

District schedules input sessions on facilities improvements at two local schools

With work on revitalizing local school facilities already underway thanks to the Half-Cent for Schools initiative, Alachua County Public Schools is seeking public input on two of the biggest and earliest projects.

Parents, staff, and community members are invited to attend sessions that will be held at both Howard Bishop Middle School and Idylwild Elementary School later this month. District staff and the architects hired for each project will present information and take input from participants on what they want in a redesigned campus.



Both schools are slated for major improvements, including the demolition of many existing buildings, new construction and other renovations.

“Both schools are going to look, work and feel very different when the work is done, and we want each school’s community to have a say in that,” said the district’s Assistant Superintendent for Operations Paul White.

The Bishop input session is scheduled for Thursday, August 22 and the Idylwild session is set for Tuesday, August 27. Both sessions will run from 5:30 to 7 p.m. and will be held in the schools’ cafeterias.

Planning has also begun on a massive reconstruction and renovation project at Metcalfe Elementary School that will include the demolition of most of the existing buildings. An input session for Metcalfe will be scheduled in the next few weeks.

The Half-Cent for Schools initiative was approved by 68% of local voters in November to revitalize the district’s aging, outdated and overcrowded facilities. The district received the first dollars from the Half-Cent in late March.



Besides Metcalfe, Idylwild, and Bishop, planning is also underway for projects at several other schools, including Hawthorne Middle/High School, Santa Fe High School, Buchholz High School, Wiles, Talbot and Hidden Oak elementary schools, A. Quinn Jones School and a new elementary school. More will be coming online in the next few months.

A number of facilities projects were completed over the summer, including roof and air conditioning replacement and other work at Gainesville High School, Terwilliger and Stephen Foster elementary schools, Kanapaha Middle School and the Duval Early Learning Center.

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This summer the district also launched a new website designed to inform the public about facilities projects at all local schools.

The district's revamped Facilities Update page now includes a 'story map' that provides a school-by-school timetable of the facilities improvements planned for each campus, an interactive map and information on the progress at each school. The website link is: <https://bit.ly/2xzHi9p>

In the next few months, the district will be adding a more detailed feature to the story map that follows the steps the district is taking to complete each project, which can include everything from hiring architects to applying for permits.

The new site also includes information about the Half-Cent for Schools oversight committee, a group of local citizens who review the spending of the revenues from the half-cent initiative. Visitors to the site can find meeting minutes and detailed information about the half-cent expenditures.

"We said all along that we want this process to be as transparent as possible," said White. "This site gives the public a quick and easy way to find out how the Half-Cent revenues are being spent."

Besides the website, the district will also be communicating with parents and the public about its facilities revitalization plans through fliers, school and community meetings, social media and other methods.

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