

## 3.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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MGT was contracted by Rapid City Area Schools (RCAS) to gather information and data in order to develop a long-range facility master plan. An important component of a viable master plan is data gathered from various community sources to ensure that critical perspectives have been heard and considered in the development of the final plan.

To ensure broad-based input, MGT conducted two sets of open community forums with an online survey aligned to the discussions at the community meetings, and invited internal and external input from identified individuals. The internal input included interviews with the superintendent, school board, and senior staff, as well as the curriculum staff, including focus groups with various staff. The external input included interviews with the county executive and county planning staff. The goal of each of these sessions was to identify overall strengths and challenges for the district and explore any specific issues unique to that person's role or function. The discussions with county planning staff were intended to provide information about planned developments across the county that could affect the schools – both number of students and location of students. Information from the internal and external interviews were used to shape the open community engagement activities.

The community engagement activities included two types of community engagement activities in support of the district's goal to create a long-range facility master plan. The activities were focused initially on gathering **input** – what was working well, what needed attention or focus during the study and for the long-range plan – and then gathering **feedback** – what had we heard, what data had been gathered and what did the community think about that information. Both types of activities included face-to-face meetings as well as online survey opportunities.

### COMMUNITY INPUT ACTIVITIES

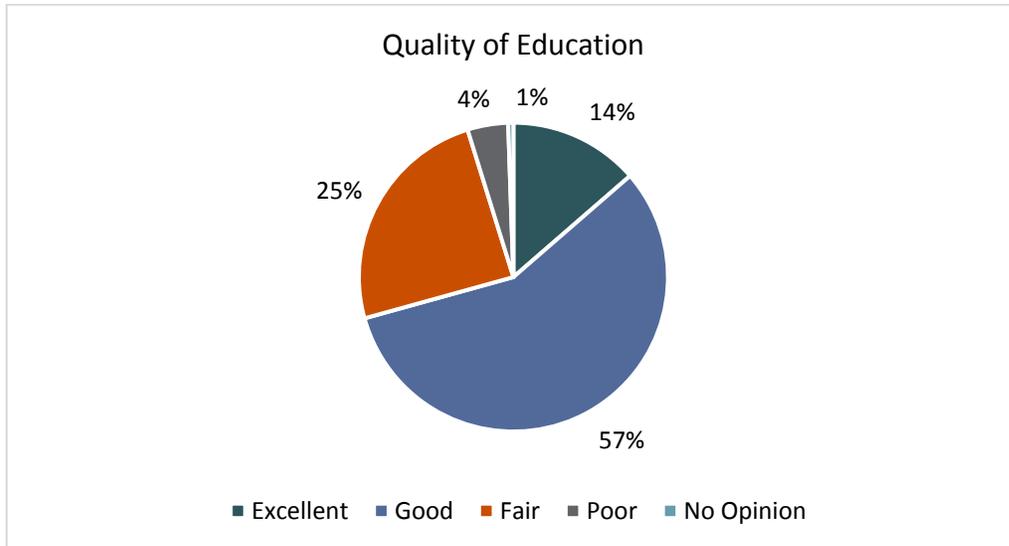
In order to gather community input regarding the long range facility plans for the district, MGT conducted five large group sessions open to the public and provided an online survey that included the same set of questions used during the large group sessions.

- ◆ North Middle School – November 10, 2015
- ◆ West Middle School – November 12, 2015
- ◆ East Middle School – November 17, 2015
- ◆ South Middle School – November 18, 2015
- ◆ Southwest Middle School – November 19, 2015

