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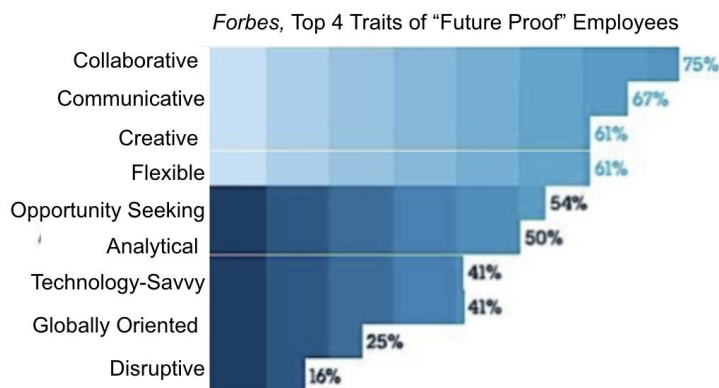
Pleasantdale Middle School  
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## Background

Over the course of the past several years, the district has made great strides in helping students to better grasp the Four C's: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking. Likewise, the district has implemented a robust Strategic Blueprint to ensure that each student becomes an inspired learner. This Strategic Blueprint, developed by community stakeholders, recognizes the need to provide students with modern learning spaces that mirror the world of work they will soon enter. Our Strategic Plan has allowed us to implement teaching practices that embody the Four C's and help us achieve our mission *To create a community of inspired learners*. In both schools, we have implemented new math resources and instructional practices, allowing students to learn math beyond memorizing formulas and really interact with math in real world ways. Our classroom teachers at the elementary school and English language arts teachers at the middle school will implement the Writer's Workshop model of instruction. These models enable practice for all Four C's: students will be creative and critical thinkers as well as collaborators and clear communicators with classmates and teachers. In 2016, the district introduced a one-to-one computing program, opening up new ways for teachers to teach and allowing students greater access to high quality information. Since the iPad rollout, we have seen teachers taking advantage of new teaching methods and students creating and collaborating in exciting new ways. Through the use of video and online tools, our students have endless creative possibilities. These are just a few of the positive changes to help our schools continue from great to greater.

As mentioned above, the Board approved our Strategic Blueprint in 2017. One of its goals seeks to improve our learning environments: *We will provide flexible learning environments that promote purposeful collaboration and a balanced educational approach to create inspired 21st century learners*. As such, the district has provided students with sensory rooms at both schools for students whose learning needs require sensory breaks in their day. We have worked with teachers to better understand how to organize learning spaces in a flexible manner. By providing flexible learning spaces for our students, we are better able to implement new learning practices as well as make better use of the technology we are putting in our students' hands. At the end of the 2017-18 school year, the district launched a flexible learning spaces grant program, enabling teachers to implement best practice in how space is used. This program is intended to help teachers achieve a more varied approach to instruction within the classroom. The goal will be to create model classroom configuration options that teachers can choose to employ in their classrooms. This approach provides our students with modern learning spaces and gives teachers autonomy over their work environment.



## Phase Two: The Vision

As we enter into year two of our Strategic Blueprint, we seek to further our vision of using our learning spaces to improve student growth. When we consider the evolution of learning spaces in schools, we seek to provide spaces that allow for varied teaching methodologies and learning styles. 21st century learning can best be accomplished through providing students

with a firm understanding and exposure to the Four C's: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking. *Forbes* magazine published a survey of over 1700 CEOs to determine the most desirable skills of "future proof" employees. The top four qualities were collaborative (75%), communicative (67%), creative, and flexible (61%). The full list of "future proof" rankings can be found in the provided graphic. To support the acquisition of these skills, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills defined the modern learning space as:

The support systems that organize the conditions in which humans learn best -- systems that accommodate the unique learning needs of every learner and support positive human relationships needed for effective learning. Learning environments are the structures, tools, and communities that inspire students and educators to attain the knowledge and skills the 21st century demands of us all.

