

**FACILITY AND GRADE LEVEL CONFIGURATION
COMMUNITY TASK FORCE REPORT**

**Primary Focus Area Two:
Facility and Grade Level Configuration Model
Moorhead Area Public Schools**

Final Report

December 4, 2001

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I. Background

From October 2000 to February 2001, Roger Worner Associates, Sartell, Minnesota, conducted an Organizational Analysis Study for the Moorhead Area Public Schools. The purpose of the study was to gather and analyze school district data, present findings, draw conclusions, identify alternatives, and prepare recommendations that would lead to decisions about the future of the school district's programs, services, staffing, grade level configuration, facilities, and other operational characteristics to ensure the delivery of quality teaching/learning, community, social, and recreational opportunities for the school district's preschool, school-aged, and adult populations.

As a result of the study, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Larry Nybladh recommended a decision making process organized around eight Primary Focus Areas. Our Primary Focus Area, Facility and Grade Level Configuration, used the Community Task Force approach, which involved community collaboration and consensus for its decision making process.

Members of the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Community Task Force were:

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The purpose of the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force was to research, examine, and consider alternative options to Moorhead Area Public Schools' use of facilities and grade level configuration in an effort to maximize educational effectiveness and economic efficiencies, as well as to position the district for a positive future. Our task force received and considered reports from:

- A. Student Demographics Community Task Force
- B. Administrative Project on Current / Future Facility Analysis
- C. Middle School Model Research Study Group and Community Task Force
- D. High School Enhancement Research Study Group and Community Task Force
- E. Alternative Education Delivery Model Community Task Force
- F. Administrative Project on Operational and Capital Revenue Analysis

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force provides the following findings and recommendations regarding the most appropriate facility and grade level configuration plan for the future of the Moorhead Area Public Schools.

II. Introduction

Providing an environment to *effectively educate* children in an *economically efficient* manner will be a key to the future of any school district, including Moorhead Area Public Schools. Successfully balancing these two aspects of educational effectiveness and economic efficiency in administering the school district will require the appropriate infrastructure.

Increasing costs for educational programs and services, declining student enrollment and uncertain state political support for public education are current trends that negatively impact the Moorhead School District, as well as the majority of Minnesota school districts. The reversal of these negative trends does not appear likely in the foreseeable future and, unless the Moorhead School District takes action to proactively address the impact of these trends, there is a distinct risk of jeopardizing the educational quality and opportunity to which the Moorhead community has become accustomed. In order to meet the expectations of the public and the educational needs of our students it is time to invest in our district's infrastructure.

Moorhead's school district buildings, with an average age of 40+ years, are of an era in which school system design, educational delivery and building construction were conceptually very much different than that which is recommended currently. The current facility and grade level configuration in the Moorhead school system does not adequately address the programs and services that are offered or mandated by the state. Many of these programs and services did not even exist when a majority of our school buildings were built. The district has been forced to configure grade levels based upon the availability of classroom space rather than the most effective method of grouping children and providing programs and services. This has created educational disparities among our students and, in some instances, forced the district to sacrifice quality education time due to students being transported to different sites for various programs during the school day.

The current number of school buildings in relation to enrollment has created excessive operational expenses. These operational inefficiencies have caused the school district to expend limited resources on buildings instead of students. By reducing the number of facilities that the school district currently operates, the district will be able to more effectively balance class size, maintain class size targets, and offer additional services and programs. The proper facility infrastructure will also position the school district for future enrollment changes, up or down.

The citizens of Moorhead are at a crossroads. The community must determine what level of investment to make in one of the most important aspects of our community. What type of educational environment and opportunity do we want to create for the children of our community? What statement about education do we want to make to prospective families and businesses that look at Moorhead as their future home? That is the basis for the findings and recommendations of this Task Force.

III. Grade Level Configuration

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that the Moorhead School District reorganize its present grade level configuration of a K-4/5, 5-6, 7-8, 9-12 design to a K-5, 6-8, 9-12 design.

