

Planning the educational programs and facilities of MUSD in the 21st century is underway. After an open and thorough search that took several months, a committee of parents, board members, and staff selected Mark Quattrocchi and Associates of Santa Rosa as the firm to design new classrooms to replace those deemed noncompliant with the Field Act requirements at the Grammar School by the Division of the State Architect.

In late January the Superintendent received word that the Office of Public School Construction and the State Allocation Board had approved the District's application for hardship and modernization/replacements funds for the Grammar School totaling 1.7 million dollars. This is less than half the actual cost of the repair/replacement. The District will be responsible for planning an affordable, appropriate facility and securing the additional required funds. MUSD has exactly 18 months from January 26, 2005 to get its plans developed and approved by the Division of the State Architect or it will lose these funds and will need to requalify and begin the application process again.

The Board of Trustees and the Superintendent have formed two separate but overlapping committees to help plan programs, facilities and staffing to meet the future educational needs of the children in our school district. The work of these committees, along with community input, will help the District meet the tight timeline required to keep the secured funding and provide a thoughtful, appropriate plan for the District.

In January, Dr. Jim Shock, Superintendent of MUSD, formed a Futures Committee to identify and define educational programs necessary at all grade levels to maintain MUSD's tradition of excellence while dealing with declining enrollment. Members of the Futures committee include three teachers from the elementary program, two teachers from the middle school, two teachers from the high schools and the president of the classified employee union. Also on the Futures Committee are the head teachers from the Community High School and Independent Study, a district special education coordinator, the two school principals, the business manager, and the administrative assistant to the Superintendent. Together they are reviewing the programmatic strengths, unique elements, community identity, and need for dynamic schools in Mendocino currently and in the future.

This committee meets about every three weeks. Their mission is to help formulate recommendations that the Superintendent can present to the Board of Trustees relative to programatic and staffing needs. Since 1993 MUSD has declined in enrollment by nearly 320 students. This trend is expected to continue for about four more years when the total enrollment is projected to be 580 students. It is critical to plan for this continual decrease in enrollment while simultaneously planning for a continuing level of bold educational excellence. The Futures Committee believes that strong, attractive, healthy schools are beneficial and essential to the quality of the entire community and its children.

The Board Committee, consisting of mostly parents, along with a few teachers, the Grammar School Principal and one Board member, is called the Grammar School Design Committee. This group also meets about every three weeks in the Middle School Library with the District's architect to provide design and program guidance. These meetings are posted and the public is always invited to attend. The next meeting is scheduled for March 15 at 3:45 pm.

Also in attendance, but not officially members of this committee, are the Superintendent and the architect. Quattrocchi, Kwok and Associates will use ideas and guidance from this GS Design Committee to begin drafting plans of what the replacement facility for the elementary program will look like. In order to address immediate needs, the multipurpose room of the old Grammar School building is currently being examined by engineers for more immediate restoration and use.

Members of the both committees along with additional parents, two Middle School students, and a few teachers will be making visits to other schools to look at various grade configurations, such as K-8 and 7-12 programs. These visits are to help clarify and envision various grade and site configuration possibilities. Visits are scheduled over the next few weeks.

Once the Superintendent has recommendations, a community meeting will be scheduled to discuss, with the community at-large, the recommendations being considered. The purpose of the meeting will be to create dialog around the various pros and cons of the recommendations. Because schools are a critical element of this community, regular press releases will be provided to the Beacon and local radio stations to keep the community informed.

Anyone wishing additional information should contact the District Office at 937-5868.