

The Flume – The Park County Republican and Fairplay Flume

Re-2 reviewing all school facilities

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The Fairplay-based Re-2 School District is in the process of looking at what to do with all its Fairplay school facilities - not just the high school - and a look at charter school facilities in Lake George and Guffey are part of the process, said Re-2 Superintendent Charles Soper in a Jan. 20 interview.

Soper stressed that nothing has been decided with regard to what to do about the school district's facilities, and public input will be needed before any decisions are made.

There are a number of possibilities, he said, but one idea being examined is the construction of a new high school-middle school complex on the existing football field and remodeling the South Park High School building to house the elementary school.

The Silverheels Middle School building and the additions to the Edith Teter Elementary School building might be torn down, he said, and the original Edith Teter building, which was built in 1880, might be preserved as a historic building. It's the oldest operating school building in the state.

That's just one possible scenario, he said. In that scenario, a new athletic complex would be needed for the high school - which now doesn't have a regulation track or a football field big enough to be used as a soccer field. And it's possible that the school district could partner with the Town of Fairplay or Park County in creating other community uses for such a complex.

"The school district is very serious about discussing dual-use options with the Town of Fairplay and Park County - for example, recreational facilities, opportunities for adult education and college course work, and maybe library facilities," said Soper.

Bud Jankiewicz, a South Park High School social studies teacher who is chairman of the Facilities Review and Planning Committee for the district, said that the Colorado Department of Education "encourages dual-use collaboration efforts between the communities and the school districts."

That's partly because dual-use facilities form more of a tie between the schools and the community, he said.

The state has a funding mechanism called "Building Excellent Schools Today," or BEST, that could provide as much as 27 percent of the funding for new facilities. "They're more likely to supply assistance to the schools that meet the parameters they encourage," Jankiewicz said. That includes dual-use facilities - used by the school and the community - and high performance in energy efficiency.

Jankiewicz declined to provide an estimate on costs because the process is still in its infancy.

One possible step, if the district can come up with the money, would be to hire an architect and engineer to produce different options and conceptual designs to look at.

"We're not at the point where we're going to build a new this or a new that," Jankiewicz said. "The community may say, 'just renovate,' or 'live with it.'"

And "community" does not necessarily mean Fairplay alone. It could also mean Guffey and Lake George, each of which has a charter school within the Re-2 district.

"The charter schools, by law, have to be invited to participate in this process," he added.

The Colorado Department of Education has contracted with a company to grade every school building in the state, and Re-2 has requested that an assessment be performed on its buildings as soon in 2009 as possible.

Jankiewicz could provide no firm timeline, but he said that the idea would be to get a bond issue on the November 2009 ballot if public input indicates that course of action is merited.

The facilities committee has been meeting for several months as part of a process that started last July, Jankiewicz said.

He's enthusiastic about the work the committee has done. "We have really talented people on the committee," he said. Among them are retired contractor Charles Schultz and governor's energy office volunteer Foss Smith.

The committee has been developing a facilities master plan so that it can understand "the state of the district, and what needs to be looked at and what needs to be fixed," said Jankiewicz.

"We're trying to make ourselves smart first," he added.

Foundation findings

As noted in the Jan. 19, 2007, Flume, the Denver-based Donnell Kay Foundation found that the Edith Teter building was inadequate, that other district buildings had many needed repairs, and that the obsolete facilities were partly responsible for parents in the area opting for Breckenridge schools.

At the time, Soper said he agreed with the general findings and that he planned to establish a facilities research committee to help figure out what to do.

The foundation's Edith Teter findings were part of a comprehensive study on the condition of classrooms for grades K-12 in Colorado's public schools.

On the foundation's Web site, www.crumblingclassrooms.com, the building underwent the following scathing review:

"Edith Teter Elementary School in Fairplay, Colo., was built in 1880 and is the oldest continuously operating elementary school in the state. The district would like to donate the historic stone building to the town or state historical society to serve as a museum. It is a fine example of 19th century architecture, but it is not an adequate educational facility for 21st century learning. To begin with, the school is 25 percent over capacity, requiring classrooms in trailers for the overflow. Inside the antique building are tiny classrooms, sufficient for the population of a 19th century mining town on the frontier, but not nearly large enough to allow for modern educational curriculum. ...

"... In addition to desperately needing a new modern elementary school, the other district buildings have a long list of needed repairs and renovations as well. Due in part to its obsolete facilities, the district has lost 10% of its students as some parents would rather drive their children over the pass to Breckenridge and its new state-of-the-art schools."

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