Board to consider first steps: hiring an architect, completing a study

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The Lafayette Parish School Board is preparing the first steps to replacing the aging and overcrowded Lafayette High School.

More than 2,400 students attend the school, which is about 60 years old and where more than 200 adults work.

The board will decide Wednesday whether to hire an architect to develop a program to replace the school and to set a budget of $100,000 for the architectural services.

The idea of replacing Lafayette High isn’t a new one.

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The project was seriously discussed a few years ago as a community committee helped guide the development of a master plan for all of the district's schools. The estimated price tag to replace the school with new construction of at least 330,000 square feet was more than $109 million.

While portable buildings dot the campus, the school was originally designed for a capacity of 1,480 students and was 207,401 square feet. At the time of the report in 2010, the school had about 2,000 students, and more than 122,000 square feet would be needed to accommodate that enrollment.

Expansion wasn't recommended because "the core areas are not of sufficient size to properly support the current and projected student enrollment," planners wrote in the report. They also recommended the administrative offices, cafeteria, kitchen and media center be both expanded and modernized.

"Due to the age, the orientation of multiple buildings and the structural condition of the permanent facilities, it is recommended that this facility be replaced," planners wrote.

Planners suggested a new school be built where the stadium and baseball fields are located or a phased replacement where other buildings are now located.

That was five years ago, and those recommendations were based on a student enrollment of 2,000 students.

Now the school has an additional 400 students.

The architect would conduct a feasibility study to determine the cost to replace the school, said Kyle Bordelon, the school system's acting chief operations officer and facilities planning manager.

"If everyone was present on a single day, we'd have more than 2,700 people on campus. It makes a difference on bathroom facilities and the wear and tear on things," he said.

Leonard, who is retiring Tuesday, said the construction project is doable without interrupting student instruction.

"We've looked at this for several years, and the concept was that back by the athletic fields — softball and baseball fields — that's where the school would go," he said. "While that construction is going on, it's feasible that instruction could go on in the existing buildings."

A timeline to replace the school hasn't been discussed. The board recently voted to build a new high school on property it owns in Youngsville and has called that project a priority. The board voted to finance the construction of the new Youngsville high school with a bond sale that also will help pay for expansions at a few other schools to alleviate overcrowding in the southern part of the parish.

Superintendent Donald Aguillard and School Board members have said additional projects would require community support in the form of a tax. Follow Marsha Sills on Twitter, @Marsha_Sills.