



August 2026

Garaway Local Schools Master Planning

Consolidated Focus Group Summary Report



Focus Group Feedback

Executive Summary

Five in-person focus group sessions were held during the last week of July 2026, representing a **cross-section of 58 community stakeholders**.

Across all five stakeholder groups, there was strong agreement that Garaway Local Schools provides an exceptional educational experience supported by a highly engaged community. Participants consistently expressed pride in the district's **academic success, culture, traditions, and close-knit community relationships**. At the same time, virtually every group acknowledged that the district's aging facilities present significant challenges and that long-term facility improvements must be addressed.

While opinions varied regarding the exact facility solution, many participants expressed openness to consolidation or centralization if educational, operational, financial, and safety benefits could be clearly demonstrated.

Stakeholders emphasized that **communication, transparency, community engagement, and preservation of Garaway's identity** will be critical factors in determining public support for any future initiative.

Major Themes

1. STRONG
COMMUNITY
PRIDE &
IDENTITY

2. RECOGNITION
OF SIGNIFICANT
FACILITY NEEDS

3. SUPPORT
FOR FACILITY
CONSOLIDATION,
WITH IMPORTANT
CONDITIONS

4. FINANCIAL
STEWARDSHIP
& TAXPAYER
IMPACT

5. IMPORTANCE
OF THE AMISH
COMMUNITY

6. STRONG
DEMAND FOR
COMMUNICATION
& TRANSPARENCY

7. FUTURE USE
OF EXISTING
BUILDINGS

Strong Community Pride & Identity

The strongest theme across all five groups was deep pride in Garaway Local Schools and the communities it serves. Stakeholders emphasized that Garaway's strength comes from its people, traditions, values, and relationships, not simply its facilities. Community members expressed concern that any future facility solution must preserve these qualities.

Participants repeatedly described the schools as:



**COMMUNITY
GATHERING SPACES**



**SOURCES OF LOCAL
PRIDE & IDENTITY**



**IMPORTANT CULTURAL
INSTITUTIONS**



**ANCHORS WITH DUNDEE,
BAL TIC, RAGERSVILLE, &
SUGARCREEK COMMUNITIES**

Common concerns included:

- Loss of local school identity
- Preservation of community traditions
- Maintaining neighborhood-school relationships
- Honoring district history and heritage

Implication

Many participants suggested preserving recognizable historical elements and thoughtfully planning future uses of existing buildings if consolidation occurs.

Recognition of Significant Facility Needs

All stakeholder groups acknowledged growing concerns regarding the condition and adequacy of existing facilities.

Frequently identified concerns included:

● Building Systems

- Aging infrastructure
- HVAC performance issues
- Outdated electrical systems
- Air quality concerns
- Increasing maintenance demands
- Need for modern technology infrastructure

● Safety & Accessibility

- Security vulnerabilities
- ADA accessibility limitations
- Science laboratory safety deficiencies
- Emergency response challenges
- Building layouts that are difficult to supervise and secure

● Learning Environments

- Lack of air conditioning
- Excessive classroom temperatures
- Limited educational flexibility
- Spaces not aligned with modern teaching methods

Insight

Teachers specifically noted that facility limitations increasingly affect educational effectiveness, accessibility, student services, and instructional delivery.



Support for Facility Consolidation with Important Conditions

Perceived Benefits

Improved educational opportunities

Greater equity among students

Operational efficiencies

Improved safety and security

Expanded support services

Better accessibility

Reduced maintenance demands

More efficient use of district resources

Most groups demonstrated varying levels of support for some form of facility consolidation. However, this support was generally conditional rather than unconditional.

Teachers noted that centralization could help equalize services across elementary schools and improve access for students with specialized needs.

Parents noted the convenience of having children in one location and recognized the long-term costs associated with maintaining multiple aging buildings.

Ongoing Concerns

- **Loss of local schools**
- **Transportation impacts**
- **Student travel times**
- **Community identity**
- **Elementary student placement**
- **Preservation of small-school culture**
- **Age separation within a K-12 facility**

Implication

Participants repeatedly requested visual examples demonstrating how elementary, middle, and high school students would remain separated while sharing a campus.

Financial Stewardship & Taxpayer Impact

Financial considerations emerged as the most significant potential barrier to community support.

Stakeholders requested clear information regarding:

**RENOVATION VERSUS NEW
CONSTRUCTION COSTS**

**LONG-TERM
MAINTENANCE EXPENSES**

**UTILITY
SAVINGS**

**TRANSPORTATION
IMPACTS**

**STAFFING
IMPLICATIONS**

**OFCC
PARTICIPATION**

**BOND AND LEVY
STRUCTURES**

**TAXPAYER
OBLIGATIONS**

**FACILITY LIFE
EXPECTANCY**

Insight

Participants repeatedly emphasized the need for “apples-to-apples” comparisons between options so residents can make informed decisions.

There was also concern about current economic pressures and increasing property taxes, reinforcing the need to demonstrate responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources.

Importance of the Amish Community

Several focus groups highlighted the importance of Amish families to the district and acknowledged that their perspectives may significantly influence future planning efforts and election outcomes.

Implication

Participants consistently recommended actively engaging Amish stakeholders throughout the planning process.

Frequently discussed questions included:

- How consolidation may affect Amish enrollment
- Transportation impacts
- Grade-level participation patterns
- Future access to educational facilities
- Community acceptance of centralized campuses



Strong Demand for Communication & Transparency

Every stakeholder group emphasized the need for ongoing community engagement.

Recommended communication tools included:

- Site plans
- Building renderings
- Floor plans
- Campus diagrams
- Cost comparisons
- Community meetings
- Facility tours
- Testimonials from other districts
- Parent and teacher panels
- Frequently updated project information

Implication

Participants stressed that community engagement must be meaningful and not merely procedural. Citizens want to understand how their feedback influences outcomes.





Future Use of Existing Buildings

A recurring question across all groups involved the future of existing facilities should consolidation occur.

Participants generally preferred redevelopment or repurposing over demolition and suggested uses such as:

**COMMUNITY
RECREATION**

**HOUSING
DEVELOPMENT**

**ATHLETIC
FACILITIES**

**COMMUNITY
SERVICES**

**EDUCATIONAL
PROGRAMS**

Insight

Many participants expressed concern that existing community assets not be abandoned or wasted following a facility transition.

Overall Conclusion

Common Themes and Shared Priorities

Across all five focus groups, stakeholders demonstrated strong support for Garaway Local Schools and a shared commitment to providing high-quality educational opportunities for future generations. While there were differing opinions regarding renovation, consolidation, and implementation strategies, broad consensus emerged around several key points:



The overall sentiment can be summarized as:

Garaway's people, culture, and academics are its greatest strengths. Stakeholders are open to facility improvements and potential consolidation, provided the district demonstrates clear educational benefits, responsible financial stewardship, preservation of community identity, and a transparent planning process.