

SCHOOL DISTRICT U-46



# PROCESS UPDATE

## ► The Process

### Unite U-46

A community-led initiative to develop recommendations about the best way to implement the U-46 Board of Education vision.

#### Anchors For Achieving the U-46 Vision:

- Move 6th grade to middle schools to improve the educational experience
- Provide an equitable experience for all elementary students
- Review elementary schools' ability to accommodate districtwide preschool program

## ► The Plan

In early 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, U-46 embarked on an Educational Facility Master Plan (EFMP) process with DLR Group, a Chicago-based design firm. This process assessed the District's:

- Infrastructure
- Classrooms
- Overall facility use
- Efficiency

It also provided a review of the readiness of our facilities to meet the District's vision.

On Jan. 24, 2022, the Board of Education unanimously approved a resolution confirming their support of a five-year implementation plan that meets our District's vision.

We understand this shift will not be an easy task, and we need the engagement and feedback of our community.

School District U-46 will host Unite U-46 Community Engagement Sessions throughout the spring and fall of 2022 to explain this five-year plan and provide an opportunity for our community to develop recommendations on the best way to implement this plan.

## Timeline

### 2018

Vision of the Board recognized declining enrollment, aging buildings.

### 2020

DLR Group hired to develop educational facilities master plan.

### 2021

DLR completed an in-depth review and analysis of District facilities and presented findings to the Board.

### 2022

Board accepted District leadership recommendations to move forward with the DLR plan, engage with the community, support the move to the middle school model and redraw boundaries for the first middle school transition.

Unite U-46 community engagement program launched.

## ► Spring 2022 Community Engagement Sessions

Three Unite U-46 Community Engagement Sessions were held in April and May at the U-46 Welcome Center. There was also a virtual option via Zoom for each session. The sessions were:

### April 27

- Welcome to Unite U-46
- Overview of U-46 and Our Buildings
- Presenters:
  - Unite U-46 Community Chairs
  - U-46 Superintendent Dr. Tony Sanders

### May 11

- How Our School Buildings Impact Student Success
- Presenters:
  - Keri VanSant, Project Manager, DLR Group
  - B Sanders, Design Research Leader, DLR Group

### May 25

- The Whys Behind preschool and Middle School
- Presenters:
  - Dr. Josh Carpenter, U-46 Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning
  - Katie Cox, U-46 Director of Early Learners
  - Lela Majstorovic, U-46 Assistant Superintendent of Schools

More than 500 participants attended one of the first three Unite U-46 community engagement sessions in person or virtually. Everyone is encouraged to join the process as it continues in the fall.



## ► What We Learned

In the first three community engagement sessions, Unite U-46 participants learned more about the District as a whole, how facilities impact learning and the whys behind preschool and middle school. The key information learned included:



### Enrollment

- U-46 serves approximately 36,000 students who live within a 90 square mile area that encompasses 11 communities in three counties.
- Enrollment in the District is declining mainly because of falling birth rates. This is currently impacting the District's elementary schools and will eventually affect the middle and high schools.
- Building capacity throughout U-46 varies greatly, with eight schools at 99-113% capacity and six at 51-62% capacity.

### Finance

- U-46 has an annual budget of approximately \$660 million and around \$400 million in reserves.
- The District has a strong AA S&P bond rating.
- U-46 has received the financial recognition designation from the Illinois State Board of Education annually since 2012.
- U-46's tax rate is similar to most surrounding school districts.

## ► What We Learned, *continued*

### Facilities

- U-46 owns and operates more than 57 buildings. The square footage of these buildings is equivalent to the size of 14 Soldier Fields.
- The District's schools were built during different eras starting in 1887.
- The biggest challenges facing U-46 facilities are:
  - Aging facilities that no longer meet the instructional needs of students
  - Need for additional annual spending on facility maintenance and operations
  - Uneven capacity use among the schools
  - Program placement is often based on where space is available
  - No middle school in the southern portion of our District
  - Limited preschool opportunities
  - Inequitable access for our students
- Buildings being recommended for replacement and retirement are among the oldest in the District and have the following:
  - Smallest site acreage
  - Lowest square footage per student
  - Lowest average projected enrollment
  - Least amount of space for expansion
  - Lowest overall building scores from the DLR findings
- U-46 is currently updating some of its facilities not slated for retirement or replacement to make them more flexible and adaptable for students by replacing furniture and equipment.
- The following buildings are being recommended for retirement within the next two years:
  - Garfield Elementary
  - Hanover Countryside Elementary
  - Illinois Park/More at 4
- The following buildings are being recommended for updating or rebuilding within the next five years:
  - Lowrie Elementary
  - McKinley Elementary

- Washington Elementary
- Glenbrook Elementary
- Century Oaks Elementary
- Parkwood Elementary

### Preparing Students For The Future

- 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't been invented yet.
- Teaching and learning today have a more student-centered approach than in the past.
- Students today benefit from hands-on, collaborative learning environments that are flexible and adaptable to their learning styles and infused with technology.

### Transitioning To Middle School

- To improve the educational experience, sixth grade will move to the middle schools.
- There are significant changes and growth in 10 to 15 years olds. Besides infancy, it is the most significant period of change in the human lifespan.
- Currently, 69.6% of middle schools in the United States serve grades 6 through 8.
- The middle school teaching and learning model is team-based through the use of both student teams and teacher teams. Students are grouped in small learning communities of 120-150 that share the same 4-5 teachers in their core content areas.
- This focused collaboration allows teachers to better understand and know each student and identify and meet their needs, providing additional supports when necessary.
- Students have the opportunity to engage in hands-on learning through a variety of elective courses and extracurricular activities.
- Incoming middle school students are welcomed through the summer middle school experience, where they are introduced to their new school by engaging in team-building and

academically and socially focused activities.



