Architectural firms move forward with educational design specifications

The architectural firms hired to design a new elementary school, replacement schools for Firgrove and Northwood, and additional classroom space to meet class size reduction goals came together at Carson Elementary recently to collaborate on the details of the district’s standard educational specifications which they will use to help design the new schools.

The districtwide elementary specifications, recently approved by the school board on February 22, 2016 were presented in detail to architects from the firms BCRA, Mahlum, NAC, and Studio Meng Strazzara.

The meeting consisted of the architectural firms assigned to specific projects, as well as district staff involved in the process. Mario Casello, director of educational planning, facilitated the meeting. Also in attendance were Chief Operations Officer Rudy Fyles, Director of Capital Projects Gary Frentress, and Carson Elementary Principal Judy Piger.

Piger gave the group a tour of the school as they learned that many of the design specifications are modeled after Carson, which was opened in 2007.

“The projects we are looking at, in a lot of ways are very different, but today we are looking at things that are going to be consistent,” stated Frentress.

Casello described the process used to create the educational specifications. During the development phase the core team met with staff throughout the district to understand the physical space needs and how it is used. Teachers, district administrators, office staff, nurses, and food and nutrition employees were among the staff members consulted. The core team considered the needs for classroom, technology, library, special education, staff, food service, and special programs.

“‘We got some great information and insights. We feel really, really good about what they brought to the table during the process,’” stated Casello.

Carson was used as the starting point for designing the elementary educational specifications. The Carson specifications were reviewed, updated, and revised. Some items were added and some were deleted.

As they toured Carson, important relationships between spaces were pointed out. For example, the location of the music classrooms in relation to the stage for performances.

One of the significant changes in the updated specifications will help accommodate bigger schools. Another example of discussion with the teams were the shared project rooms between two classrooms. Currently, art and science lessons take place in the classroom. The new specifications call for shared project rooms that are larger, which will help accommodate art and science curriculum and small group instruction. The gymnasium in the new schools will be bigger and include space for bleachers. The schools with 44 homerooms will have a larger commons to support the increased student counts.
Casello noted changing technology needs will be reflected in the new designs. Technology and the storage needs for it will look different as the district executes the 1-to-1 initiative to equip each student in grades 4 – 12 with a device to use.

It was clear that the architectural firms will have flexibility in design while meeting the educational specifications. “We are not just taking Carson and putting in on another site,” stated Dennis Erwood of Meng Strazzara as he presented the specifications. Erwood participated on the educational specifications core team as the lead principal representing Studio Meng Strazzara.

Chief Operations Officer Rudy Fyles stated, “What pulls the designs all together are the students. We care about all of our students and staff.”