

January 12, 2006



**A message from
Superintendent
Don Helmstetter**

A successful February 28, 2006 bond referendum would benefit all students

After a year-and-a-half of study, Spring Lake Park School District 16 has announced a bond referendum special election on February 28, 2006. A successful referendum will

- **provide long-range educational solutions for this and the next generation of students,**
- **address a projected 20% growth in enrollment by adding new classrooms at all schools,**
- **include major renovation to address deferred maintenance needs on 35 to 50 year-old facilities,**
- **meet the needs of state and federal guidelines, and**
- **build a new 750-student K-3 elementary school**

While the \$95.9 million amount is significant, the net additional tax impact for the average homeowner is less than \$16 per month. For more information about the impact of the bond referendum or to ask a question, continue to visit the District 16 website, call the bond referendum hotline at 763-795-5195, or send an e-mail to 2006BondReferendum@district16.org.

While nearly everyone I've talked to agrees that a bond referendum is necessary to address the facilities needs of the school district, a few have also asked, ***"Why not build a new high school or middle school, which would benefit all students in the district, rather than an elementary school which would be utilized by only about one-third of the district's students?"***

First, it's important to emphasize that over two-thirds of the total bond referendum package would be used for renovations and new construction at the middle school complex or the high school complex, which are utilized by all students in the school district.

Second, Minnesota State guidelines require at least 50 acres for a new middle school and at least 60 acres for a new high school of our size, but there is only one site available within our school district boundaries with 20 or more acres. The district has a verbal agreement to purchase that site, not far from the intersection of 125 Avenue N. and Cloud Drive in Blaine.

Third, the cost to build a new elementary school and to provide renovations and additions for the middle school and the high school is much less than it would cost to build either a new middle school or a new high school and to provide new additions and renovations to our other schools. The Facilities Utilization Task

Force studied all of these options and, after consulting with the Minnesota Department of Education, reached the conclusion that this is the most efficient and cost-effective use of school district and taxpayer dollars.

Another question that is asked is this: ***“What would the district do if the bond referendum fails?”*** As superintendent, I truly believe that it is in the best interest of the district and its taxpayers to approve the bond referendum on February 28 for a number of reasons.

First, the district is growing; we need additional classrooms. Because of a projected 20% increase in enrollment, the district will either need to purchase or construct new classrooms that will cost additional dollars.

Second, our deferred maintenance needs are critical and must be addressed. Not addressing these critical needs could significantly and permanently damage the existing facilities.

Finally, the interest rates and the cost of construction have already increased significantly since the facilities study began. When the initial study began in March 2004, new construction costs were estimated at \$130/square foot, and the cost for renovations was \$80/square foot. Current new construction costs are estimated at \$175-\$185 per square foot, and the cost for renovations is now \$100 per square foot.

Because the needs will remain and because the costs will continue to increase, it is in the best interest of the school district and its taxpayers to approve the bond referendum on February 28, 2006.

If the February 28 bond referendum does not pass, we will continue trying to find a proposal that will pass, but costs will continue to increase and students will ultimately get less and less. This is a scenario that all members of the community-staff task force sought to avoid by “doing it right the first time.”

The last time a school was built in District 16 was in 1971, when the junior high school was constructed next to Westwood Elementary School. The cost of construction at that time was \$20 per square foot, and the cost of a new, fully-equipped Chevrolet Impala was \$4,700.

Clearly, things have changed!

Today, more students drive to school, more parents bring their children to school, and all of us are feeling just a little more vulnerable. The bond referendum would improve the parking lots and traffic flow at each site, and the security infrastructure will be enhanced as well. A successful bond referendum on February 28, 2006 will address the facility needs of current students and will meet the facility needs of students for generations to come.

I urge all citizens to become informed about this critical issue in Spring Lake Park School District 16 and to vote on February 28, 2006.