Additionally, this organization identified several conditions for implementing modern teaching methodologies. These modern spaces are able to seamlessly integrate technology into the daily work of students and teachers. Thus, technologies must function well and be readily available to students and teachers. Likewise, these spaces are designed to facilitate collaboration. To enhance collaboration, furniture should be flexible, and teachers should have the autonomy to structure classrooms in ways that allow for student-to-student and student-to-teacher interactions. 21st century learning spaces also allow for creative expression which can be accomplished through the use of experimentation or MakerSpaces. Finally, these should be comfortable social spaces which mirror the environments students choose to work in. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has coined the phrase "Learning Studios" when discussing modern learning environments, noting that spaces should flex to accommodate the human relationships that are critical to successful learning.

Further, there was overwhelming support for a redesign and update to our library spaces in a recent survey of Pleasantdale Parents (n=164). This April 2018 survey asked parents if they would support the updates as described in this executive summary; 78% of parents responded "yes" they would. Additionally, seventeen parents responded that they would volunteer to serve on a committee to assist the district in this endeavor. As we look at our current library spaces, we see opportunity to implement the qualities of a 21st century learning environment and further advance our Strategic Blueprint and district mission.

#### Impact on Pleasantdale Students

Our technology implementation and classroom spaces have been areas of focus as we have worked to support our Strategic Blueprint goals. Yet one area of our schools has remained untouched: our libraries. In a 21st century learning environment, the library serves as the "learning hub" of the school building. In fact, the Partnership for 21st Century Learning states, "The library media center should be the nerve center of the school, a place where kids gather to get and create information, a place where they can get excited about learning and where they can escape from the pressures of the day" (p. 11). Therefore, our library must be re-imagined to support curricula that is focused on differentiation, collaboration, creativity and exploration. Our libraries, as currently configured, are one-dimensional spaces that support the more traditional functions of a library: book check-out, whole class visits/presentations, and occasional small group work. These library spaces are not equipped to support multiple activities and uses all at once. A 21st Century library can support many different types of learning and student engagement simultaneously: individual work, small group work, whole class lessons, collaboration spaces, and creative spaces where students can create and design their own projects. And while any re-designed space would continue to contain a full-service library for our students, we see the opportunity to expand our spaces into more inviting, flexible environments where we can diversify a student's learning experience in Pleasantdale. Students today need access to the digital tools and media-rich resources that will help them explore, understand, and express themselves in the world they will inherit tomorrow. We aim to achieve this goal while balancing our library spaces with the need to

provide students with hard copy materials such as books and periodicals. This excerpt from the article *21st Century Libraries: The Learning Commons* succinctly sums up the role of libraries in our connected world.

When every student has the potential to carry a global library on the device in his or her pocket, the role of physical libraries may become even more important, not just a place to house resources, but one in which to create meaning from them. The libraries of the 21st century provide a welcoming common space that encourages exploration, creation, and collaboration between students, teachers, and a broader community. They bring together the best of the physical and digital to create learning hubs. Ultimately, libraries will continue to inspire students to construct new knowledge and meaning from the world around them.

As we look locally at what surrounding districts are doing with their library spaces, we see a trend toward updated library spaces. As you can see from the following graphic, many of our comparison districts have undergone some level of improvement to library spaces over the course of the past five years. While not every district took the same approach to updating their spaces, nearly all districts made some sort of improvements.

	Construction Update <sup>1</sup>	Refresh <sup>2</sup>	No Update
Western Springs 101	●		
LaGrange 102		●	
LaGrange-Hodgkins 105	●		
LaGrange-Highlands 106			●
Gower 62	●		
Butler SD 53	●		

