



## **Woodlands Facilities Update FAQ**

*January 2023*

The Woodlands Board of Trustees have received questions from community members during the public forum portion of board meetings concerning various topics. In our continuing effort for transparency and accountability, we are posting questions and answers for everyone in the community. The questions have been divided into five categories; **Board of Trustees, Academics, Finances, Facilities and Staffing.** *Please note that some of the questions contain statements that are inaccurate.*

### **Board Of Trustees:**

#### ***What is the makeup of the Woodlands Board of Trustees and what is its purpose?***

- The Woodlands Board of Trustees must have at least five members to conduct business and no more than eighteen members. The board is composed of volunteers – parents from Bluemound and State Street campuses, as well as community members.
- Currently, the Board has two (2) Bluemound parents including the Chair that does not vote unless a tie needs to be broken, three (3) State Street parents, and two (2) community members. We are accepting applications to fill the following vacancies: three (3) Bluemound parents (the Board Chair is from the Bluemound campus and will allow the board to have an odd number in case of a tie) and one (1) State Street parent. In addition, we have vacancies of Trustee positions for community members. Ideally, the Board should be composed of thirteen (13) members with diverse backgrounds and experiences.
- Woodlands School, Inc. is governed by a board of trustees. The Board of Trustees are representative of their community, putting the interests of students' first.
- Applications are available on Woodlands' website. We encourage those interested to apply and submit their applications to [board@woodlands-school.org](mailto:board@woodlands-school.org). Applications are accepted year-round. Applicants will be notified if there are openings. If positions are open, applicants will be interviewed by the Governance committee and notified if they will be voted in at the next regularly scheduled meeting.

#### ***Who was present for the Letter of Intent and Woodlands campus merger vote?***

- Keesha Jones-Sutton, Chair; Mackenzie Menefee, Vice-Chair; Rodrigo Marangon, Treasurer; Kenge Adams (virtually present for the presentation unable to stay for the vote) , Trustee; Amy Miller, Trustee; Joe Rogall, Trustee; Vickie Brown-Gurley, Woodlands Executive Director; Karen Obukowicz, Woodlands, Dir. Of Business Services; David Glazer, Woodlands Broker were all present.

- All votes took place lawfully under the presence of an active, full Board of Trustees.

***Why does the board not answer concerns publicly during the board meeting?***

- During most board meetings, the community is invited to comment during the Public Comment agenda item. The Woodlands community is asked, upon being recognized by the Board Chair, to introduce themselves, state the campus they represent before addressing the nature of their comments. Commenters are asked to keep their comments to 2 minutes.
- The Board normally will refrain from responding until they have had an opportunity to thoughtfully reflect on comments and questions. If a response is required, a response will be posted on the schools website. Concerns may be referred to the appropriate party for follow-up, and the Board will be informed of the resolution.
- The Board Chair may establish other time limits and guidelines for comments.

***Is it possible to post questions to the FB page and someone from the board responds there?***

- To ensure all have access to questions, the board will address questions via the school's website.

***Can we bring back the Workforce Development Committee that includes staff/principals, exec dir., HR and a board member on it to collaboratively work together?***

- Yes, the board will work to restart this committee to help keep the lines of communication open between all parties involved.

***When will the BOD approve and post the November/December Meeting minutes?***

- The minutes will be approved at the January 9, 2024 Annual Board meeting and be posted to the website within 7 business days.

***What is our communication strategy? For example, teachers, parents, and then general community - all at once or segmented? How will we allow for feedback? (\*upset that teachers didn't have more time to digest information prior to parent communication)***

- We will continue with the segmented communication strategy; making teachers aware of changes and then parents. We want to ensure that both groups are receiving information directly from the board and administrative team to avoid misinformation. We will also continue to host forums for staff to give feedback directly to the board and administrative team and offer surveys for feedback to those that don't feel comfortable asking questions in public.
- We recognize that some did not identify the 'parent facilities survey' as the precursor to building decisions. Going forward, communication will be more frequent, direct, and visible.

**Present update on recently received lawsuit. (All parents should have this information and know its potential impacts.)**

- The recent letter received is NOT a lawsuit. It is an open records request. Because of the extensive nature of the request, the Board has enlisted our attorney. We are meeting with the parents who are working with a lawyer to hopefully resolve the request without further attorney involvement.

