

**Communication from Northfield Public Schools**

Date: October 26, 2010  
From: L. Chris Richardson, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools  
Subject: School Board decides not to pursue an agreement with the Northfield Area YMCA for facility location on the Northfield High School campus

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In a vote of 5 to 2, the School Board defeated a resolution to “proceed into negotiation with the Northfield YMCA regarding the construction of a building that through a joint use agreement would be built and operated by the Northfield YMCA.”

**Background**

- At the June 14, 2010 School Board meeting, representatives of the Northfield Area Family YMCA presented the Northfield School District with a proposal to locate a YMCA facility on the Northfield High School site. YMCA representatives indicated that locating and operating their private non-profit facility on high school property is their preferred choice and would benefit the School District and the greater Northfield community.
- The School Board held two work sessions (July 29 and September 22) on the YMCA’s proposal, gathering information from District administrators and facilities consultant, as well as additional information from the YMCA.
- On October 7 the District held an open house to gather additional public feedback on whether this collaboration would create a mutually beneficial partnership for Northfield Public Schools and the YMCA while enhancing opportunities for the community.

**Key Messages about the School Board’s Decision**

- The decision facing the School Board was not about whether there should be a YMCA in the community. It was a decision about the location of the YMCA facility on School District property. The School District values the work of the Northfield Area YMCA in the community.
- The School Board and the District value and support collaboration, and we anticipate and encourage continued collaborative programming with the YMCA and others in the community. Successful collaboration occurs when organizations with identified needs come together to mutually develop a joint solution to address those needs. In the case of the YMCA’s facility proposal, the plan was developed by the YMCA and then presented to the School District as an opportunity to collaborate. According to Board members who did not support the resolution, the reasons for collaboration were not compelling and did not address high school building security and significant special education space needs.
- The proposed location of the YMCA facility on the high school property raised more concerns about the impact of the decision to build on the campus. The high school would be land-locked, limiting any needed expansion in the future; the location of the YMCA facility would reduce the amount of green space on the campus; and the sustainability of the YMCA in future years is unsure and failure would result in the School District paying to operate and maintain a building not designed to meet the most pressing needs of the District.
- Additional issues included increased traffic resulting in safety concerns; maintaining the appropriate separation of church and state; not having a large enough percentage of capital funds on hand prior to construction; and a fear that focusing on short-term gains could compromise long-term opportunities.