Rationale:

- The recommended configuration would allow for the full implementation of a middle school model for students in grades 6-8 as recommended by the Middle School Model Community Task Force. See the Middle School Model Community Task Force report (attached).
- The recommended configuration would be aligned with the Minnesota Graduation Standards. The Minnesota Graduation Standards are grouped by the following levels:
 - Primary Standards: K-3
 - Intermediate Standards: 4-5
 - Middle Standards: 6-8
 - High Standards: 9-12
- The recommended configuration for the Moorhead Schools would allow for effective and comprehensive curriculum development and articulation as required by the state standards because of the continuity and consistency it would provide. A change in the grade level configuration would also allow for efficient and consistent monitoring of students in assessing their progress toward meeting the state standards.
- The recommended configuration would provide consistency and equity in programs and services for students at the K-5 level (i.e. support programs, special education services, and after school programming, etc.). In the present configuration, valuable teaching and learning is lost because of the time involved in transporting students to centrally located programs and because of staff travel to accommodate multiple building schedules and districtwide staff needs.
- The recommended configuration would reduce the number of transitions for students from building to building. Currently, Moorhead students are transitioning four times during their K-12 school years. The recommended configuration consists of three transitions which benefits students by providing greater consistency and stability. When students and parents remain in a school longer, there is greater opportunity to build a strong sense of community and belonging, thereby benefiting teaching and learning.

IV. Facilities

A. Elementary Facilities

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that the school district establish three K-5 elementary schools designed around the “school within a school” concept. Specifically, this would involve the conversion of Robert Asp School into a K-5 elementary school, the conversion of Moorhead Junior High School into a K-5 elementary school, and the construction of a new K-5 elementary school at a site to be determined by the school board in cooperation with the City of Moorhead that will best promote residential growth in the district.

Rationale:

- The elementary recommendation would assist the school district in its efforts to lower class size or to maintain the target class sizes at the K-5 level as determined by the school district. The task force believes appropriate class size is of the highest priority.
- The elementary recommendation would provide K-5 facilities where the “school within a school” concept can be designed and incorporated within the educational setting. It is imperative that the school district incorporate smaller learning communities within the three recommended elementary school facilities. Providing a safe, secure, and family type environment within a larger school will create for the students a sense of belonging and well-being. It will also provide greater opportunities for participation in programs, services, and activities.
- The elementary recommendation would provide for equity in programs and services for all students at the K-5 level due to a better balance in enrollment at each of the three buildings.
- The elementary recommendation would reduce the number of elementary facilities from five to three, which would in turn create economic efficiencies in the areas of capital expenditures, operational expenses, and support staff.
- The elementary recommendation would allow the district to provide more balanced class sizes across the district because of fewer elementary schools.
- The elementary recommendation would position the district elementary schools for future enrollment fluctuations.
- The elementary recommendation would create three modern elementary facilities that meet federal, state, and local building codes.
- The elementary recommendation would provide three sites with enough space that allows for much safer drop-off and pick-up areas for students. The sites would also provide more

adequate parking space.

- The elementary recommendation would provide additional green space which expands the opportunities for outdoor student activities.
- The elementary recommendation would allow for the modernization and upgrading of the technology infrastructure within the elementary school buildings.

B. Middle Level Education Facility

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends the construction of a new middle school building to accommodate a 6-8 grade configuration and support the full implementation of a middle school model. It is also recommended that the building site be determined by the school board in cooperation with the City of Moorhead. Consideration for site locations should be given to operational efficiency and promotion of residential growth which will provide future sustenance to the school district.

Rationale:

- The middle level recommendation would accommodate a 6-8 grade level configuration, which is most suitable to the implementation of a middle school model (see attached Middle School Model Task Force report).
- The middle level recommendation would create economic efficiencies that will enable the district to provide a quality educational environment at the 6-8 grade level (i.e. better student/teacher ratios, access to enhanced curriculum, expanded programs and opportunities for students).
- The middle level recommendation would provide for a modern facility which will promote and support the teaching and learning methods of the middle school model.
- The middle level recommendation would allow for the repurposing of the existing junior high school facility to a modernized elementary facility, thus enabling the district to operate three elementary schools of equal size.
- The middle level recommendation would allow for the modernization and upgrading of the technology infrastructure within the middle school facility.

C. High School Enhancement

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that the current high school be remodeled into a modern, state-of-the-art facility which would better accommodate the programming and instructional delivery needs at the high school.

Rationale:

- The high school recommendation would provide for the creation of “small learning communities” where the high school education becomes more personalized (see attached High School Enhancement Task Force report).
- The high school recommendation would provide for the transition of students from the middle school to high school with the implementation of a house concept.
- The high school recommendation would address and improve recognized deficiencies within the high school as identified by the High School Enhancement Task Force and in the architects’ report.
- The high school recommendation would provide additional and remodeled instructional space that will enhance teaching and learning.
- The high school recommendation would provide flexible space for interdepartmental collaboration and planning.
- The high school recommendation would provide for facilities that allows flexibility through a variety of learning settings beyond the traditional classroom.