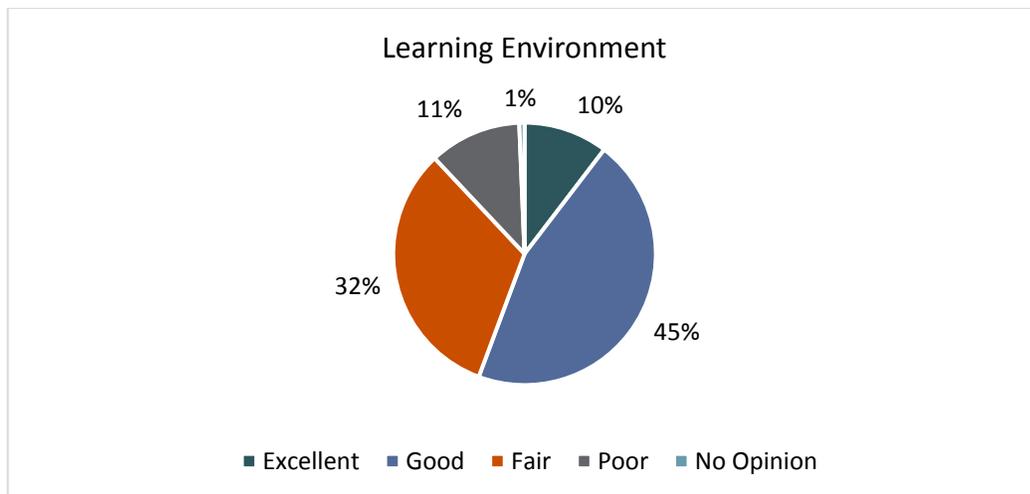
## FINDINGS

163 individuals participated in charrettes or took the online survey, for a total amount of respondents for the public input portion of the plan as 933 (N=933). For the purpose of this report, we have combined the data gathered from the community input sessions and the online survey, since nearly the same data were gathered through each venue. The combined charrette and survey responses are included in **Appendix B**.

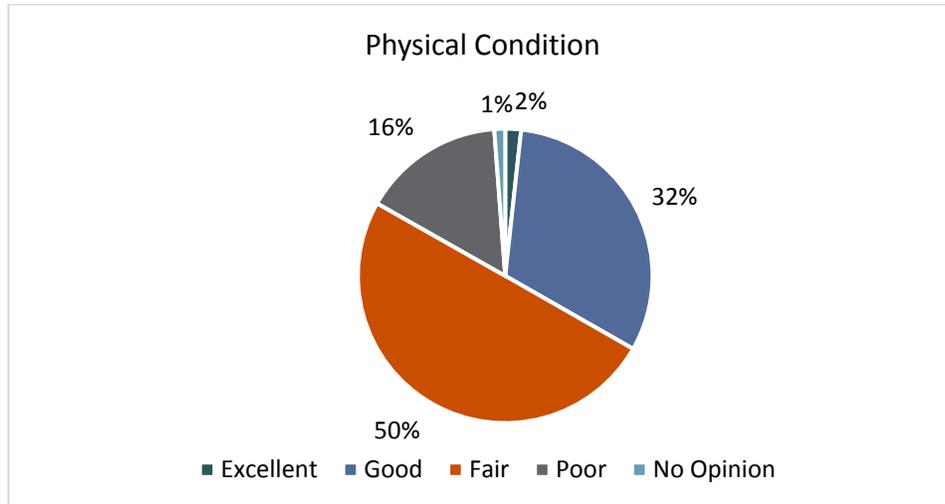
- Over 71% of respondents feel the quality of education is *Excellent* or *Good*. Respondents cited the high quality of teachers as the primary contributor to the quality of education.



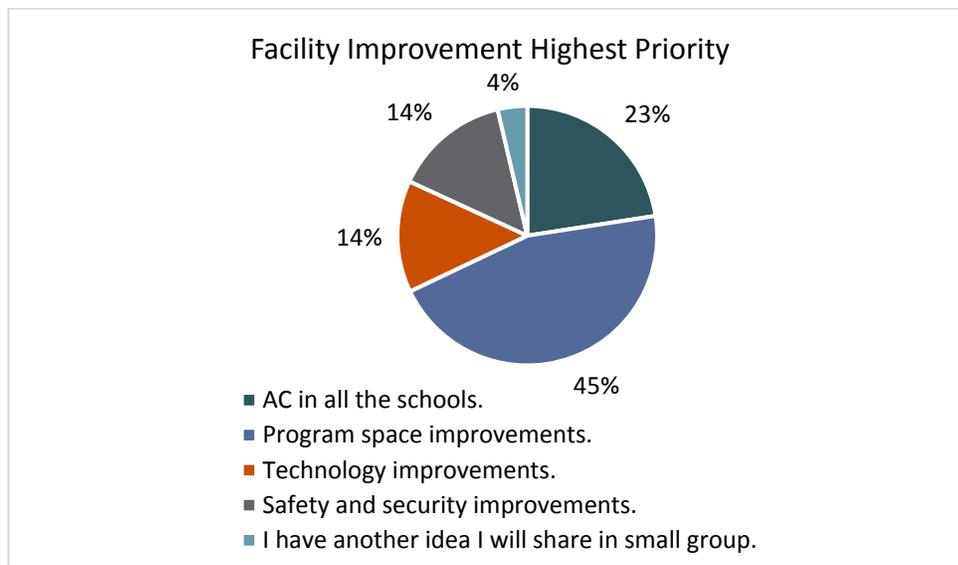
- However, nearly 43% of respondents feel the environment for learning is *Fair* or *Poor*. Many respondents cited HVAC issues, particularly the lack of sufficient air conditioning as an example.



