

Details on Referendum Question #1

The School District of Shell Lake will have two questions on the April 3rd Spring ballot. This article focuses on Question #1 and next week's article will focus on Question #2.

The first question seeks 12.2 million dollars for a primary addition to the current 3-12 building along with several classroom renovations in the middle school/high school. The decision to seek a referendum is the result of an assessment of our current facilities and plans to meet our needs for many years.

The process began by exploring ways to make our buildings more energy efficient. With the Primary having been built in 1959, and the 3-12 having been built in 1993, we started by looking closely at the Primary. As we worked with consultants and school staff, we quickly realized that while energy use was a concern, there were other more pressing issues.

The current primary building lacks music and art rooms, utilizes a relocatable unit designed for short-term use to house the library/computer classes and several intervention classrooms. The relocatable unit was intended as a short-term solution to address space needs, however, it has outlived its useful life and requires costly repairs to the roof and siding. Other space concerns are rooms that have had to act as a multipurpose office space, sick room, computer server room and staff bathroom.

In 1959 when the primary school was built, classroom square footage was smaller and the number of students per room was larger than today, 4-year-old kindergarten didn't exist, kindergarten was a half-day program and technology in the classroom was limited to a film projector.

Today, we have early childhood programming that starts at three years old, multiple sessions of four-year-old kindergarten, all day kindergarten, and computers, tablets, and SmartBoards are commonplace. There is no music or art room. Art is delivered to each class using rolling carts, and music is taught in the gym or the breezeway. The library/computer room and small instructional areas are located in a relocatable structure that is attached to the building, and the principal's office houses the servers for the building technology.

The physical condition of the current building is a major concern also. An area in the front of the building has settled over the years, resulting in a dip at the roofline and window area. This would require repairs to the foundation. Sidewalks on the side and rear of the building are in poor condition and should be replaced. Air exchange is minimal compared with today's standards and although security is in place, it is not optimal. The roof on the library is at the end of its life and the parking lot needs to be replaced.

The cost to address the needs at the existing primary school and the cost to add a new wing on to the existing 3-12 site was shared with the public in the form of a survey conducted in November 2017 by School Perceptions. The results of the survey showed that our community

favors adding a new wing to the existing 3-12 site rather than spending nearly as much money on a building that is almost 60 years old.

The new wing would include a separate entrance for grades 4K-6, art and music rooms, 4K-through second grade classrooms, a shared open learning space, library, technology, more secure entrance, office area and an elementary gym.

Included in referendum question #1 are improvements to several existing areas of the 3-12 building: special education, middle school science, career and technical education, and art. These areas will be restructured to better meet the academic and physical needs of our children.

Additional information will be shared and the public will be able to ask questions at upcoming presentations on March 7th at 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm at the 3-12 building or on March 13th at 4:00 pm and 7:00 pm in the primary building.