D. Alternative Education Delivery Model

Middle School Level

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that an integrated “school within a school” model for students aged 12-15 who require an alternative education setting be integrated within the newly constructed middle school.

Rationale:

- The middle school alternative education recommendation would provide for a continuum of options and services for students at risk in traditional settings that address risk factors which may contribute to placement in an offsite program (see attached Alternative Education Delivery Model Task Force report).
- The middle school alternative education recommendation would allow for flexibility in independent programming for students at the 6-8 grade level.
- The middle school alternative education recommendation would provide for easier and more appropriate transitions between traditional and alternative programs.
- The middle school alternative education recommendation would also provide economic efficiencies through savings in transportation, facility operations and staffing.

High School Level

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that the school district locate the Area Learning Center within or in close proximity to Moorhead Senior High School and consider the possibility of adding an Alternative Learning Program, which includes an independent study model.

Rationale:

- The high school alternative education recommendation would provide for the option of the independent study model through the Red River Area Learning Center within the continuum of services for at-risk learners.
- The high school alternative education recommendation would provide for easier and more appropriate transitions between traditional and alternative programs.
- The high school alternative education recommendation would also provide economic efficiencies through savings in transportation, facility operations and staffing.
- The high school alternative education recommendation would allow better access to curriculum, media services, physical education space, etc.

E. Probstfield Elementary

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends that Probstfield Elementary School be converted into a multipurpose facility so as to accommodate a variety of district programs which could include the following: administrative offices, community education, adult basic education, early childhood family education, districtwide staff development services, and other community youth service programs.

Rationale:

- The Probstfield recommendation would reduce the number of facilities currently owned or being leased by the school district.
- The Probstfield recommendation would create additional economic efficiencies through the sharing of districtwide staff.
- The Probstfield recommendation would provide a better model for supervision and communication of districtwide staff.
- The Probstfield recommendation would provide a facility that is better suited for the programs being recommended to occupy the facility.

F. Disposition of Excess Facilities

Recommendation:

The Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force recommends the development of a comprehensive plan to dispose of excess facilities in a manner consistent with the district's long range facility goals and community friendly purposes. The plan should be determined by the school board in cooperation with the City of Moorhead and consultation with affected neighborhoods. The plan should be based on the following:

1. The demolition of:
 - a. Voyager complex
 - b. Washington Elementary

2. The marketing and sale of:
 - a. Edison Elementary
 - b. Riverside Elementary
 - c. Lincoln Center
 - d. Townsite Center

Rationale:

- This recommendation would provide for the potential expansion of the school district, city and county tax base.

- This recommendation would discontinue the district's practice of leasing excess facilities to better utilize district resources for educational purposes.

- This recommendation would provide facilities for building sites to other private or public sector economic purposes which are friendly to the community.

- This recommendation would create economic efficiencies that will enable the district to provide a quality educational environment; (i.e. better student/teacher ratios; access to more curriculum; more opportunities for students; etc.).

- This recommendation would produce revenue for the district from sales proceeds.

- This recommendation would allow for the expansion of site space for the repurposing of Robert Asp Elementary School.

V. Financial Implications

The financial implications of the proposed recommendation are both significant and far-reaching. There will be an expenditure of approximately 60 million dollars to construct and remodel numerous facilities within the Moorhead School District. This expenditure will improve educational effectiveness, create economic efficiencies, and provide a modern state of the art educational environment.

The primary sources of information within this report have been provided by the following entities: Evensen Dodge, Inc. and the Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning.

Debt Service Equalization is a funding mechanism the state of Minnesota currently has in statute, to assist school districts in making improvements to their facilities. Current law will provide approximately 45% state aid for a 60 million dollar bond in the Moorhead School District. The current debt service equalization aid language provides a two-tiered system in regards to state aid. To qualify for tier one funding, a school district must levy over 15% of their adjusted net tax capacity. In the Moorhead School District this equates to an annual bond payment of \$2,007,734. Once this threshold is met, the state of Minnesota provides approximately thirty-seven cents of aid for every dollar levied. The latest information provided from Evensen Dodge, Inc. indicates that the district needs to bond approximately 16.26 million dollars to qualify for tier one aid. To qualify for tier two funding, a school district must levy over 25% of their adjusted net tax capacity. In the Moorhead School District this equates to an annual bond payment of \$3,346,223. Once this threshold is met, the State of Minnesota provides approximately seventy-five cents of aid for every dollar levied. The most recent information from Evensen Dodge, Inc. indicates that the district needs to bond approximately 31.81 million dollars to qualify for tier two aid.