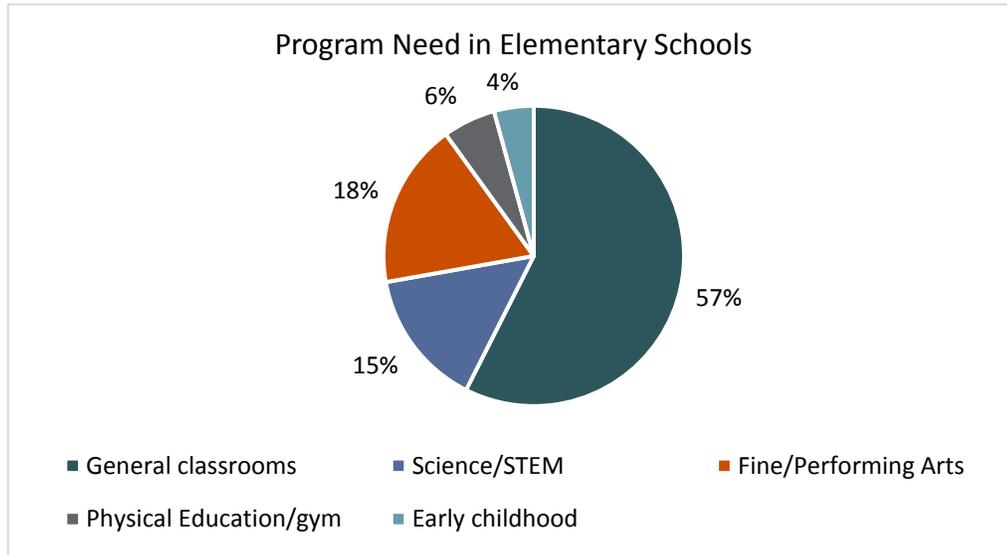
- ◆ Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents rated the physical conditions of RCAS schools as *Fair* or *Poor*, and only 34% rated conditions as *Excellent* or *Good*. Lack of air conditioning was overwhelmingly cited as most unsatisfactory element of the physical condition of schools, followed by room sizes that are insufficient to support the instructional programs.



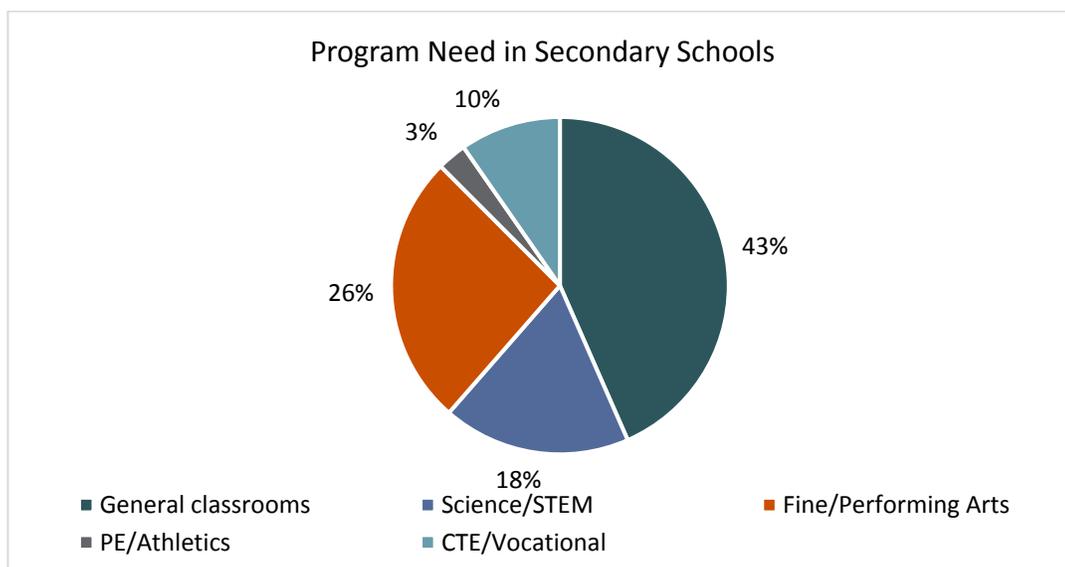
- ◆ Sixty-eight percent (68%) of respondents identified *AC in all the schools*, and *Program space improvements* as the highest priorities in the district. Twenty-eight percent (28%) identified improvements in technology and safety and security.



