

February 10, 2006

**A message from
Dr. Don Helmstetter,
Superintendent**

The February 28 Bond Referendum

A tremendous benefit for kids, a sound investment, an effective use of tax dollars

Greetings!

On another occasion, I would love to share with you the excitement we have about our rising test scores and innovative learning strategies that effectively target the needs of each and every student. I believe that you would be pleased to see how your local schools and staff are working so hard, every day, to prepare students for the future.

But that discussion is for another time....

On Tuesday, February 28, residents of Spring Lake Park School District 16 will vote on a Facilities Improvement bond referendum. People who have thoroughly reviewed the entire plan tend to agree that their tax dollars would be most effectively invested by voting "Yes."

Here's why the proposal is a sound investment:

- As one taxpayer, a senior citizen, put it, "the cost to homeowners is minimal, but the benefit to the school district in prolonging the buildings is great." The owner of a home with a taxable market value of \$200,000 will pay less than \$16 per month. The impact of that investment will be modern, functional schools, at every site and in every city in the district, that will last and serve students for decades to come.
- There has been a comprehensive long-range planning process. A 28-member school-community task force, which included parents of school-aged children, empty-nesters, senior citizens, and businesspeople, studied plans and options for ten months before presenting a unanimous recommendation to the School Board. Prior to that, the Task Force held public meetings and received valuable public input.
- The needs won't go away.
- Solving the needs later will become much more expensive.
- The extensive growth in student enrollment will continue to occur, making it necessary to build additional classrooms to relieve overcrowding that could negatively impact individual student achievement.
- The deferred maintenance items won't go away either, and the cost to repair or replace these items increases as they age. An example? The high school

has a 50-year-old boiler with an anticipated lifespan that expired 30 years ago. Twice in the past two years, Spring Lake Park High School, Kenneth Hall Elementary, and our alternative school have closed due to problems associated with aging electrical and mechanical systems. Now *that* affects learning.

- The cost to replace or to repair items of this significance is not a part of any annual budget. As a practical matter, these can only be paid for with a bond referendum.
- Interest rates and construction costs are increasing. All of us want to get the biggest bang for our buck. While we don't typically buy the most expensive items for our home, we do want to be sure that the items we purchase are a good value in the short term and in the long term. That's what the school district plans to do with this referendum.

- The District has demonstrated consistency, openness, and credibility. Representatives of the district have energetically and transparently shared with the public its intentions and reasons for the facilities improvement plan.

Following School Board approval of the plan in December, over a dozen evening and/or daytime community information meetings and facilities tours took place.

- Over 40 additional meetings were held with groups, including parents of early childhood students, three city councils, taxpayers league members, area clergy, senior citizens, and local service organizations. We are continuing to meet with any individual and any group that has questions or needs more information.
- Our website, www.springlakeparkschools.org, receives over 1,700 visitors per day, many to our extensive Facilities Needs/Bond Referendum site. We have informational videos on our website, on seven local cable stations, and anyone can come to any of our schools or the district office to pick up and view an informational DVD.
- Daily, we respond to E-mail Hotline and Phone Hotline questions.

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Once the referendum passes, we will provide all residents with continual updates on all planning and construction phases. In addition, the District will form a Construction Oversight Group of community members who will meet periodically to review design and construction progress, as well as to hear from the architects and construction manager about the next planned phase of construction.

Realistically, not everyone will be in total agreement with every item in a long-range plan of this scope. However, on behalf of the community, the task force met nearly two dozen times, visited every facility, walked the grounds, and spent over 60 hours researching, discussing, and coming to unanimous consent on the many long-term needs of district facilities. Only then, did they make their recommendations to the School Board. In the end, they did not recommend everything that they *wanted*, they recommended everything they believed the district and its students *needed*.

Because the needs are very real, and many are immediate and crucial, it is the role of the School Board and administration to do what is necessary to address these needs. So, if the February 28 bond referendum fails, the District would need to conduct another referendum, and another if necessary.

However, any delay in passing a referendum will result in increased costs and a diminished return on taxpayers' investment.

This vote truly is the community's best opportunity to have an effective role in making a decision, not only about the future of the school district, but about how tax dollars can most effectively be expended.