



# Facilities Master Plan FAQs

## **What is the Facilities Master Plan?**

The Facilities Master Plan is a long-range plan to rebuild or remodel Akron's school buildings. The Facilities Master Plan is based on the Ohio School Facilities Commission design requirements and community input from Akron citizens. Construction on some of the buildings in Phase I of the plan begins in 2005.

## **How is the construction project funded?**

The project is jointly funded by the state and the local community. Akron Public Schools, the city of Akron and the OSFC are partners in the building project – the largest construction opportunity in the history of Akron. The new or renovated buildings will become community learning centers. The state funds 59% of the project, and the balance is funded with revenue from a city income tax – which the Akron community passed in 2003. The district must follow the OSFC's rigid design and enrollment guidelines to remain eligible for state funds.

## **Why is the district altering the Facilities Master Plan?**

Like all plans, the Facilities Master Plan must change to reflect the district's current needs. The OSFC requires districts to continually review their plans to assure that the new buildings are appropriate for each district's enrollment size.

## **What are the most recent changes made to the Facilities Master Plan?**

A committee comprised of school and city leaders made the following changes:

- **Central-Hower High School** – Close in June 2006
- **East High School** – Combine with Goodyear Middle School to form a grades 7-12 facility
- **Erie Island Elementary School** – Close in 2010
- **Essex Elementary School** – Close in 2010
- **Heminger Elementary School** – Close in 2009 (school closing was included in original FMP)
- **Hotchkiss Elementary School** – Close in 2006
- **Goodyear Middle School** – Convert East High School to grades 7-12 facility with sixth-graders remaining in elementary buildings
- **Jackson Elementary School** – Close in 2017
- **Lincoln Elementary School** – Close in 2012 and reopen in the old Riedinger facility
- **Margaret Park Elementary School** – Close in 2008
- **Smith Elementary School** – Close in 2015
- **Riedinger Middle School** – Close in 2011 and reopen in 2012 as Lincoln Elementary School

## **How were buildings selected to be repurposed or discontinued as schools?**

The superintendent appointed a task force to study enrollment patterns, building size and school boundaries. The task force includes APS, city of Akron and OSFC members. Facts about every building's condition and size along with updated enrollment projections were used to do a thorough, objective analysis of all school buildings. The task force looked at:

- Overall condition of building and site
- Student enrollment, building capacity and utilization
- Economic development/reuse potential
- Space available at nearby schools
- Location of building in its neighborhood
- Financial considerations

## **Was academic performance a consideration?**

No, consideration was not given to school programs or academic success. The OSFC is strictly concerned with bricks and mortar.

## **Are changes to the Facilities Master Plan completely driven by OSFC guidelines?**

The Akron community also plays an important role in the number of schools we operate. When parents choose to send their students to charter schools, APS enrollment drops. When enrollment drops, the district's construction project must be scaled back. The OSFC does not allow the public to vote on school closings.

Akron's task force representatives negotiated with the OSFC to improve upon some of the OSFC's initial recommendations. For example:

- The OSFC recommended closing four high schools and two middle schools in Akron. The task force negotiated to continue operating seven high schools, including a combined grades 7-12 facility, and eight middle schools.
- The OSFC only looks at building enrollment and condition and does not care where schools are located. Akron task force members worked with the OSFC to create a more logical neighborhood configuration for the location of schools.
- The task force was able to save existing high school auditoriums. OSFC guidelines call for cafeteriums with no permanent auditorium seating.

## **Why is student enrollment important?**

To ensure that districts do not overbuild, every three years the OSFC conducts studies to project enrollment trends. The OSFC completed its latest enrollment study for Akron earlier this year. The study showed that APS enrollment has declined in the past 10 years and is projected to decline further in the next decade.

Over the past decade, student enrollment declined 12% — from 31,800 students in 1994 to nearly 28,000 in 2005. The OSFC study projects a loss of 1,500 additional students by 2014. Much of this decline is due to students leaving APS to attend charter schools. The number of charter schools located in Akron has increased 121% since 1999.

Although charter schools are the primary reason for enrollment losses, other factors are at play. Enrollment in all Ohio urban districts is declining due to population shifts to the suburbs. Ohio ranks 48 of 50 states in population growth; and its small, one percent growth is primarily in suburban areas. In Akron, a 20% decline in live births over the past decade indicates that overall family size is declining. In addition, the population of Akron has declined 2.3% since 2000.

The OSFC enrollment study points out that Akron is operating more buildings than it needs for the number of students enrolled. The OSFC will not fund construction projects for schools with enrollments under 350. Akron currently has 24 schools with enrollments less than 350.

### **Why can't APS just pick up the cost of keeping all its buildings?**

Akron has been offered an opportunity of a lifetime to participate with the OSFC to replace its schools with modern efficient community learning centers. The OSFC is paying 59% of the cost. Without this funding, it is unlikely that the district could ever afford to renovate buildings. The OSFC requires that every building meet its design requirements.

As the district struggles to balance its general fund, it must make decisions that keep the education of its students as its highest priority. The only way APS could ever afford new facilities is to take advantage of the OSFC funding opportunity.

### **Since we're building fewer schools, is it reasonable to assume the project will cost less and the income tax will be retired early?**

The income tax that the community approved to generate the local funding share is in place for 30 years or until the project is complete – whichever comes first. There is no way to anticipate the challenges we will face at each building site; but when the project is complete and the bonds are repaid, the income tax will be retired.