

The Future of West Elementary

by David Truitt, Superintendent

Over the past few weeks, I have shared several updates on the future of the West Elementary School campus. Two staff and community discussion sessions were held for the District to hear feedback in regards to the May 2018 bond results, staff and community survey data, and potential new bond timelines and tasks. A Special Called Board Meeting was held on August 6, 2019, to hear presentations from Claycomb, Architects, Inc. on potential design plans for a new West Elementary School campus. On August 7, 2019, a PAC met to share ways they could potentially support a new bond as well. This week, two Public Hearings are set for Wednesday, August 14, and Thursday, August 15, 2019, for community members to come share their feelings and thoughts on a potential new Bond project. Both Hearings are set for 6:30 PM at the West ISD Administration Building at 406 W. Shook Street. To date, a Bond has not been called by the West ISD Board of Trustees, but all points are leading to this suggested and highly sought after response in support of our Prekindergarten through Grade 5 staff and students.

Despite not passing in May 2018 by sixty-one votes, the West Elementary School bond project has continuously been a priority topic in our work. I still believe this decision is a long-term solution for our last district construction project for decades to come. We need a bold response to an overcrowded campus as our community still deals with the addition of the West Intermediate School grade levels back to the campus following the West Explosion. Our greatest challenge is learning space as we move forward with growing grade levels of students and the need to look at the addition of temporary buildings for a campus with little land for this purpose. The campus has great needs when it comes to renovation work, and a simple new bank of classrooms constructed as a new addition to the campus is not the long-term solution to the many facility needs across all grade levels. The needs I presented during the 2017-2018 school year are even greater in 2019-2020. I know our community cares greatly about the safety of our students and staff, continuing student growth, and overcrowding shared spaces and lack of available classroom space across the campus.

Since the 2016-2017 school year, the campus has grown by sixty-nine students. For the upcoming school year, I expect the campus to slowly grow to six-hundred students. I will have to seek class-size waivers from the state for overcrowding at Kindergarten and Grade 1, and Prekindergarten and Grade 5 will be over our local District class-size goals. We even added a fourth Prekindergarten classroom due to our growing numbers. Currently, the campus is holding at twenty-nine Prekindergarten through Grade 5 classes, but is really in need of thirty-two classrooms.

West ISD has been working hard to acquire the needed acreage for the new campus site, complete a campus rendering and design plan for the new campus, and review ways to keep the construction costs down for this potential new project. I have heeded the advice from the community on the previous bond in regards to not maxing out the bond amount or our school district tax rate. I know West ISD must review a bond figure that is less than our new bond capacity, but at the same time reviewing current construction costs and figures versus the 2018 estimates. As requested by the community, West ISD has also worked hard to improve our state accountability ratings, staff compensation plan, and staff retention plan. Over the past, few years, Mr. Mikeska has even asked the Board to approve the reduction of our district tax rate by six cents and will request another cent at the end of August. The home value versus monthly cost rates being reviewed are even vastly different from 2018. For a home

value of \$100,000, the monthly cost was \$19.16 for the \$20,000,000 bond. The new monthly cost is \$11.42 for the same home value and bond amount.

As you can see, I am striving to improve the communication of our new plan and share with you the many ways we are working through the feedback shared following the May 2018 Bond. We are even working with a new district architect and will chose a new construction company as well. As always, I am available to discuss any aspect of this project. I hope you will consider attending one of the Public Hearings planned for this week. Our Board is studying all proposals and has spent hours reviewing all planning information. They truly understand the importance of balancing the tax impact on our community with the growth, learning, and safety needs of our students and staff at West Elementary. Our Board loves serving the community of West and truly want what is best for our youngest, most in need of intervention and support Trojans and Lady Trojans. For additional information about this potential bond project, please go to westisd.net and click on the bond information link.