Savings to the taxpayer will be three fold under the recommendation being made by the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force. First, the school district will be able to close excess facilities. This will result in a minimum of \$700,000 annual savings in operations. Second, the school district will save on maintenance and facility improvements of the excess facilities. Current budget projections indicate over two million dollars in capital improvements over the next three years to those facilities that are scheduled to be sold or torn down. Third, the school district will be able to consolidate programs and reduce the annual impact of lease levy on the district taxpayer.

There are other financial implications that should be considered. For example, the Moorhead Area Public Schools will be reducing its property tax levy from nearly \$8,000,000 in payable 2001 to \$2,200,000 in payable 2002. This equates to approximately a 73% reduction in local school district property taxes. The current formula will provide approximately \$27,000,000 in state aid. Interest rates are at thirty and forty year lows. Millions of dollars could be lost if interest rates go back to levels that were more the norm in the 1990's.

Review of major financial implications:

- The school district will receive approximately \$27,000,000 in state aid for a \$60,000,000 building project. This provides 45% state subsidy for the proposed projects.
- Once the school district levies approximately \$32,000,000 the State of Minnesota pays 75% of all costs. This threshold is referred to as tier two funding.
- Once the two tier funding level is reached, the State of Minnesota will pay \$21,000,000 or 75% of the dollars necessary to complete the recommended projects.
- The local taxpayer will pay approximately \$217,000 annually for every \$10,000,000 in levy once the school district qualifies for tier two funding.
- The school district will be able to realize a minimum of \$700,000 annually by operating four less buildings within the school district.
- Current budget projections over the next three years indicate capital improvements in excess of \$2,000,000 for those facilities scheduled to be sold or torn down.
- The school district will be able to consolidate programs and reduce the annual impact of lease levy on the district taxpayer.
- The district will be reducing its property tax levy from nearly \$8,000,000 in payable 2001 to \$2,200,000 in payable 2002. This equates to approximately a 73% reduction in local school district property taxes.
- Interest rates are at thirty and forty year lows. Millions of dollars could be lost if interest rates go back to levels that were more the norm in the 1990's.

ISD 152, Moorhead, Minnesota
\$60,000,000 G.O. School Building Bonds of 2002
Debt Service Equalization Aid

	If Bonds Are Not Sold	If Bonds Are Sold	Impact / Difference
Outstanding Levy (105%)	\$606,381	\$606,381	
New Debt Service Levy (105%)	0	5,161,751	
Total Levy Before Equalization Aid	<u>\$606,381</u>	<u>\$5,768,132</u>	<u>\$5,161,751</u>
Does Not Qualify	\$606,381	\$2,007,734	
Qualifies in Tier 1	0	1,338,489	
Qualifies in Tier 2	0	2,421,909	
Total Levy Before Equalization Aid	<u>\$606,381</u>	<u>\$5,768,132</u>	
Does Not Qualify	0.000%	0.000%	
Tier 1 Aid % 1 - (\$13,384,892 / 6,604.75 / \$3,200.00)	36.670%	36.670%	
Tier 2 Aid % 1 - (\$13,384,892 / 6,604.75 / \$8,000.00)	74.668%	74.668%	
Debt Service Equalization Aid (As a %)	<u>0.000%</u>	<u>39.861%</u>	
Does Not Qualify	\$0	\$0	
Tier 1 Debt Service Equalization Aid	0	490,826	
Tier 2 Debt Service Equalization Aid	0	1,808,392	
Debt Service Equalization Aid	<u>\$0</u>	<u>\$2,299,218</u>	<u>\$2,299,218</u>
Total Levy Before Equalization Aid	\$606,381	\$5,768,132	\$5,161,751
Debt Service Equalization Aid	0	2,299,218	2,299,218
New Levy After Equalization Aid	<u>\$606,381</u>	<u>\$3,468,914</u>	<u>\$2,862,533</u>
Initial Debt Service Equalization Aid (As a %)	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%
Debt Service Equalization Aid (As a %)	0.000%	39.861%	44.543%
New Levy After Equalization Aid (As a %)	<u>100.000%</u>	<u>60.139%</u>	<u>55.457%</u>