#### Responsible Funding of our Vision

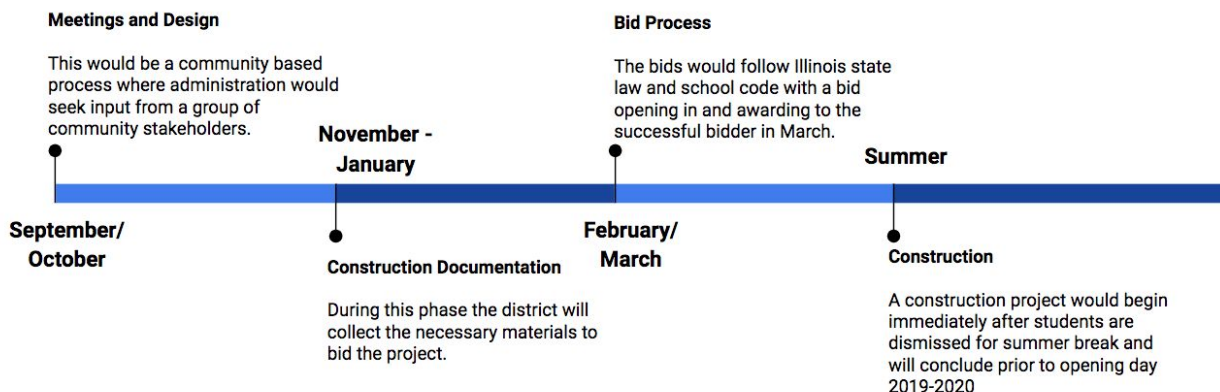
Pleasantdale SD 107 has a long history of responsible financial management. For example, we have the lowest tax rate of any of the LTHS associate districts. Likewise, the district recently upgraded its bond rating to a Aa1, and we have not asked the voters to approve a tax rate increase in over a decade. The district is consistently recognized by the state as having excellent financial management. Finally, and most importantly, the district has refunded over \$6 million to taxpayers in the form of a bond abatement which keeps our community's taxes low. The district has a history of making thoughtful and strategic structural improvements to our schools which will have positive impacts to student instruction or programs. Examples of these improvements include a preschool wing at the elementary school and new gym facilities and science labs at the middle school. All of these improvements were made over a decade ago, which underscores the need to once again consider making improvements to our schools.

As we seek to make structural improvements to support the instructional program, we must do so in the most fiscally responsible manner possible. Administration met with our architecture firm, STR Partners, to identify potential costs and timeline of a library project at both schools. While these numbers are preliminary and subject to change, it gives the Board an idea of how much a project would cost. We can assume a construction cost of \$175 per square foot for our 3,000 square foot middle school library, for an approximate cost of \$525,000. Additionally, we can assume a cost of \$50,000 for furniture.

<sup>1</sup> Construction means large scale facilities improvement

<sup>2</sup> Refresh means paint, carpet, and/or furniture

When we consider the timeline for this project we believe the work (from community involved design to substantial completion) could be done for the opening of the 2019-2020 school year. Following is a graphic of a potential timeline.



The district has several options when considering how to fund this project. Each option has its benefits and drawbacks. The options, with benefits and drawbacks, are outlined in the table below.

Options	Benefits	Drawbacks	Required Action
Cash on hand	No impact to the tax rate.	Draws down reserves and impacts the district’s financial position.	Board Resolution (possible public hearing).
Non-Referendum Bonds	Minimal increase to the tax rate (\$5.36 per household). Keeps the debt level steady.	Extends the debt for an additional seven years.	Petition period of 30 days, publish intent in the newspaper, and hold a public hearing.
Referendum Bonds	Pay off the project sooner.	Significant increase in the tax rate and requires voter approval. Delays timeline.	Voter action
Combination of Cash on hand and Non-Referendum Bonds	Allows the district to responsibly draw down reserves to align with Board policy. Very minimal impact on the tax rate.	Extends the debt for an additional four years.	Petition period of 30 days, publish intent in the newspaper, and hold a public hearing.

Conclusion and Considerations

Given the body of evidence outlining the benefits of updating our library spaces, and the fact that this project can be completed in an economical manner, we seek to continue our study and bring additional information to the Board of Education. We would like to form a more complete timeline for completion of this project and input from a community stakeholder group. Finally, we would like to update the Board on design and costs over the course of the next several months. During the planning phases, the

administration will provide the broader Pleasantdale community with an opportunity to learn about the project and provide feedback. Additionally, an advisory committee will convene to provide input and guidance as we seek to improve our library facilities. The administration seeks guidance from the Board on this recommendation.

Sources:

Edutopia: Holland, B. (2015, January): 21st Century Libraries: The Learning Commons

Krause, K. (2012, December). Top 4 Traits of "Future Proof" Employees, According to 1,709 CEOs *Forbes*, 33-35

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, *21st Century Learning Environments*