centralized core facilities, including a common cafeteria and media center.
- Lexington District 2 (Cayce/West Columbia) – CPRC members toured a new elementary school, a new Career and Technology Education (CATE) center, a renovated CATE center and renovated athletics facilities at a high school.
- Beaufort County School District schools – A total of 19 schools were visited by CRPC members.

## Presentations

- Safety and security – Centurion Defense Solutions, a consulting firm contracted to complete vulnerability assessments on district schools, focused on safety and security deficiencies and the costs associated with upgrading security systems.
- Demographics – McKibben Demographic Research, LLC, a consulting firm, presented long-range enrollment forecasts for the district.
- Priority schools – Four architectural firms – Jumper, Carter and Sease Architects; Red Iron Architects; McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture; and FWA Group – completed comprehensive facilities assessments for six district schools identified as needing major overhauls and modernization (HHIHS, HHMS, BCHS, RSIA, LIMS, BES).
- Technology – District staff developed a cost estimate for updating the technology infrastructure at the six priority schools. Those estimates were used to estimate costs to update technology at all district schools.
- Career and Technology Education (CATE) – District CATE Director Karen Gilbert made two presentations, one of those including input from a community business owner who discussed local workforce needs.
- Playgrounds – Churchich Recreation completed an assessment of playground equipment and surfaces at district schools.
- Athletics facilities – McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture completed an assessment of athletics facilities to see what would be needed to establish district-wide equity and to bring athletics facilities up to the standards at other South Carolina school districts.
- Furniture – A vendor currently on contract with the district provided cost estimates to replace furniture at all district schools.
- Bluffton growth – The Town of Bluffton presented on new home construction and commercial development. Beaufort County's planning department also submitted a presentation on growth in unincorporated areas. District staff reviewed student enrollment projections in Bluffton.
- Taxpayer impact – Chief Finance Officer Tonya Crosby presented data showing potential impacts on county taxpayers for a range of referendum totals. Ms. Crosby also discussed how possible shortfalls in 2018-19 operating revenues could affect 2019-20 millage rates.

## Overall points of consensus

CPRC members reached consensus on a range of overarching statements:

- We come from every community in Beaufort County and represent a broad cross-section of its residents – men and women, parents of school-age children and nonparents, working professionals and retirees, homeowners and renters, Republicans and Democrats. We are not a political body, and our findings are not intended to send any sort of political message.
- We are a group of community members who devoted considerable time and effort to:
  1. Independently and objectively evaluating the current conditions of the Beaufort County School District's facilities.
  2. Reviewing information provided by independent outside authorities.
  3. Comparing our district's facilities with those in two other South Carolina districts with roughly equivalent or higher poverty rates.
  4. Assigning priorities to facilities needs across Beaufort County.
- While some members had questions about specific projects, those we have identified and prioritized generally represent the school district's "needs" and not its "wants." These projects are necessary to:
  1. Improve safety and security for students and staff in ever-changing environments.
  2. Provide district-wide equity so students' home addresses do not determine the quality of their schools' classrooms and other facilities.
  3. Help reduce achievement gaps by providing equal opportunities for all students.
  4. Limit tax increases by preserving district assets for future generations. To paraphrase the old saying, "A dime of prevention is worth a dollar of cure."
- Growing school districts ideally need facilities bond referendum revenues every four to five years in order to preserve existing resources and accommodate growth. The most efficient and economical approach to addressing facilities needs is a consistent, multiyear plan.
- While student enrollment in Beaufort County has increased steadily, the school district has not had a successful bond referendum in 11 years. Accordingly, we have let our children down when it comes to providing high-quality facilities and maintaining those facilities.
- The last two referendums failed not because voters disagreed with the specific needs of schools or students, but because voters lacked confidence in the district's Board of Education and superintendent. Since the most recent unsuccessful referendum vote in November 2018, the Board of Education has seen a significant transition in its membership. In addition, the Board recently selected a new superintendent to lead the district.
- Voter rejection of future bond referendums will not change the district's facilities needs. And the longer we wait to address those needs, the more expensive that process will become and the more conditions will deteriorate.