

A 20-year Facilities Blueprint

I want to take the opportunity to clear up a few misconceptions related to the upcoming April 7th referendum. The voters will be asked to approve a \$15 million dollar building project as opposed to a \$17 million project that made the headline in the Platteville Journal last week.

Because it has been planned to coincide with the retirement of debt from a 1996 referendum, the impact to taxpayers will be **no** increase to the debt service portion of our levy and likely a small decrease. Currently, \$1.59 of our total \$10.73 mill rate (or about \$238.50 annually on a \$150,000 dollar home) goes to pay off that debt. What this means is that voting for this project would **not** increase property taxes. If the referendum did not pass, homeowners would see a decrease of that portion of the levy only.

Over the last two years, the Platteville School District went through a process of studying our present facilities and determining how well those facilities meet our present and future needs. This process began by doing a thorough examination of our present facilities, surveying our staff related to how well the facilities were meeting educational needs, and developing potential options that would better meet those needs. This was followed by multiple information sharing and listening sessions with staff, students, parents, and community members as well as surveys with these same groups. It was unfortunate that a representative from The Platteville Journal was not able to attend. I think it would have cleared up many of the issues listed in the previous article and editorials that were listed as surprises.

What emerged out of these sessions was a strategic 20-year facilities “blueprint” for the future that maintains and updates our facilities, addresses the present space deficiencies at the lower grade levels, and can flexibly and financially adjust well to either increases or decreases in student enrollment. It represents a long-term vision to invest in a three-building configuration to maintain or even reduce operating costs. When the Platteville School District closed OE Gray, there was an annual operating cost savings of nearly \$500,000. If we were to open it back up, it would significantly increase our operating costs and we would need to go to referendum just to maintain our current programming. OE Gray is almost fully rented to community agencies that provide huge benefit to the Platteville community including Headstart, Family Connections, Southwest Technical College, CESA 3, and Forward Services.

I want to be clear. At this point, there is no plan to close Neal Wilkins. It would continue to house our Early Childhood, 4K and Kindergarten students. Neither is it in the plan to invest significant financial resources into the building. The original plan called for an almost three million dollar investment. After talking with staff, parents, and community members, it did not seem to make sense to invest heavily in a building configuration that perpetuates an ineffective grade level configuration, high operating costs, and multiple transitions for families and students.

Back in 1996 (20 years ago), the community passed 15 million dollar long-range facility plan. In today's dollars, that would be over 28 million. The board recently passed a resolution to go to referendum for another 15 million dollar long-range (20-year) facilities plan. The key projects include:

- A 2-story addition and large gymnasium addition to Westview to accommodate moving 1st grade and 4th grade to that facility for a total of \$9.7 million.
- STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) facilities renovations at the middle school and high school with a focus on the science classrooms and labs for a total of \$2.5 million.
- Safe and Secure entrances and main office renovation at all four buildings for a total of \$2 million.
- Expanding the size of the Kindergarten rooms at Neal Wilkins (these were not built originally as Kindergarten rooms, rather traditional sized classrooms) for a cost of \$300,000.
- Completing the priority 1 (code compliance and safety items) and 2 (end of useful life items) at each of the four buildings identified in the facility study for a total of \$2.1 million. You can see what these are by going to our web-page and then to the separate sections for each school.

The total estimated cost of this project will be \$16.62 million with \$1.62 million being taken from our healthy fund balance and annual maintenance budget, leaving the \$15 million to a referendum vote. The future of this community depends on the ability to attract young families to live here. Our staff does an outstanding job, as can be seen by many of their recent accomplishments. We believe that this investment to update and maintain our facilities will help support that. There will be multiple information sessions and school tours in the very near future. Please contact us if we can provide more information or answer questions and please vote on April 7th.