**What is the term for executive director? How is a new one appointed?**

- *An executive director is the senior operating officer or manager of an organization or corporation, usually at a nonprofit. Similar in many ways to the CEO role in a for-profit corporation, executive directors are responsible for steering the organization and managing its operations.*
- *Our current Executive Director was hired, not appointed, by the Woodlands Board of Trustees. She is the only staff member that is supervised by the Board. She receives a contract for her work from and is evaluated by the Board of Trustees.*

**Academics:**

**How does Woodlands plan to address the lower scores of students?**

- Both campuses have students struggling academically. The three subgroups of students as identified by UWM's Performance Framework at both campuses are
  - **Students with Disabilities**
  - **Socio-economically Disadvantaged Students**
  - **African American Students**
- Last spring Woodlands developed an **Academic Excellence Framework** which was shared with staff this fall. [Click here](#) to see the infographic.
- This will be explained at the Jan. 9th Board meeting.

**What will 'extension' at the State Street Campus 'look like'?**

We spend time working with staff and families that utilize Extension to determine what it will look like during the 2025-26 school year. This will be decided well in advance of enrollment for the 2025-26 school year.

**Why were there student names on the petition being circulated? Were all parents notified that their children were being asked to sign a petition?**

The petition was not created or distributed by Woodlands Board members or staff. We cannot provide any information regarding the methods of distribution or information collection.

**When students are asked to assist with special projects (such as speaking with the UWM Board) are parents notified and/or asked for approval?**

Yes. Parents were notified and asked for approval. UWM did not provide us any information on the questions that would be asked to any group during the charter renewal process.

***What is the SPED/504 student to teacher ratio at Bluemound currently per classroom? What is it at State St per classroom? When the merger is completed what are estimated numbers?***

- Caseloads for all special education teachers, speech pathologists, and occupational therapists fluctuate throughout the school year based on initial evaluations and dismissals, as well as transfers into Woodlands from other schools. Caseloads are not by classrooms. Currently at Woodlands they are grouped by grade levels. 504 Plans are managed by the director for pupil services in conjunction with regular education staff and teaching assistants. Special education staff do not have students with 504 Plans on their caseload. Management of caseload numbers is carefully monitored by the director of pupil services to ensure balance and compliance with minutes and services in the IEP documents.

***Given that numbers may increase in some classes, what is the plan to ensure that all students are receiving equitable learning experiences?***

- When the two campuses join, the special education staff will also come together. Therefore, the services will remain the same. Additionally, the classrooms are also coming together under one campus, so there should be no need to increase the number of students that receive special education services in any classroom.

***And IEP needs are being met?***

- IEP needs and services will continue to be met and regularly monitored for compliance by the special education case managers and the director of pupil services.

**Finances:**

***How can we be informed about budget/financial details so that we can respond before the decision?***

- This information will be shared at the January 9, 2023 Board of Trustees' Annual Meeting. Documents shared will be posted on the Woodlands website within seven days after the Board meeting.

***What is the financial position of Woodlands?***

- This information will be shared at the January 9, 2023 Board of Trustees' Annual Meeting. Documents shared will be posted on the Woodlands website within seven days after the Board meeting.

***How do we best classify the \$3.1 million?***

- These are funds that Potawatomi Business Development Company has dedicated to upgrade their buildings to retain us as tenants and to invest in their community.

***Based on the document provided, there is an approximate savings of \$30,000 per year by combining the campuses. This seems like a low amount to move.***

The main reason for the move is to provide better learning opportunities for students. We also hoped to provide a better working environment for staff by providing an updated facility with space to do the work they need to do with students. We hoped to secure a facility with more fixed costs and allow us the ability to better budget each year for expenses. We have also taken into consideration the renovations we are being offered at no cost to us a huge benefit.

***How were ESSER funds utilized? How much did the school receive? Is there an itemized list of what the money was used towards and where can that be accessed?***

- [Here](#) is a document regarding ESSER funds. Please feel free to reach out to the Board or administration if you have additional questions.

**Facilities**

***Will it be ADA compliant?***

- Yes it will.

***What outdoor space will be established?***

- We are currently negotiating additional outdoor space. We will keep the community updated.

***Are there updated renderings?***

- Not yet. We will be meeting every other week with the building and design team. We will share when we have updated documents.

***What is the updated timeline?***

- The estimated timeline currently looks like construction will be finished by next winter. However, we will see better once we secure the permits and materials needed to begin the work.

