

District blasts Paterno proposal

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David Paterno's high school plan will not save \$30 million, is "poorly organized" and presents nothing new, says a report that will be unveiled at the State College Area school board meeting tonight.

The 30-page document, prepared by school administrators, L. Robert Kimball & Associates and Poole Anderson Construction, sharply criticizes a plan the district resident and six other volunteers presented the board two weeks ago.

"This report points out the most problematic issues and identifies once again the limitations of the two-building approach," the introduction states. "These design shortcomings are not new and were evident in the concepts developed in 2005."

Paterno had asked the board to essentially return to its original idea to renovate and expand State High's existing North and South buildings for an estimated \$62 to \$67 million. The plan, which he dubbed "The Sensible Solution," also included an enclosed walkway over Westerly Parkway -- a street students cross daily to attend classes.

The board's project, soon to go to bid, calls for the renovation and construction of the North Building to house all four high school grades. Plans for the South Building, once slated for demolition, have been scrapped and remain unknown. Kimball and Poole Anderson are the architectural and construction management firms, respectively, working on the project.

The report, to be discussed at today's board meeting at 7:30 p.m. in the Mount Nittany Middle School library, outlines nine project objectives. The new school will be secure by having an administrative office at the front entrance and assistant principals on all three floors, it says. The school will have student-centered spaces, including a 1,300-seat auditorium, 4,000-square-foot band room and two large group instruction rooms. And, because students won't walk as much to get to class, "over 2,520 minutes of instructional time will be added to the school year," the report states, "without lengthening the school day."

The report compares both plans and provides a laundry list of examples why Paterno's plan is "deficient." His plan, the report continues, does not address the flooding of the North Building, will have a more invasive impact during construction and doesn't include provisions to prevent students from crossing Westerly Parkway.

"While personal fitness is important for students and staff, the time required to make such treks has an impact on the delivery of education. Students are challenged to arrive on time to their next classes," the report says. "They have little, if any, time to visit a restroom or go to their locker. Students end up carrying numerous books in large heavy backpacks."

Paterno and Superintendent Patricia Best, both reached at their homes Sunday night, offered varying reactions to the report. Paterno declined to comment at length, but he said he is confident his plan will save at least \$30 million and hopes the board will hold a work session. School officials may have "missed the boat," he added, by not recognizing the educational benefits that exist in the current setup.

"People are not building 2,700 capacity high schools," he said.

Best said the report shows why the board decided to turn away from a two-building design and embrace what board members are calling the "one-building solution."

"We think that there is a compelling argument for the unified high school structure," she said. "This report, a summing up of information that we have been talking about for quite a long time, helps make that argument clear."

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