

OUTDOOR ENRICHMENT COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES: 11/12/2022

I understand the district has yet to engage in the improvement review process, allowing for time to review possible new locations for the classroom. *The front entry project had been approved and VPS has sent out for bids.*

Do we know if the proposed project has a more in-depth and lengthy review process than a replacement of playground equipment? Perhaps a replacement of equipment or a simpler design would allow the PTA to move forward in providing the school community an improvement they raised funds for. *All review processes are lengthy. Lakeshore submitted a small playground update plan to VPS in January 2022 and it has still not been approved.*

We fundraised for an "outdoor classroom" and "playground improvements." We didn't fundraise for updated landscaping at the front of the building. We advertised to our community that funds from the Fun Run would be spent on "Felida's first outdoor classroom", "playground improvements", and "an outdoor multi-purpose learning area for students and staff". I fear that not producing the outdoor improvements that were advertised to parents and told to students could have a negative impact on all PTA fundraising moving forward.

No communications were meant to be misleading. The project does not have 'Brand Guidelines' to follow. With multiple volunteers creating fliers and newsletters, the project has been called many different names. Additionally, the project has changed many times since its conception. There was one Fun Run flyer that advertised 'playground improvements'. The next flier read "help us raise money for outdoor improvements". In 2021 it was advertised as a fundraiser for an 'outdoor multi-purpose learning area for students and staff and other outdoor improvements'. The project details were discussed at all PTA meeting throughout the school year and the plan has been posted on the PTA website since February 2022. The design was created to be available for use as an outdoor class room until recently modified to be a community gathering space.

Teachers were not aware of the proposed location of this outdoor classroom and the staff feels misrepresented because they voted for an outdoor classroom in the back of the building.

Staff was surveyed last week about this. Survey results: 68% of staff were aware of the location of the classroom project, while 32% staff said they were not aware.

The administration recognized that "a lot has changed in the past 2 years," and surveyed what priorities staff has. These results can be discussed at the committee meeting.

If the 2021 survey results are being used to guide decisions of how to prioritize our already raised funds, the 28 staff members who completed the survey favored an outdoor classroom to provide group lessons (75%) located specifically in Area B under the trees (70.6%). When asked where they'd like to see an outdoor classroom area, the front courtyard area received only 13 votes, or 38%. The survey results will be used to help the committee identify the next phase(s) of the project.

I think the lack of transparency in answering community questions has been a large part of the problem. *The PTA has been transparent throughout the process. PTA volunteers have responded to all emailed questions and concerns. PTA meetings are open to members and non-members to attend. PTA meeting minutes are available to active PTA members upon request.*

Administration should not have been tasked with choosing the first priority project. This should have been voted on by the school community. *The school administration is a part of the school community and participates as PTA members. The administration wasn't tasked with choosing the first priority project, the administration identified a safety concern due to overgrown shrubs near the school entrance and asked for help. The school community does not vote on PTA projects, only active PTA members are eligible to vote. The PTA General Membership voted to approve the budget for Outdoor Improvement.*

We are spending funds on something that doesn't directly benefit the students. It doesn't promote learning and it won't be used during school hours. We are using district resources to review building improvements that don't directly benefit student learning. *The campus improvement project addresses the entire school campus and will take years to implement (Harney's project took 10 years). Felida is just at the beginning stages. Students benefit from campus updates and all spaces matter.*

Safety: Conducting educational activities in the front of the school is a safety risk.
The front entry courtyard plan has been revised and will no longer be used as a classroom space

Effective Instruction: The busiest location on campus is not an effective place to conduct learning.
The front entry courtyard plan has been revised and will no longer be used as a classroom space

Transparency: Benches, rocks and landscaping is not an outdoor classroom
When they take students outside for hands-on project-based learning, VPS teachers have been requesting places to seat a whole class to provide instruction and then move about to their lesson. The front entry design provided enough seating to fit one classroom if a teacher so chose to use it. This space was meant to facilitate a place where people could gather to hear and then move on to their learning, such as the replanted courtyard gardens.

Additionally, benches and rocks at the front of the building were not a part of the parent survey
The Staff, Student and Community Survey included questions about seating and gathering areas.

Possibility of sponsored landscape projects from local businesses.

Outdoor classroom grants from the state

Yes. There is external funding and grants available to us. The PTA has applied to 5 local and national grants for the courtyard entryway enrichment project thus far. PTA would welcome volunteers willing to source and write grants. Prior to any grant application writing, there must be a clear design plan, including cost estimates which means coordination with Ms. Janati, our design architect and VPS facilities department.

