



**GOVERNING BOARD AGENDA ITEM
AMPHITHEATER UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 10**

DATE OF MEETING: **March 24, 2015**

TITLE: **Study of New STEM Elementary School Construction and Related Issues**

BACKGROUND:

Review of the Current Bond Program

In 2007, the voters of Amphitheater Unified School District overwhelmingly passed a bond proposition, referred to the voters by the Governing Board, for the improvement of physical properties within the District. The Governing Board's decision to seek the voters' approval of bonds was arrived at after a community wide study process -- a substantive evaluation of District facility needs by a Blue Ribbon Committee composed of community members from a variety of constituent groups ("the Committee"), that found several concerns with respect to the physical properties of the District. Those concerns were as follows:

1. The Health, Safety, and Security Needs of the District Must Be Improved.

The Committee correctly noted that students learn best and achieve their full potential in healthy, safe and secure classrooms and schools. The committee found that, across the District, there were needs for: increased security fencing at each site; reconfiguration of bus drop off areas and parking at some sites; modernization of restrooms at many schools; updating of some nurse's offices, kitchen areas and cafeteria spaces; improvements in handicapped access; replacement of aging walkway coverings; and improvement of water drainage on school sites.

2. Portable, Temporary Classrooms Throughout the District Are Deteriorating and Must Be Replaced.

The Committee was struck by the fact that the state school construction finance system had failed to adequately serve Amphitheater's children, as evidenced by the substantial number of portable, temporary classrooms that were located throughout the District in 2007. At the time of the Students' FIRST Deficiency Correction Assessments, the School Facilities Board (SFB) retired only 6 of 92 portables that were located in the District. The 86 temporary classrooms that remained within the District in 2007 had continued to deteriorate and age without any state support for upkeep. The prevalence of portable classrooms was a significant issue for the Committee, because while the functional life of a permanent school structure classroom is generally considered to be 40 to 50 years, the useful life of a portable, temporary structure is actually only 10 years. The Committee consequently proposed that portable classrooms be removed and replaced as appropriate.

3. Our District Community Needs New Classrooms and Increased Capacity to Serve Students.

Beyond the need to replace deteriorating and aging portable classrooms, the Committee also saw a need in 2007 to create additional classroom space within the District. Specifically, based upon a growth study conducted a year previously, **the Committee recommended construction of a new elementary school and a new middle school.** This particular aspect of the Committee's proposal was based on several factors.

Class Size Considerations

The Committee took issue with the fact that the School Facilities Board applies a static standard for the physical size of a school classroom: 920 square feet -- never taking into account the number of children in that classroom, the nature of the physical content of the classroom, or the content of the education provided in that classroom. Under the SFB's standards, these important questions are largely irrelevant. To our community and the Committee, they were not.

The Committee noted that parents and staff desire and expect lower class sizes, because they believe in the benefits of teachers working with fewer students and being able to spend more time with students on an individual or small group basis, as evidenced by voter support of a maintenance and operations budget override which, among other things, specifically allocated funding to hire additional teachers for the express purpose of lowering class sizes. Those new teachers of course need classrooms – something the SFB does not take into account.

Over Utilization of Facilities

The Committee observed, after tours of our facilities, that most of the District's existing schools were utilized to their limits and, indeed, beyond their limits in many circumstances. At the time of their work, the Committee saw that schools had to make modifications to physical spaces such as dividing classrooms into smaller rooms, converting valuable library space into classrooms, or using faculty workrooms for curricular purposes.

Infrastructure Limitations

At first glance, the simple solution to addressing the cramped conditions at individual schools might have seemed to be the creation of new classroom space, in addition to replacement of temporary classrooms. In many circumstances, however, the Committee recognized that expansion of school campuses was not practicable due to the limitations of the common facilities such as cafeterias, libraries, multi-purpose rooms, gymnasiums and fields.

Adequate Programs versus Appropriate Programs

The Committee also noted that the determination of how much space a school might require was also largely controlled by other determinations – largely, programmatic ones. Thus, where someone might conclude that an existing school’s space is *adequate*, it must also be determined whether allocated and available space is *appropriate*. The committee realized that new space and facilities can be required to appropriately serve the needs of students without regard to increasing student enrollment.

Neighborhood Schools Philosophy

The Committee also grappled with the fact that SFB allocations of new classroom funding are based upon district-wide capacity, not individual school capacity. 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 runs contrary to the commonly held expectation and desire of parents and students that students go to school in their local neighborhood.

Special Programs and Special Needs

The significant impact of special students and their unique needs upon a school’s facility was also studied by the Committee. Special education classrooms frequently require greater square footage per student than might normally be the case with a non-special population. This is due to the legal mandates of students’ individualized education plans and the disabilities of those students which often combine to require a much lower student to teacher ratio. With the Amphitheater District’s special population nearing 15% of its total student population, this remains a significant issue.

Other programs which augment the basic level of educational services contemplated by the state, such as Head Start, preschool, before and after school programs, REACH (gifted education), reading resource programs, Advanced Placement®, Sheltered English Immersion, and academic intervention must also have dedicated space to function, need to also be considered in determining school and district capacity needs. The Committee recognized this as well, whereas state funding and construction models do not.

All these efforts require additional classrooms and facilities beyond a level which merely equates a certain number of square feet per child. As the Committee stated, “Ultimately, it’s not about square feet or the number of students. It’s about student

needs and our community values. It's about having the classrooms and facilities necessary to get the job done and done well".

4. Our District Must Improve Its Technology Infrastructure to Keep Pace in the 21st Century.

The Committee not only looked at physical spaces and capacity needs, it also looked at key infrastructure considerations within the physical plant. The Committee was concerned that the technology required for the learning that needs to occur in the next decade could not take place given then existing District infrastructure. The cabling, optics and other infrastructure components were insufficient to meet the level of demands which current and future technology require.

