

Architects Gather Design Ideas for Building

By ANN WISHART

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Plans for building the all-grade Berkshire school are on the drawing board, but architects told the Partners in Rural Innovative Models of Education group Sept. 20 the drawings are very preliminary and lots of input is needed.

"At this stage, the plans are carved in pudding," said Ben Fierman. "If (a plan) is not right, we smear over it and redo it. Many projects go through 12 to 18 iterations before they meet the needs of everyone."

BSHM architects and contractors talked about how they design schools and asked PRIME members to offer their ideas on how the new Berkshire school should be designed.

Fierman, who is a psychologist with BSHM's subcontractor Collaborative Partners, said he is astounded at how far "down the road" people in the district have considered what those needs may be.

The team of three architects and Fierman spoke to about 50 members of PRIME, school administrators, staff and public officials at Kent State University - Geauga, where Berkshire Schools will lease 25 acres, long term, as the site for the school.

BSHM, of Youngstown, was hired by the district in August to design the school. The firm will be paid 6.85 percent of the project cost of over \$41 million, with 55 percent of the overall cost to be paid by the state.

"Your building will be highly customized. We're going to work really hard to get to know you," said Rusty Walker, principal with subcontractor Holabird and Root, of Chicago.

The team's goal is to gather the information and reduce it to graphic form by the end of the year, said Eric Risinger, Holabird and Root architect, adding they hope to meet with the PRIME group every three to four weeks for input and a progress report.

He presented a sketch of the KSU-Geauga campus with a three-wing school east of the KSU building. The woods on the campus

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- Rusty Walker

will be incorporated into the overall design to provide access for art and science classes.

Meeting the timeline will be possible if the state cooperates and Berkshire provides Walker with the necessary data quickly, he said.

The placement of the Berkshire building will create "one vibrant campus" with the existing KSU building, so the master plan is important, Walker said.

"We're trying to get our hands around the numbers," he said, adding the team knows the district wants the best cost, efficiency and utilization of space.

Berkshire Superintendent John Stoddard said the rendering the team presented is just a concept.

"It won't look like that," he said.

PRIME is figuring the school will be two stories high and expandable, since the district's enrollment is increasing.

Last year, Berkshire had 1,250 students and this year has nearly 1,300, Stoddard said.

"We're growing, already. We're going to keep growing. When (the new school) opens in three years, we will get more (students)," he said.

When another set of drawings are ready in a few weeks, Stoddard said he hopes to get input from community groups, including high school students.

"The current sophomores, juniors and seniors will never be in it, but we want them to feel like part of the process. We want to reach out to all the community partners to make this happen," he said.

Input generally falls into categories in the BSHM school planning concepts as outlined by Walker.

"These are things we think about before we put lines on paper," he said.

Open, transparent spaces provide "passive supervision" and encourage good behavior, Walker said.

Hallways and open spaces are marked and colored to give students direction and a sense of place, he said.

The design depends on technology to keep the building safe and secure.

"We don't want it to look like a bunker," Walker said, adding it will be safe and defensible.

The school is going to become a hub of community activity with many different programs for students and the public, so diversity in the design is important, he said.

Students need to feel pride in their building and campus. How they feel about the school will affect their futures, Walker said.

"It changes lives for generations. If you design it so students feel a sense of ownership, they will keep other students from disrespecting it," he said, adding efficient, cost-saving operating and maintenance design means the community's money can be spent on education.

The traditional one-student-per-desk-in-rows is no longer seen as an optimum design for learning, said Risinger.

The furnishing of classrooms is important so students are motivated to learn and hallways can be designed as opportunities for collaboration, he said.

The mission and values category considers how teachers can shift to become mentors and coaches in the learning environment, Walker said, adding what teachers

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feel they need is a vital building block in the design process.

Natural daylight from large windows enhances the school environment and, with natural ventilation, is taking school architecture back to the basics, he said.

Risinger proposed the woods be used as outdoor learning spaces and said they hope to site the building so a view of the woods and surroundings is pleasant.

"We'll be designing from the inside out," Walker said. "We are talking about four-wall classrooms - nothing experimental."

In answer to a question, he assured the group the school will fit in with Burton's architecture and style and be appropriate for another 50 to 100 years.

Technology, while bound to be important to the new school, is a discussion that should wait a while, said BSHM architect Jay Crafton, adding the amount and degree possible will depend on the budget.

But the reason for waiting is the speed at which technology is changing.

"By the time we get to that package, the stuff we talk about today will be out of date," Crafton said.

The BSHM team recommended Stoddard put together groups of PRIME, staff, students and residents to visit some of the schools the firm has designed in Champion and South Range school districts for a better idea of possibilities.