ISD 152, Moorhead, Minnesota
\$60,000,000 G.O. School Building Bonds, Series 2002

Tax Year	2001	2003	Diff.	Annual Property Tax Comparison from Tax Year 2001 to 2003
Residential Homestead				
\$50,000	\$117	\$157	\$40	
\$100,000	\$258	\$344	\$86	
\$150,000	\$629	\$562	-\$67	
\$200,000	\$1,044	\$780	-\$264	
\$250,000	\$1,459	\$999	-\$460	
\$300,000	\$1,874	\$1,217	-\$657	
\$350,000	\$2,289	\$1,435	-\$854	
\$400,000	\$2,704	\$1,654	-\$1,050	
Agricultural Homestead				
\$50,000	\$117	\$157	\$40	
\$100,000	\$185	\$244	\$59	
\$150,000	\$253	\$331	\$77	
\$200,000	\$423	\$435	\$12	
\$250,000	\$636	\$547	-\$90	
\$300,000	\$849	\$658	-\$191	
\$350,000	\$1,063	\$770	-\$293	
\$400,000	\$1,276	\$882	-\$394	
Agricultural Nonhomestead				
\$50,000	\$176	\$203	\$28	
\$100,000	\$351	\$406	\$55	
\$150,000	\$527	\$610	\$83	
\$200,000	\$702	\$813	\$110	
\$250,000	\$878	\$1,016	\$138	
\$300,000	\$1,054	\$1,219	\$165	
\$350,000	\$1,229	\$1,422	\$193	
\$400,000	\$1,405	\$1,626	\$221	
Commercial and Industrial				
\$50,000	\$586	\$309	-\$277	
\$100,000	\$1,172	\$617	-\$555	
\$150,000	\$1,758	\$926	-\$832	
\$200,000	\$2,572	\$1,336	-\$1,236	
\$250,000	\$3,387	\$1,747	-\$1,640	
\$300,000	\$4,201	\$2,157	-\$2,044	
\$350,000	\$5,015	\$2,567	-\$2,448	
\$400,000	\$5,830	\$2,978	-\$2,852	
Apartments (Four or more units)				
\$50,000	\$586	\$370	-\$216	
\$100,000	\$1,172	\$739	-\$433	
\$150,000	\$1,758	\$1,109	-\$649	
\$200,000	\$2,344	\$1,479	-\$866	
\$250,000	\$2,930	\$1,848	-\$1,082	
\$300,000	\$3,516	\$2,218	-\$1,298	
\$350,000	\$4,102	\$2,588	-\$1,515	
\$400,000	\$4,688	\$2,957	-\$1,731	
Apartments (Three or less units)				
\$50,000	\$415	\$309	-\$106	
\$100,000	\$830	\$617	-\$212	
\$150,000	\$1,245	\$926	-\$319	
\$200,000	\$1,660	\$1,235	-\$425	
\$250,000	\$2,074	\$1,543	-\$531	
\$300,000	\$2,489	\$1,852	-\$637	
\$350,000	\$2,904	\$2,161	-\$743	
\$400,000	\$3,319	\$2,470	-\$850	
Seasonal Recreational				
\$50,000	\$312	\$203	-\$109	
\$100,000	\$674	\$406	-\$267	
\$150,000	\$1,089	\$610	-\$479	
\$200,000	\$1,503	\$813	-\$691	
\$250,000	\$1,918	\$1,016	-\$902	
\$300,000	\$2,333	\$1,219	-\$1,114	
\$350,000	\$2,748	\$1,422	-\$1,326	
\$400,000	\$3,163	\$1,626	-\$1,537	

Prepared 10/29/01 by Evensen Dodge

VI. Summary

The mission of the Moorhead Area Public Schools is “to develop the maximum potential of every learner to thrive in a changing world.”

In order to maintain the high level of educational quality that our schools and community have become accustomed to, a comprehensive facilities and grade level configuration plan that creates educational effectiveness and economic efficiencies is necessary for a positive future. The recommendations from the Facility and Grade Level Configuration Task Force reflect a plan that spans the needs of preschool, school-aged and adult learners, thereby creating continuity and stability for all learners in the Moorhead Area Public Schools. The task force recommendations reflect Moorhead’s long standing commitment to the education of all children and address the challenges of the 21st century.