- ◆ Ninety percent (90%) of charrette respondents identified General Classrooms, Science/STEM spaces, and Fine/Performing Arts spaces as priority needs for elementary schools, with General Classrooms seen as the highest priority by 57% of respondents. General classrooms were cited as being too small in the older elementary schools, and a need to air condition the rooms throughout the district. Lab facilities to support STEM are seen as insufficient, and there are insufficient numbers of spaces to fully support Fine and Performing Arts.



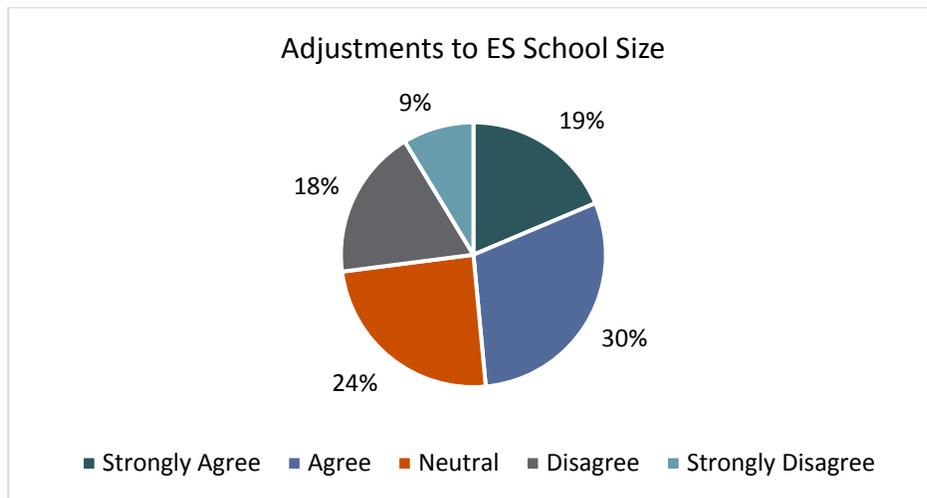
- ◆ Similarly, 87% of respondents identified General Classrooms, Science/STEM spaces, and Fine/Performing Arts spaces as priority needs for secondary schools, with General Classrooms seen as the highest priority by 43% of respondents. There is also a slightly larger percentage of respondents seeing Fine/Performing Arts as a priority area (26%). There is also agreement that the number of spaces in secondary schools is too small to adequately support STEM and Fine/Performing Arts.



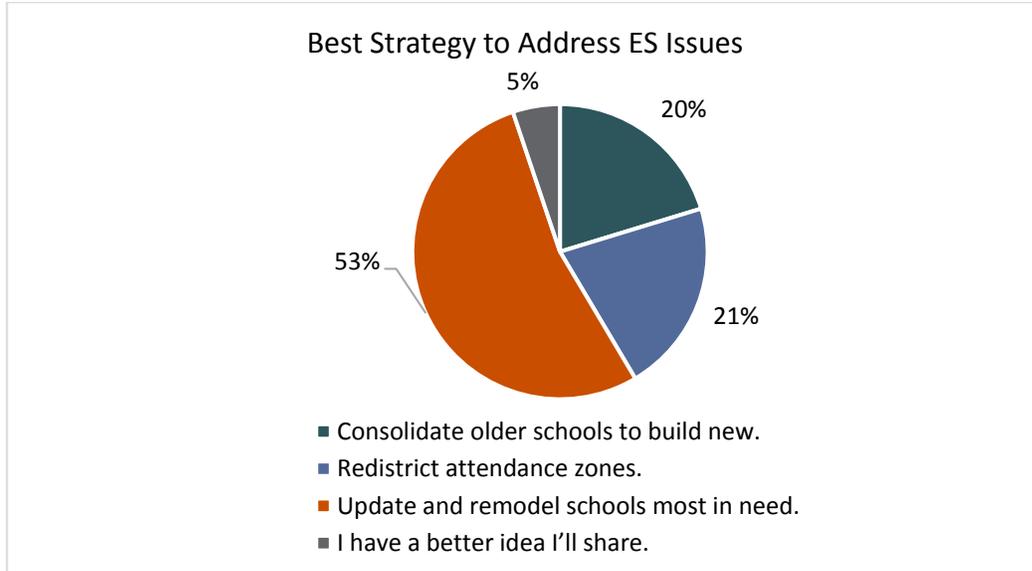
- ♦ Ratings for the quality of safety and security in schools were split, with 57% rating it as *Excellent* or *Good*, and 42% rating it as *Fair* or *Poor*. Safety concerns among the respondents included: too many access points into the school buildings, lack of sufficient separation between parking lots and bus loading zones.



