



## Executive Summary

As a result of the small group work activity

Community Engagement Session #4 • September 14, 2022

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On Sept. 14, 2022, 145 people participated in the fourth Unite U-46 community engagement session. Participants learned more about District finances from the District's Deputy Superintendent of Operations, Dr. Ann Williams, a recap of what we have learned and heard during the Unite U-46 process and a series of plans that could move our school buildings forward. Twenty-three people attended in person, and 122 logged in for the virtual session via Zoom.

Following the presentation, participants worked in nine small groups virtually and in person to complete the tasks discussed below. To view the presentation and verbatim responses, visit [UniteU46.org](http://UniteU46.org). Following is a summary of the responses from the groups.

### **Task #1: Finances**

**What are three things you learned tonight about U-46 finances that you think should be better communicated to those who live in our school district? What additional questions do you still have about school finances in U-46?**

The responses to the first task about what participants thought should be better communicated were varied, but there were some common themes. Five groups mentioned the district's positive financial health and budget management, while three groups mentioned the availability of surplus funding or savings. Six groups suggested sharing details about how school funding works, including where funding comes from, how taxes are broken down, the use of reserves and comparisons to neighboring districts. Four groups referenced sharing options/plans being considered for accomplishing future improvements.

When discussing additional questions participants had about school finances in U-46, four groups asked about the inequality of state funding and the differences between funding and budgets between counties. Two groups asked questions about the U-46 budget, including how it was developed and how any changes might impact funding for areas such as maintenance, special programs such as PreK and gifted, and salary and benefits. Two groups also wanted to know specifics on bond issue funding. One group asked about considerations for student-teacher ratios and enrollment projections for the future, while another asked about proposed professional development for teachers and staff, as well as a "what is the proposal to improve the school food service?"

## **Task #2: Plans**

**Please come to consensus and rank the plans (A,B,C) presented this evening with 1 being your most preferred and 3 being your least preferred. Why did you choose plan \_\_\_\_\_ as your most preferred plan? Please provide two pros and two cons for each of the plans presented:**

When asked to reach a consensus and rank the three plans presented, five groups chose Plan B as their most preferred plan, while three chose Plan C as the most preferred. One group was split between plans B and C. Six out of the nine groups chose Plan A as their least preferred. None chose Plan A as their most preferred choice.

Among the groups that selected B as their most preferred plan, three groups said the plan provided more “bang for your buck” and would accomplish more; two groups noted the plan would not require a tax rate increase; and two said it would be easier to “convince” the public. One group said it would improve infrastructure at all schools, and another said it would cause the least amount of disturbance. One group said they were equally split on choices and ranked them by math.

Among the groups that selected C as their preferred choice, two groups noted how the plan addressed needs at the middle school; two mentioned comprehensive, long-term benefits and the equity of the plan; and another said the plan addressed technology needs.

In the area of pros and cons for each plan, participants had many responses. In listing pros for Plan A, six groups mentioned the plan was cheap and easy, requiring no tax increase and no referendum, and two groups touted additional classrooms for PreK. Other pros listed by one group each included the following: the plan is already in the works; it’s least disruptive to students; and it “addresses most significant needs economically.” Among the cons for Plan A, six groups said it doesn’t address the needs at the middle school level; four groups said it was a “Band Aid” and didn’t address long-term needs; four groups said it doesn’t address all needs or do enough (i.e., class size and before- and after-care); and two groups said it doesn’t address technology needs. One group was concerned about the changes to the students’ environment, another group listed the transition from elementary to secondary; and one group was concerned about the risk to PreK block grants with responsibility for applying being shifted to elementary principals.

As the most preferred plan by a small majority of groups, Plan B had the most comments regarding pros and cons. In citing the benefits of Plan B, five groups said B was the most comprehensive plan, providing the most renovations and affecting the most students. Four groups noted the plan would not require a tax rate increase and four groups touted the increase in funding for maintenance, safety and security. Two groups noted the potential improvements to school boundaries. One group each noted the following as being pros: addresses immediate needs; removes old buildings; more items addressing elementary needs; “somewhat” addresses technology needs in buildings; ability to have a new building; and finally, the likelihood of success.

In expressing concerns with Plan B, five groups noted the plan does not fully address the middle school needs. Three groups cited concerns about the cost of the program and the potential

need to use reserve funds. Three groups also noted the need for a longer-term plan to address the future needs of students. Two groups were concerned about the transition and movement of students while the elementary schools were being built. One group each noted the following as being cons: “Lack of schedule for other buildings not touched (maybe 3-5 years per building);” requires referendum; PreK model needing to be full day; and the closure of the high school to the transition of the other schools being a long way off. One group said they did not want the closure of Hanover Countryside, while another asked if the transportation would be round-trip when closing preschools.

When considering Plan C, four groups listed each of the following as pros: addresses all schools and brings them up-to-date; provides modern middle schools to address middle school needs; and has potential community investment benefits such as improved quality of education, increased enrollment and enhanced property values. Three groups noted the emotional benefits of student morale, pride and identity that come with a new school. One group noted the plan is long-term, and another said Plan C would provide the most comprehensive technology for student success.

In the area of concerns, six out of nine groups were concerned Plan C would be difficult to convince voters to support because it costs the most and requires a tax rate increase. Individual concerns noted by at least one group were: focuses exclusively on infrastructure; doesn’t address equalizing sizes of districts; boundary change headaches; lack of full-day PreK programs; and most disruptive to students. One group suggested if the district selected Plan C, to provide a calculator so taxpayers could determine their exact tax impact if approved.

### **Consensus Points**

- U-46 should continue communicating information about the District’s finances to its stakeholders. Specifically, the community should be well-informed about the district’s positive financial health, budget management and details about how school funding works.
- The most preferred plan by Unite U-46 participants was Plan B. The least preferred option was Plan A. Many of the groups liked that Plan C addresses all schools, including the middle schools, but felt it would be difficult to convince voters to support it because it costs the most and requires a tax rate increase
- Plan B is the most comprehensive plan, providing the most renovations and affecting the most students without requiring a tax rate increase. The plan also allows for an increase in funding for maintenance, safety and security. However, Plan B does not fully address the middle school needs, and requires the use of reserve funds. There is also a need for a longer-term plan to address the future needs of students.

**For a complete listing of all responses,  
see the CES #4 Verbatim Response Document on the website, [UniteU46.org](http://UniteU46.org)**