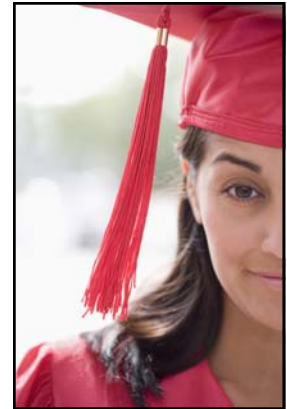


E-470 EDUCATION MASTER PLANNING PROJECT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Forward: Charting a Course for the Future Together

"It's not enough to have a vision. A vision grows out of a community of purpose and for me that purpose is very, very simple: It's the people who live in this community. Having purpose is accepting the challenge of leadership".

Mayor Ed Tauer, State of the City Address
March 29, 2006

Aurora is already the third largest city in Colorado with more than 300,000 residents and a growing economy. New housing developments along a portion of E-470 will add about 50,000 new homes and 150,000 people to Aurora's population over the next 20 to 25 years. These new homes will require approximately 22 new public schools within the boundaries of APS and other amenities like early childhood learning facilities, parks and recreation centers, from 56th Avenue to the north and Quincy Avenue to the south. This growth provides a special opportunity to create an attractive and livable set of communities at a reasonable cost, draw new businesses to Aurora, and make a more diverse community.

A stronger, more strategically integrated education system from birth through college for both current and new residents will be the foundation for making Aurora one of the most attractive places to live, support the continued growth of City's economy, and make it a national model of collaborative leadership on public education issues.

To ensure that this unique opportunity becomes a reality, a major planning effort was initiated by leaders in the business community, in partnership with Aurora Public Schools, the City of Aurora, and other key stakeholders.

Introduction: Why an Education Master Plan?

An education master plan is becoming an essential component of new community development and existing community revitalization. Increasingly, developers and homebuilders are collaborating with school districts and other public and private agencies to ensure attractive, high achieving schools. Why is this necessary when only a few years ago new school facilities were built with little thought about flexible programming or even the adequacy of the facilities themselves? There are a number of reasons for this change:

- Today's housing market is increasingly competitive, and it takes more than just quality housing to make a community attractive to buyers, especially those with school-aged children.

- Parents are more informed and are, in greater numbers, selecting the best learning environments for their children. They know that if their children are going to be successful in a knowledge-based economy, they will need an outstanding education, from early childhood through postsecondary education.
- Careful planning is needed to successfully meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student body with a variety of interests, both academically and professionally.
- A growing body of research has identified many successful educational strategies that require thoughtful planning to be effectively implemented and achieve desired outcomes across an array of vested stakeholder groups.
- City and school district resources are becoming increasingly scarce while expectations for services are increasing.

While developing an education master plan is challenging, implementation will be more so. However, there are substantial benefits to the City of Aurora, Aurora Public Schools, the community, developers/homebuilder, and local businesses to ensure that they will thoughtfully implement the Master Plan.

Properly executed, benefits include: higher student achievement, opportunities to participate in new educational programs, improved alignment between early childhood, kindergarten to grade 12, and postsecondary education, higher housing and land values, greater tax revenues, and greater student diversity within schools.

First Steps: Creating a Shared Understanding

The planning effort began with an Education Summit in December 2005 that brought together a diverse group of education policy experts with Aurora citizens and leaders from the City, Aurora Public Schools, and business community. At the Summit, Kelly Leid, Executive Director of the Foundation for Educational Excellence, stated the following:

"This is one of those very rare opportunities-I believe that the conditions before us represent a "unique opportunity" to forge new thinking, new partnerships, new energy, and new, more meaningful results as we engage in a broader discussion about education and how best to provide Colorado children with the tools they need for their long-term success. In terms of Aurora, just think about the incredible physical assets this City/region has or will have in the coming years - Denver International Airport, Transport Center (future), Buckley Air Force Base, Fitzsimmons Medical Center, and the improving transportation corridors like - E-470 & 225".

The Summit participants shared this point of view and agreed on the following:

- A quality education and a healthy, vibrant economy are closely linked – one is not possible without the other;
- A new, robust partnership is necessary between Aurora Public Schools, the City of Aurora, the business community, developers, the nonprofit community, and other key stakeholders, and
- An E-470 Corridor Education Taskforce should be established through a partnership of key stakeholders to develop a long-range "education master plan" for new school development and existing school revitalization.