Will the committee be providing feedback on how our already acquired Fun Run funds will be spent? Or is the purpose of the committee to provide recommendations on how future Fun Run funds will be spent? *The goal of the meeting is to look at both the current and future funds earmarked for 'outdoor enrichment'. We will reexamine suggestions by the Felida administration and staff and those ideas most favored in the survey to outline a path forward for this year and into next school year.*

Now that the space is not intended for student use, does it still take priority over student outdoor learning spaces that are intended for student use? How do we decide the priority of the next project? *The goal of the 'outdoor enrichment' program is to benefit the school community as a whole. There are many ideas on how best to meet this objective, deciding which project will be prioritized and how will be addressed in the meeting. Cost, ease of execution, Felida survey results, safety, and other factors will be considered during the process. Every voice matters.*

Trying to understand if the entire plan is set in stone and we just need people to help fundraise and manage communication or if there is more work that needs to be done before the entire project moves forward. *This is the start of our 'outdoor enrichment' journey. In an ideal world there would be large pools of money made available by the school district for outdoor enrichment projects and these projects would happen seamlessly, by the VPS facility department during the summer months. In reality, the VPS district does not have any funds to provide and has extremely limited staffing for anything they deem 'extra'.*

In light of this, the Felida PTA and Felida ES administration along with other schools in the district are fundraising and advocating independently to create enriching outdoor spaces for their school communities. This movement is new (~5yrs) and the district with extremely limited staffing restraints is struggling to manage requests from schools.

These extra requests have to be vetted through the VPS legal team, and the VPS facilities department for bid requests and acquisitions. Each contractor must be licensed and bonded within the state and can only work within restricted hours based on the school schedule, all coordination has to be done by VPS...etc. (Think big clunky government entity with lots of rules and overworked staff)

What is the timeline? What's the budget? Or is this a general strategy, subject to fundraising for each proposed item and then proceeding with the actual construction? *Per statements above, the most efficient path forward is to feed each small project to the VPS facilities department in bite size pieces, packaged and ready to go. Each project package needs a design drawing by a licensed architect (we have hired Jane Kleiner previously) and has to be fully vetted. VPS then sends this design package to legal for approval and out to bids. Based on the cost, this package may also need to go to the school board and be voted on for approval.*

VPS is looking 5-10 yrs out at the maintenance of whatever is installed, how well it will hold up to elements and if it will become a legal issue as it deteriorates.

The budget for each project must be solely funded by PTA funds raised through grants, fundraisers, donations in kind, etc.

Would love to better understand where the line is between district responsibility vs. PTA responsibility when it comes to outdoor improvements/landscaping. *See above. In short, PTA provides funds, VPS get the final say on what, when, where, and how as they are legally responsible for the school.*

When master plans are approved, how long does the approval last (i.e. is there an expiration date to have to complete the project by?) *Jane Kleiner, the design architect of the Master Plan has worked with VPS school for years creating and designing spaces for our local schools. While the Master Plan has not been 'approved' in its entirety as we had hoped due to VPS district office staffing restraints, we are confident in its overall design.*

As stated above, our path forward at this time is to choose specific projects from the master plan as we have funding and send those through the VPS approval process.

The Felida PTA fully expects to use the Master Plan to lay out the current and future enrichment projects as Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3, etc. and have each project be part of the cohesive design.

What building requirements for safety, etc. are already in place? For instance, does the district have a rotation plan to repair/replace aged structures already in place? *VPS facilities have very specific requirements for accessibility, mobility, durability, these are vetted during the proposal process outlined above.*

Felida PTA is not currently aware of any district rotation plan for replacing the play structure. If we chose to tackle the play structure as an enrichment project, this will be one of the first questions asked.

Will the committee be providing feedback on how our already acquired Fun Run funds will be spent? Or is the purpose of the committee to provide recommendations on how future Fun Run funds will be spent? *See above statements.*

Where will the funds from last year and this year's fun run be going to? *See above statements.*

Why are we not taking advantage of resources that already exist for both the landscaping project and the outdoor enrichment? *Per above statements, there is no funding available from the district at this time, they view the courtyard entryway enrichment project an 'extra'. Basically anything not already provided on campus is an 'extra'. PTA has applied to grants local and national seeking funding. We are seeking volunteers to write grant applications or source local donations for all outdoor enrichment projects. See above for more.*