



GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10

DATE OF MEETING: **January 12, 2016**

TITLE: **Study of Planning and Design for New STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Elementary School**

BACKGROUND:

The whole people must take upon themselves the education of the whole people and be willing to bear the expenses of it. There should not be a district of one square mile without a school in it, not founded by a charitable individual, but maintained at the public expense of the people themselves.

--- John Adams, Second President of the United States of America
Letter to John Jebb, 1785

In November of 2007, the voters of the Amphitheater School District approved a \$180 million bond program for the District. This approval came at a time when it was becoming clear that the Arizona School Facilities Board (SFB) and its enabling Students FIRST legislative scheme were failing schools. These abject failures, continuing well through today and even more so, were particularly notable given that they had both been intended as corrective action for long-standing failures of the past.

Prior to 1998, capital funding for school facilities was heavily dependent on the sale of general obligation ("Class A") bonds, because the annual capital funds received by Districts at the time from the legislature were insufficient to maintain school facilities, let alone enable the construction of new ones. The result of such a system, as one might have expected, created vast disparities between school districts, as "property poor" districts could not generate sufficient funding through bond tax levies to provide adequate facilities. In contrast, districts with greater property wealth were not only typically able to support capital enhancements through bond tax levies on their property tax base, but could usually do so at a much lower tax rate due to their extensive property base. (Arizona Association of School Business Officials, Arizona School Finance Summary Manual 2010).

In 1992, a group of school districts (Amphitheater among them) and parents challenged this system of school financing in the state courts, and, ultimately, in Roosevelt v. Bishop (1994), the Arizona Supreme Court ruled that the state's system for capital funding of facilities and equipment was unconstitutional. The court reached this conclusion finding the then existing state system violated the provision in the state constitution that required the state to provide a "general and uniform" system of public education (Arizona Constitution, Article XI, Section 1).

The Supreme Court ordered the legislature to create a new capital funding scheme to comply with the Constitution. In 1998, the legislature passed Students FIRST which created a new school facilities funding scheme that would ostensibly allocate Students FIRST capital funds to all public school districts, regardless of wealth.

And for a few years the legislature funded Students FIRST but rarely, and some would argue if ever, did the legislature fully fund the new system. (As we now know of course, the components of the Students FIRST are essentially wholly abolished, with funding reductions gutting the system).

But, earlier examples of the failures of the Students FIRST and SFB system as initially funded by the legislature became apparent quickly in our district when the program first began. When the SFB Deficiency Correction Program began, for example, Amphitheater Public Schools had 102 portable classrooms scattered throughout the District, at schools where growth in enrollment outpaced the District's ability to expand existing facilities with hard space or build new schools – on very limited capital funding received from the state. Thus, it was hoped that the District's portable classrooms, many of which were more than 20 years old at that time, would be replaced with hard spaces suitable for the care and instruction of students. But, when the Deficiency Correction Program ended after just a few short years, Amphitheater was left with 96 of the original 102 portable classrooms. The SFB replaced 6.

Other remarkable failures of the new SFB system followed from the SFB's school facilities standards, upon which all funding allocations were based. These standards included strict limitations on the size of school facilities (920 square feet per classroom, for example). Where existing district facilities exceeded size limitations, the "excess space" counted against the District in terms of qualifying for new space – regardless of where that space was located and regardless of the *functional* capacity of that space.

Thus, for example, the classrooms at Walker Elementary School (much larger than 920 square feet), were considered as "available classroom space" for students in the growing reaches of Oro Valley – regardless of the fact that the "available classroom space" was miles and miles from the students' area of residence, and perhaps more importantly, regardless of the fact that the "available classroom space" at Walker could only serve those students by putting 45 or more students in a single Walker classroom. Similarly, by way of example, because the large vestibule/lobby at Wilson K-8 School exceeded size standards of the SFB, that "excess space" also originally "counted against" the District in terms of qualifying for any new classroom space *anywhere in the entire district*.

The Governing Board has long recognized and respected the community's interest in children being able to attend school in their neighborhoods, with the option to open enroll throughout the District. This concept, however, is wholly unsupported by, if not antithetical to, the nature of the SFB/Students FIRST system of determining school district "eligibility" for classroom space.

These were among the concerns a 2006 Blue Ribbon Committee of concerned citizens had when proposing to the Governing Board that a bond election be held in the District for the purpose of supporting capital improvements that were not adequately supported by the SFB or other state funding. While the composition of this citizen committee has frequently been described in previous board items and other communications, the tremendous efforts and care taken by these individuals warrants their recognition again. They came from all segments of our community:

Mr. Randy Agron, Business and Parent Leader
Ms. Rhonda Ball, President, Amphitheater Education Association
Ms. Diana Boros, Community and Parent Leader
Ms. Colleen Crowinshield, Business and Parent Leader
Mr. Nicholas Malden, Business Leader
Mr. Bill Nettling, Business and Parent Leader
Ms. Marty Schuh, Pima Association of Taxpayers and Parent Leader
Mr. Ernie Sinohui, Business Leader
Mr. Mike Trueba, Business Leader
Mr. Granger Vinall, Business and Parent Leader
Mr. Chuck Walton, Retired Business and Community Leader
General John Wickham, Retired Military and Community Leader
Ms. Susan Zibrat, Co-Chair, Community and Parent Lead
Ms. Lynne DeStefano, Co-Chair, Business and Parent Leader

After meeting more than a dozen times over several months and studying the District budget, the SFB/Students FIRST system, the physical condition of District facilities and school buses, the tax structures for public schools in Arizona, the District tax base and capacity, and many more points of information, these Blue Ribbon Committee members unanimously reached 5 key findings:

1. The Health, Safety, and Security Needs of the District Must Be Improved.
2. Portable, Temporary Classrooms Throughout the District Are Deteriorating and Must Be Replaced
3. Our District Community Needs New Classrooms and Increased Capacity to Serve Students.
4. Our District Must Improve Its Technology Infrastructure to Keep Pace in the 21st Century.
5. Our Community Needs an Improved Transportation Fleet and Facility.

