

Over the past two weeks, additional information has been shared with you regarding the School District of Shell Lake referendum questions that will be on the Spring election Tuesday, April 3.

This referendum is important to our district and its surrounding community for several different reasons. Throughout this project, the district and its committee members have been looking for a solution that would address our needs long term. In 1993, when the 3-12 building was constructed as a result of the old school being condemned, there was discussion about bringing the primary school and the new construction together at that time. At the time, interest rates were higher (around 5.5%) and the primary school was 34 years old.

Twenty-five years later, interest rates are at historically low levels (averaging 3.5%), the the primary school is now 59 years old and our enrollment has increased 23% since 2003.

Lower interest rates provide a prime opportunity to borrow money. Lower interest rates will result in lower monthly payments. A greater percentage of district money will go to pay down the loan than it did in 1993. Over the past 25 years, the primary school has served the district and its community well, however those years and the number of children passing through its doors has created increased pressure on space. Art and music rooms have been replaced with core curriculum classrooms, forcing art and music to be delivered in the classroom on a cart, limiting activities that can be performed within these limits. Items such as parking lots, heating and ventilation, roofs, relocatable buildings, lack of classroom, office, fine arts and structural concerns require expensive repairs that make it more cost effective long-term, to build on to the 3-12 building.

As our enrollment has grown, so have our programs. We are fortunate to have an excellent fine arts program in our art, music and drama programs. Sports programs continue to grow in number and participation. Graduation, concerts, presentations and the community education program also use the gym space throughout the year. Responding to these needs by requesting funds to build an additional area to accommodate these events will address a long-term need and provide additional security as well.

Asking voters to approve these referendum questions is something that our district does not take lightly. This has been a conversation throughout the process. In the end, the decision came down to several reasons to move forward now (interest rates at an all-time low, our needs are immediate, and the responsibility to act in a fiscally responsible manner) all requires that we must bring this forward. We are a district that is financially strong as a result of conservative budgeting and spending. Based on their observations and investigations, the Board and the Facility Advisory Committee believe this is a priority and is necessary to ensure the quality programs that the School District of Shell Lake has been known for.