### Expanding Preschool

- 90% of a child's brain development occurs before age five.
- Developmental gaps between higher- and lower-income children can be observed among children as young as nine months old.
- Preschool at the elementary schools provides an opportunity for early interventions and collaboration among teachers.
- U-46 currently offers preschool to three and four-year-olds at three early learning centers within six elementary buildings. Full-day preschool is provided at two locations.
- The half-day program is two and a half hours, and one-way transportation is provided. The full-day program is the same length as an elementary day, but the start and end times are adjusted to allow for two-way transportation. Both of these scenarios present challenges to working parents and guardians.
- The U-46 preschool program can currently serve 1,360 students. There are 9,853 3- to 5-year-olds in the U-46 community, with nearly 3,000 living at 185% or below the federal poverty level (\$48,470 for a family of four).

Housing preschool within every elementary building provides opportunities for more students. With the shift of sixth-graders to the middle school, there is room to do this within existing buildings.



## ► What We Heard

Following an informational presentation at each session, Unite U-46 participants worked in small groups of four to eight to complete a series of discussion activities. The following are the points of general agreement from Unite U-46 participants from the tasks at each session.

### CES #1: Welcome to Unite U-46 and an Overview of U-46 and Our Buildings

- Overall, participants were surprised by:
  - The age of U-46's buildings
  - The District's strong financial standing and reserve balance
  - The need to retire, rebuild or renovate many district buildings
- Unite U-46 participants are concerned about, want to learn more about and discuss how the transition to updated buildings and preschool and middle school will occur and how it will impact students and staff. They would also like to learn more about the rationale behind moving to the middle school and preschool models and why it is beneficial for student success.
- The topic of finances should be explored during the Unite U-46 process, including how building updates could be funded and the overall investment to retire, renovate and repurpose existing buildings to meet the needs of students now and in the future.
- Through the Unite U-46 process, the topics of specialized programs, class size, the impact of boundary changes, safety and security, sustainability and equity, and how these topics impact school buildings should be explored and discussed.

### CES #2: How Our School Buildings Impact Student Success

- As Unite U-46 develops its recommendations for our school buildings, the future needs of students and teachers should be incorporated. This includes developing collaborative, flexible spaces that encourage group and self-learning, spaces that adapt to changing technology and spaces that integrate with the outdoors and nature.
- Knowing the building update criteria that involve overall safety and security, ADA accessibility, and indoor environmental quality (temperature controls, ventilation, lighting, etc.) will be addressed with any building updates or new construction, Unite U-46 participants believe the following criteria should be the top 10 areas for consideration as recommendations are developed:
  - Improve equitable access to programs at more buildings districtwide.
  - Ensure existing facilities are proactively maintained.
  - Integrate flexible, age-appropriate furniture to support teaching and learning.
  - Replace buildings where the condition has reached the point where they are more expensive to repair or renovate than replace.
  - Improve outdoor spaces, including playgrounds and greenspace.
  - Balance enrollment at buildings throughout the District by reducing class sizes where needed.
  - Update schools to support the increasing technology needs of our students, such as maker spaces, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) labs, etc.
  - Improve traffic circulation at school sites, including parking and drop-off and pick-up access.
  - Provide a variety of learning environments, including collaborative and outdoor learning spaces to support best practices for teaching and learning.
  - When appropriate, update existing infrastructure and systems such as roofs, HVAC systems and plumbing to extend their useful life.

## Hawk Hollow Elementary

Hawk Hollow Elementary will be the first U-46 school building to transition to the new middle school model.

It was selected as the first because there is no middle school in the southern part of the District and nearby Prairievew Elementary is under capacity.

Funding is available to update the building through District reserves.

By adding Hawk Hollow as a middle school, there will be enough room to implement the middle school model districtwide.

2022-23 will be the last year Hawk Hollow will operate as an elementary school.

Based on new boundaries, current Hawk Hollow Elementary students will attend Prairievew or Spring Trail Elementary starting in August 2023.

The new middle school in the Hawk Hollow building will open in the fall of 2024.



## ► What We Heard, continued

### CES #3: The Whys Behind Preschool and Middle School

- U-46 should ensure support and education for the whole child as they transition to the middle school model and expanded preschool offerings. This should include the development of social and emotional, problem-solving and collaborative teamwork skills for every child.
- Students should be supported by high-quality teachers and staff who are well-trained and certified to teach preschool and middle school.
- Middle school students should be offered and exposed to a variety of elective and extracurricular activities.
- Preschool students should have basic academic readiness as they advance to kindergarten.
- The safety of both middle school and preschool students should be a priority as these programs are developed and expanded.



# BE A PART OF THE PROCESS

### Building Tour

**Saturday, Sept. 24 • 9 a.m.-12 p.m.**

Details at [UniteU46.org](http://UniteU46.org)

### Open House

**Thursday, Sept. 29 • 5-8 p.m.** Details  
at [UniteU46.org](http://UniteU46.org)

### Upcoming Unite U-46 Community Engagement Sessions

#### September 14

CES #4: How School Building  
Improvements Are Funded & Options  
for Moving Forward

#### October 19

CES #5: Refine Options to Move Forward

#### November 9

CES #6: Selection of Final  
Recommendations

**All sessions are held from 7-9 p.m.  
at the U-46 Welcome Center.**



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**Let's Talk!**

[u-46.org/letstalk](http://u-46.org/letstalk)