The Blue Ribbon panel went much further to explain, in detail, the specific capital improvements that they, as citizens of the District, believed should be made to address their findings. With the assistance of a consultant, the Committee proposed a listing, site by site, of much needed capital improvement projects that all fell within several defined categories that were ultimately approved by the Board for submission to the voters of the District. That bond election listing is shown in the table which follows on the next page, just as it appeared in the bond election pamphlet in November 2007.

///

///

///

///

///

///

Proposed Capital Improvements	Estimated Costs (a)	Estimated Average Annual Tax Rate (b)	Estimated Annual Cost to Owner of a \$100,000 Full Cash Value Home (b)
Non-Administrative Purposes			
Health, Safety and Security Improvements	\$13,879,783	\$0.0494	\$4.94
Permanent Instructional Space to Replace and Enhance Aging Portables	38,571,852	0.1371	13.71
Renovations to Existing School Facilities	29,138,975	0.1036	10.36
Purchase Pupil Transportation Vehicles	15,584,429	0.0554	5.54
New Elementary School	20,740,287	0.0737	7.37
New Middle School	46,854,191	0.1666	16.66
Technology Infrastructure Modernization	5,988,903	0.0213	2.13
Subtotal of Non-administrative Capital Improvements	\$170,758,420	\$0.6071	\$60.71
Administrative Purposes			
Technology Infrastructure Modernization	\$691,730	\$0.0025	\$0.25
Instructional Training Center	1,388,426	0.0048	0.48
Facilities Maintenance Center	7,211,424	0.0256	2.56
Subtotal of Administrative Improvements	\$9,241,580	0.0329	\$3.29
TOTAL	\$180,000,000	\$0.6400	\$64.00

(a) Reflects estimates for construction or acquisition of such improvements, together with all necessary incidental costs related thereto.

(b) The estimated average annual tax rate and estimated annual cost are based on the average annual tax rate over the life of the proposed bond issue and other financing assumptions which are subject to change.

At this point, as one can quickly determine and as the Governing Board well knows, the bulk of the bond program approved by the voters has either been completed or is well underway to completion. The two largely uncompleted items comprise the two new schools: a middle school and an elementary school.

For the Blue Ribbon Committee, the new schools were important components of the bond program for several expressed reasons. As the committee wrote to the Governing Board:

As we know, although the Arizona School Facilities Board (“SFB”) student space standards might suggest differently, there is certainly a substantial need within the District to replace deteriorating and aging temporary classrooms. However, replacing these classrooms will not create additional classroom space within the District – something that is also needed. The capacity of our schools to serve our community must be increased. In addition, a new elementary and middle school is needed.

The rigid, uniform standards of the SFB work against Amphitheater students due to some schools having larger than “normal” classrooms, the larger sizes and locations of special purpose spaces, and even such anomalies as the presence of oversized foyers.

The Committee also held the concept of neighborhood schools central to the issue of the new schools:

As the Blue Ribbon panel has learned, the SFB examines school capacity not on an individual school basis, but on a district wide basis. If one elementary school lacks capacity but another one miles across the same district has capacity, the SFB mandates shifting the population accordingly through boundary changes and transportation. With school populations often in a state of ebb and flow however, this approach can bounce children back and forth. More importantly, it violates the commonly held expectation and desire of parents and students that students go to school in their neighborhood.

No other form of infrastructure in our community is expected to operate in the way schools are asked to under state facility standards. We don't, for example, resolve not to build hospitals where people are building homes because another hospital across town regularly has vacant beds. We don't tell residents of a new neighborhood that their roadways will have to wait because there is less traffic in another neighborhood across town allowing more people to safely travel over there. We put the capacity of infrastructure where it is needed. It is no less important to have school capacity where that capacity is needed – now and in the future.

Excerpts from Summary and Recommendation, The Blue Ribbon Budget Analysis and Facility Needs Committee (2007).

The committee also expressed concerns that SFB capacity standards should not constrain our community's interests in maintaining lower class sizes, enjoying sufficient infrastructures, avoiding overutilization, and providing adequate space for special programs.

As time progressed, the middle school project was cancelled by the Governing Board after careful study several years ago. The District now lacks the financial capacity to build the middle school, because the bonds required for its construction were not sold and can no longer be sold. Only the elementary school project remains to be built and the bonds for that purpose have been sold, with those funds currently being held by the County Treasurer for that purpose.

For several months, an architect has been designing the proposed new STEM elementary school to be funded by the 2007 Bond Program. This item is presented to permit study of the work done to date, since the Governing Board last approved moving forward with the design phase. The presentation of information to the Board will include the following:

1. An introduction by the Superintendent.
2. An explanation of the planning process by Dr. Lopez, Chief Academic Officer for Elementary Schools, to include some details on the mission, vision and values that guided the planning, programming and design processes.
3. A presentation from the project architect, Mark Bollard of Swaim Associates, regarding the design and functions of the building and environment spaces.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for the Board's study and consideration only at this time.

INITIATED BY:

Todd A. Jaeger, Associate to the Superintendent

Date: January 8, 2016



Patrick Nelson, Superintendent