The first meeting of the E-470 Corridor Education Taskforce, which later became known as the Strategic Planning & Coordination Team (SPCT), included leaders from all of the stakeholder groups and was convened in February 2006. The SPCT directed that four committees be established to maximize opportunities for participation and focus around specific topical areas. Committee members brought significant expertise to the discussions, and each committee identified a goal, strategies, action steps, outcomes, and potential partners. The mission, vision, goals, and a summary of the strategies developed by the committees are shown below.

Overall, more than 100 people were involved in the development of the E-470 Education Master Plan, representing more than 50 different organizations.

In addition to the committee work, two community forums were held to bring the perspective of national experts to the E-470 Education Master Planning Project. Chad Wick, President and CEO of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, located in Ohio, emphasized the importance of career and vocational pathways and authentic community involvement. Ron Bogle, President and CEO of the American Architectural Foundation, located in Washington DC, spoke about the importance of integrating school facilities into the broader community.

The Education Master Plan: Convergence Around Big Ideas

Project Vision

Aurora Public Schools shall consistently be the highest achieving school district in the state.

Project Mission

To create a community plan for achieving and sustaining excellence in Aurora Public Schools by integrating the visions of new and existing residents with leaders in business, education, nonprofits and city government.

Committee Work - Goals & Strategies

Early Childhood Education & School Readiness

Goal: All young children have the opportunity to attend quality infant and toddler, preschool, full-day kindergarten and before- and after-school programs that are affordable, of high quality and contribute to school success.

Strategies: To achieve this goal, parents will be provided with information about parenting skills, the entry skills needed for kindergarten and first grade, and quality early education and care facilities in the community. Also, additional funding sources will be sought for early childhood education and full-day kindergarten. Finally, incentives will be offered to increase the number of quality early education and care providers in the community.

Kindergarten through Grade 12

Goal: A variety of options are available to successfully meet the diverse needs of Aurora's kindergarten through grade 12 population.

Strategies: New program options that are research-based and have been demonstrated to be effective will be initiated based on community preferences. Partnerships will be established with local businesses and organizations to take advantage of Aurora's many strengths. These new programs will be supported by the Aurora Public Schools to ensure that they are of the highest quality.

Postsecondary Education

Goal: High quality postsecondary educational opportunities that support regional economic development and personal career development are available to all APS students.

Strategies: Students will be aware of the postsecondary options available and be able to choose the one most appropriate for them through participation in visits to college campuses beginning as early as grade five, counseling, college and career resource centers, internships and apprenticeships, and postsecondary classes while still in high school. In addition, high school and college curriculum and assessments will be aligned to ensure that students graduate ready for college. Finally, opportunities will be sought to increase the number of postsecondary institutions located in Aurora.

Land Planning, School Design, and Facility Funding

Goal: School facilities become year-round anchors for both new community development and existing community revitalization. They provide opportunities for all Aurora residents to meet their recreational, personal, and professional growth goals. Facilities also celebrate sustainability and environmental stewardship, are highly flexible, and support evolving teaching and learning program needs over time.

Strategies: School facilities will be viewed as community centers and made available to residents when school is not in session. School facilities will be designed to accomplish this, as well as with the flexibility needed to respond to changing educational demands and to blend with the community. Through collaboration between the City of Aurora, Aurora Public Schools, and land developers, school sites will be adjacent to parks and other amenities like libraries, daycare centers, and recreation centers. This will ensure that desired services are in place at a reasonable cost.

Next Steps: Moving from Opportunity to Reality

Careful planning will be required to implement each strategy and action step. Where required, City and School District approvals will follow established procedures that include a public engagement process. Continued collaboration and support from the City of Aurora, Aurora Public Schools, the business sector, and the community at large will be needed to make this important opportunity a reality. Ultimately a broader group of stakeholders will be brought together to help coordinate and facilitate many of the strategies and action steps recommended in the Master Plan. To that end, the creation of a P-16 Council would be an ideal organizational mechanism to assist in this new robust public/private partnership.

P-16 is a fully integrated systems approach to educational planning designed to raise student achievement at all levels, preschool through a baccalaureate degree. The primary emphasis of such efforts is to focus on broad-based collaboration, alignment, and educational attainment across multiple stakeholder groups.

Ideally, the Council's membership would include representatives from the same stakeholder groups that comprised the SPCT as well as additional representatives from the early childhood and higher education communities, city and county government, and major employers. In addition to helping organize the important work ahead, the Council would also issue an annual report about progress toward full implementation of the E-470 Education Master Plan.

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The Relentless Pursuit of Quality Education for Colorado's Children