***Will the community be able to provide feedback on renderings?***

- We are happy to hear the feedback from the community on the renderings, however, we are limited in the scope of work, cost and feasibility of the recommendations. We will be meeting with staff to discuss some of those thoughts before the final plans are drawn. We plan to share the final plans with the community when we get to that point.

***Logistically, how will students transfer between buildings (cafeteria, gym) with coats, bags, and lunches? How often will that occur?***

- Students have moved between the gym and the main building for eleven years at State Street. It is much like students at Bluemound have moved between the main building and the library building for library as well as for special services all day, everyday. The new addition will be moving to the cafeteria. We will work with our Staff Transition Team to determine the most effective way for this to happen.

***What other tenants will remain at the Wgema Campus? How will Woodlands remain secure? Will these tenants have access to the students?***

- Woodlands has been on this campus for eleven years. The other tenants on the campus include the Potawatomi Business Development Corporation, Forest County Potawatomi Gaming Commission, Tribal Executive Council, Greenfire Management Services, and Wgema Leasing. There may be a few other smaller businesses, but they are mostly housed in the Wgechda Building which is only used by Woodlands when we utilize the community room.

***Please provide a detailed list of repairs/maintenance needed and associated costs for the Bluemound school that ultimately lead to the decision to look for another building.***

- [Here](#) is a list of repairs/maintenance at the Bluemound campus for the past three years. This was not the main reason for the decision to look for another building but a contributing factor. The main reason was to have space for our students to have access to all of the learning experiences we would like for them to have.

***Aside from a newer building, please explain what the State St. school will offer that the Bluemound school doesn't already have.***

Wgema Leasing and Potawatomi Business Development Corporation have offered Woodlands additional space to lease and renovate on the campus on State Street. They have allowed us to design the spaces as we see fit for our school community. They have also asked if we would allow them to provide the cleaning and maintenance services for the leased space. They wish to be more active in making sure the space remains up to date and usable for us. This lease will allow us to be in a space where we do not have to pay 50% of all repairs in an aging building. This landlord will take ownership of maintaining their property and keeping everything in good working condition. They will also provide a gated community to keep our students insulated from activity that happens in a busy city. They have an onsite security firm that makes keeping our community safe a priority. Unfortunately the Bluemound landlord has not offered us any of these things.

***How was a decision made and communicated to families, causing great upheaval, before assessments were made regarding the timeline for construction of spaces necessary to combine campuses- and what changes to process have been put into place to ensure that decision making improves?***

- The construction assessment process began with all parties involved working towards a deadline of next school year, and assurances were given from Wgema Leasing and their partners that this timeline was accurate. As the announcement came to families, delays and factors out of our control led to an updated timeline that would push into the upcoming school year and would possibly be disruptive to learning and daily operations, resulting in Woodlands decision to delay the move to 2025. Going forward, all parties involved with the planning and construction of the new facilities meet bi-weekly and communicate any and all information that may affect the timeline of construction.

Woodlands will strive to be timely and transparent with this information in our messaging to families and staff as updates occur.

***What is our financial responsibility for repairs at the Bluemound campus (provide exact numbers or percentages)?***

- Per our lease agreement, the cost of such repairs, restorations and replacements shall be shared equally between Landlord and Tenant and shall be referred to as Shared Maintenance and Repair Obligations. This results in Woodlands School being responsible for fifty percent (50%) of the costs of the Shared Maintenance and Repair Obligations at the Bluemound campus. Here is an [excerpt](#) from the Bluemound lease that states this specifically.

***What repairs are scheduled to take place at the Bluemound campus and when are they scheduled?***

With the initial plan to be ending the lease Summer 2024, no repairs were scheduled. Due to the updated timeline of the state street construction, we are currently in the process of determining what repairs will be needed that align with the one year extension.

***What are the estimated moving costs?***

We are still gathering estimates and information at this time as we assess our moving needs.

***What are the estimated costs for storage, since we will need to store items currently at the Bluemound campus?***

We are still gathering estimates and information at this time as we assess our storage needs.

***What is the cost estimate to complete the last three Univents and any other known outstanding repairs and deferred maintenance that have been delayed by the facilities search?***

Due to the updated construction timeline, we are currently in the process of determining what repairs will be needed that align with the one year extension and the costs associated with deferred maintenance.