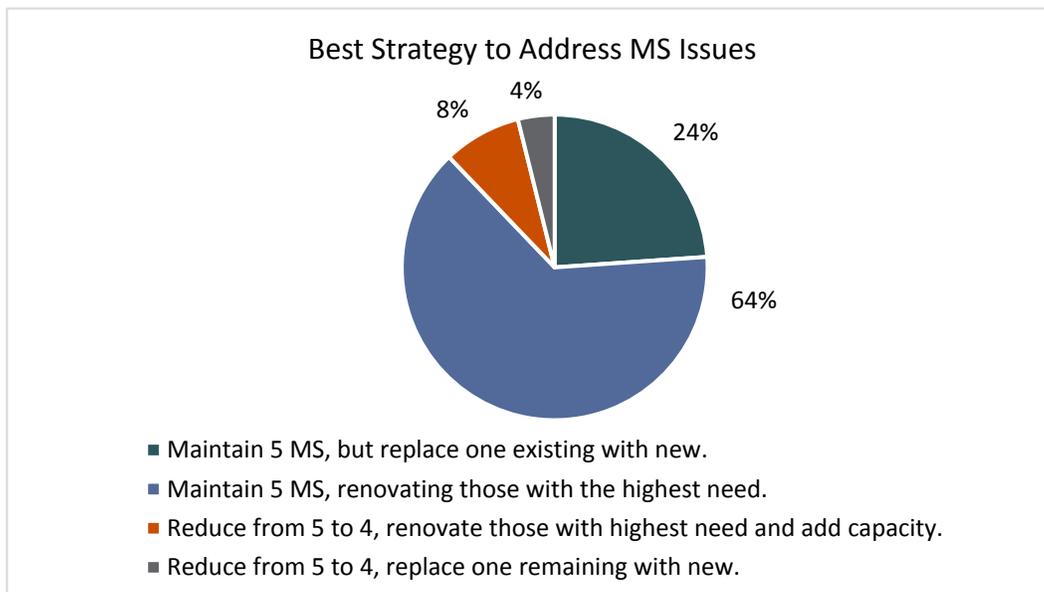
- ♦ There was also a lack of consensus regarding the size of elementary schools. Currently, these schools range in size from 300 to 600 students. When asked whether adjustments should be made to make elementary school sizes more uniform, there was a range of responses. Forty-nine percent (49%) *Strongly Agreed* or *Agreed* to the statement, 24% of respondents were *Neutral*, and 27% *Disagreed* or *Strongly Disagreed*.



- ◆ When asked for the best strategy to address size and age issues with elementary schools, 53% of respondents stated *Update and remodel schools most in need*. Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents identified consolidating older schools and building new ones and redistricting attendance zones as the best strategies to address size and age.



- ◆ When asked for the best strategy to address size and age issues with middle schools, 64% of respondents stated *Maintain five middle schools, renovating those with the highest need*. Twenty-four percent (24%) stated *Maintain five middle schools, but replace one existing with new*. Only 12% identified with reducing the number of middle schools and renovating or replacing the remaining middle schools.



These perceptual data regarding school size were helpful as part of MGT’s review of school size issues. A separate portion of the MGT long-range plan includes a best practices review of school size based on the literature and contemporary practices in high achieving schools across the country. These community perspectives are very important in developing any final recommendations for the master plan.

## CONCLUSIONS

In order to gather community input and feedback, MGT used a variety of tools throughout the process of development of this Facility Master Plan. The goal for community engagement was to ensure that all interested members of the community had multiple opportunities for both input and feedback.

- ◆ **Input** processes asked the community - what is important, what needs attention, what is working well, and what needs to be different?
- ◆ **Feedback** processes asked the community – given these preliminary data, what should be the priorities, how should issues be weighted, what is **most** important to do?

Rapid City Area Schools has an involved and interested populace. They attended community sessions with many coming to schools that were not near their homes, and even when there were other events in competition. Many more community members used the online tools so that they could provide input and feedback at a time convenient for them.

From these data, it is clear that the RCAS community wants the district to focus their efforts on the following issues over the next 10 year plan:

- ◆ Fixing identified building deficiencies – specifically HVAC.
- ◆ General classroom issues – including the size and number of classrooms.
- ◆ Size of schools – focusing initially on the size of elementary schools, but including all grade levels as new schools and additions are planned.
- ◆ Consolidation of middle schools – Focus first on maintaining the same number of middle schools, conducting needed renovations, and possibly replacing one with a new school based on physical conditions of the building.