

Decision Item #2: ELIMINATE OR SECURE PRIVATE FUNDING FOR SCIENCE FACILITIES

Background: The District currently maintains a planetarium and observatory as part of the District science program. These facilities are staff by District personnel and serve as an enhancement to the science curriculum. Specifically, the planetarium offers interactive programs and labs, classroom curriculum development support and an informational newsletter. The observatory is used by both students and teachers to view "live" images of planets, galaxies and star clusters through an Internet link.

The planetarium is also open to the public and is visited frequently by other school districts within Dane County. Approximately one-third of the 18,000 students visiting the planetarium annually are visitors from outside the District.

Expenditures: The District currently spends approximately \$156,500 to staff and maintain these two facilities.

	Salary	Other
Planetarium	\$80,000	\$12,000
Observatory*	\$60,000	\$4,500
Totals	\$140,000	\$16,500

* Funding for the observatory is from entitlement funds for innovative programs (Title VI). These funds will not continue in the next fiscal year, as current, but are anticipated to be replaced by another entitlement source.

The District currently relies on private sources of funding for equipment purchases and upgrades. The major capital investment in the planetarium is the projector which is 30 years old. The projector will need to be replaced within the next few years at an anticipated cost of over \$100,000.

Revenues: Planetarium (annual fees) = \$9,000
Non-MMSD visitors are required to pay \$1.25/student with a minimum of \$35 per class.

FTE: Total of 1.8

Planetarium 1.0
Observatory .8

Anticipated Savings: The District would realize a net cost savings to the general fund of \$83,000 from ceasing to maintain these facilities or by finding a private partner to fund these facilities.

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Student Impact: Approximately 12,000 MMSD students visit the planetarium on an annual basis.

No usage figures were available for the observatory as a majority of access is by teachers to gain materials and “viewings” for classroom instruction.

Strategic Priorities: A direct link to the curriculum and instruction priority exists. (3)

Board Priorities: No direct link.

Effectiveness: No data exist to show a direct impact on student achievement or learning in the area of science. However, it can be argued that access to these facilities and the materials they provide may make the instruction of these areas more interesting and potentially effective.

Redundancies or Availability of the

Service Elsewhere: The District has the only planetarium in the area. There are observatory facilities at the University of Wisconsin, however, they are not currently available to MMSD students. In addition, the UW facility is live, whereas the MMSD facility is remote.

Service Delivery: The level of curriculum enhancement provided by these facilities far exceeds what is available in most other Wisconsin school districts. In their absence other districts are able to enhance instruction through the use of other science-based resources found on the Internet, in technical journals and through available video resources.

As a community resource, the facilities assist to enhance the image of the District as a community partner in science education, however, there are other options for community members to gain similar information such as the University, on-line resources and specialized programming on television. Continuation should be predicated on the ability of the community to support such a facility.

The District is currently in the process of exploring alternative funding sources. Potential funding sources related to the Planetarium include NASA, the Foundation for Madison’s Public Schools, and various competitive grants. Another potential would be a partnership with the UW’s Space Place program. Additionally, a closer relationship with the UW Space Science and Engineering program may provide alternative funding or options related to the observatory.