***At the State St listening session, Vickie Brown Gurley stated that the inspiration for the merger came from the introduction of the wheel for middle schoolers. She said that there was just not enough space currently to hold the variety of classes they wanted. In looking at the rendering of the proposed new classroom layout, there doesn't seem to be many common areas in which wheel classes would be conducted. Aside from the band/choir room, there is one flex room by the 5/6 classrooms and none in the 7/8 wing.***

***How will the new campus address the lack of spaces for wheel classes?***

In regards to wheel class space, we wanted to offer a variety of wheel classes and aim to give as many of our students the opportunity to join these classes as possible. Due to the constraints with space at both campuses, it was a challenge to schedule wheel classes. We decided that a new facility would give us the opportunity to create additional spaces for students to experience more learning. The current plans are to add a room for band/orchestra, a room for choir and a room for music classes. We also looked to add a science lab and an upgraded library space that was large enough for a class of students to comfortably utilize the space. The new space also had to have more restrooms, be ADA compatible, and have a large space where we can have student performances that parents can attend. Staff also wanted to have more flexible spaces that can be used in working with small groups of students.

***What improvements are needed at bluemound and costs associated with those needed improvements? When was this shared with parents?***

The challenge is there are recurring building improvement costs

***Staffing:***

***What are we doing to ensure a healthy, open culture (fear of retaliation) of the teachers and staff?***

Administration has offered staff an opportunity to come to them directly with any questions or concerns. For those that don't feel comfortable doing that may contact the board directly. Staff members were also given an opportunity to provide questions that they have to the HR Manager during the last professional development session held on January 2nd. That information will be shared with the board and full admin team to respond to. The HR Manager reminded staff about the no retaliation policy and asked that anyone that felt that they were retaliated against in any way should report it immediately for investigation.

***State St had a mass exodus last year? Why? Were staff given an exit interview to determine the reasons for leaving?***

- Staff were given an opportunity to complete an exit interview in person or to complete the exit interview survey. All opted to do the survey. We received 12 responses. The reasons for leaving are listed below:
  - Retirement
  - My new job has better pay
  - My new job has better benefits
  - Making a career change
  - Did not feel supported by my principal
  - I did not align with the direction of upper management
  - Too many staff did not choose to stay
  - No kindergarten TA position available
  - Unsure about the direction and future of two campuses
  - Personal reasons



***How many teachers at Bluemound have signed on to return after the merger?***

- Due to the delay in the relocation of Bluemound staff to the state street location, the intent to return survey has not been sent out to staff. The survey will be sent out to staff in March in previous years.

***Who are the teachers on the transition committee, have they met yet and what are they tasked with working on? Will the community receive updates from them?***

- Click here to view the [Woodlands Transition Team Document](#).

***Why are we utilizing staffing agencies to hire teachers that clearly aren't invested in the Woodlands Way?***

- There is a national shortage of workers in every industry, especially teaching staff and Woodlands is not immune to this. We work hard to vet candidates before hiring them on. Candidates complete two interviews, background and reference checks. Candidates from the staffing agencies undergo the same process. Sometimes once employees start we find that who showed up to the interview is the same person that shows up to work and we try to remedy the situation by reiterating Woodlands expectations and holding them accountable to make the changes necessary to maintain employment. If the employee is unable to meet those expectations we terminate employment.

***What specific actions are planned to work toward a five year charter renewal with UWM in 2027?***

- Both campuses have students struggling academically. The three subgroups of students as identified by UWM's Performance Framework at both campuses are
  - **Students with Disabilities**
  - **Socio-economically Disadvantaged Students**
  - **African American Students**
- Last spring Woodlands developed an **Academic Excellence Framework** which was shared with staff this fall. [Click here](#) to see the infographic.
- This will be explained at the Jan. 9th Board meeting.

***Who lives on the State Street campus and are annual background checks completed including OIG and SAM?***

- The other tenants on the campus include the Potawatomi Business Development Corporation, Forest County Potawatomi Gaming Commission, Tribal Executive Council, Greenfire Management Services, and Wgema Leasing. The human resources department runs annual background checks for all Woodlands staff.

***What are the plans to ensure a smooth and successful merger (for teachers, kids, and parents). When will those plans be shared with parents?***

- The board of directors, the admin team, and the transition committee are working to ensure that the transition is as smooth as possible. These groups are in the process of

developing plans and regular communications that will be shared with parents as they are developed. Click here to view the [Woodlands Transition Team Document](#).