5. Our Community Needs an Improved Transportation Fleet and Facility.

The state of the District's transportation fleet was similar to that of its temporary classrooms, with some school buses having well exceeded their functional lives in 2007. Repair costs were high, inoperability affected transportation services, and the lack of air conditioning contributed to student health issues. The Committee urged modernization of the fleet to allow providing greater comfort and safety to students, improving fuel use, reducing emissions, and preventing worker injuries.

Based upon the foregoing concerns from the representative Committee, the Committee's specific recommendations and analysis, as well as its own analysis and study of District facility needs, the District's Governing Board called for a special bond election in April of 2007 for the question of whether to issue Class B bonds for the following express purposes:

1. Health, Safety, and Security Improvements
2. Permanent Instructional Space to Replace Aging Portables
3. Increase Instructional Space
 - a. *New Elementary School
 - b. *New Middle School
4. Technology Infrastructure Modernization
5. Improved Transportation Fleet and Facility

As the Board obviously knows, the question of whether to issue bonds for these very purposes was approved by our voters by a significant margin in November of 2007. Since that time the District has been pursuing the implementation of the direction of the Governing Board, the Committee, and indeed the public itself through the current bond construction program.

Every school in the District has been positively impacted by the 2007 Bond Program, with most schools receiving benefit of the removal and/or replacement of portable improvements; health, safety and security modifications such as new restrooms, nurse offices and security fencing; and technology infrastructure. Of course, all students have received the benefit of not only these improvements but also those of their new school bus fleet.

The New (STEM) Elementary School

Just a handful of projects under the 2007 Bond Program remain. The majority of projects have been completed – typically on time and at or under budget. Most of those that remain are a continuation of the District-wide improvements at existing schools. But the largest remaining voter approved project by far is that of the new elementary school, planned now for several years to be a dedicated STEM school.

The voter approved middle school, however, will not be built as part of the 2007 Bond Program. After the economic downturn in 2007/2008 and the following decline not just in existing District enrollment but also in expected and predicted census growth, the Governing Board declined to sell and issue bonds for that school. Bonds were sold for the new elementary school, however.

Following the sale of the bonds for the school, preparations for the new school began. For the last several months, District staff has been pursuing the contracting and retention of architectural, engineering, construction and related services for the STEM school. Well before those processes began, discussions of STEM and other programmatic considerations were underway in order to help inform the design process to come. In addition, budgetary planning for costs not covered by the bonds had to begin in earnest some years ago, so that the capacity to meet the upfront capital costs (in particular) of opening a new school could be met when the time for construction and opening of the school came.

This budget planning was, as most would expect, based upon certain assumptions and predictions, given that school districts can only adopt and spend a budget on a year-to-year basis under Arizona law. Thus, for example, our current capital funds (“cash on hand”) currently include funds accrued over time to ensure those new school opening costs could be met.

But the ability to meet those costs was also largely dependent upon controlling and meeting other capital needs as they arise – even when they arise at the same time as the new school opening. In other words, our budgetary planning for the new school assumed and greatly relied upon in fact an assumption that school district capital funding, having been cut by the Arizona Legislature so drastically over the last several years, would not suffer great cuts again. Then, two weeks ago, the Governor and Legislature proved that assumption, perhaps hope, wrong.

The additional loss of approximately \$1.7 in capital funding next year dramatically changes the district’s budgetary landscape. The effect of this substantial cut after so many other drastic and recurring cuts has been described as catastrophic by some observing its effects on schools statewide. Such a reality begs, especially now, a review of the plans for the new school – not just with respect to its construction but also its subsequent operation.

With so much in the balance, the review of such a matter can be a daunting thing to begin, much less substantively and thoroughly understand. To facilitate such review, the Administration has prepared a list of “Pros” and “Cons” for building the new school given the current and best information possible. This table begins on the next page of this item.

Pros of Constructing the School	Cons of Constructing the School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completes key component of bond question; in keeping District’s word, we build trust for future bond elections. • Failure to build both new schools promised to voters may disenfranchise voters and business community. • Stem school would set Amphi apart in Tucson, Pima County, and Arizona; would build brand identity for District as a whole. • Implementation of STEM model would provide launch pad for/draw attention to other programmatic improvements throughout District schools. • Creates greatest potential for drawing external open enrollment students. • Creates potential for drawing students back from charters/private/home schools. • Avoids loss of bond funds already expended. • Assures ownership of school site in perpetuity (legal deed issue). • Entirely new building will afford greater efficiencies of lower energy and maintenance costs than existing Classrooms – near net zero design. • Meeting parent expectations for a modern educational curriculum. • Meeting Oro Valley growth and development expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neighborhood concerns relating to traffic, views, purpose of use. • There will be substantial financial needs at front end for capitalization, new staffing, etc. as enrollment ramps up. • Loss of additional capital next year (\$1.7 million legislative cut) will dramatically impair ability of District to function while still opening school. • Open enrollment-only concept, by its very nature, will have negative effect upon enrollment of other schools. Could it even lead to need for school closure in future? • Drawing non-Amphi resident students (and funding) to any significant extent will likely require substantial change of open enrollment policy preferences – to allow non-district residents greater opportunity. May be offensive to Amphi residents and taxpayers. • Open enrollment only transportation needs will require more staggered class schedules throughout District. • Lost enrollment at other schools (due to open enrollment to new school) will certainly require district-wide displacement of staff (RIF, with transfers to STEM school), creating some potential district-wide disruption. • New school’s distinct branding may lead to unintended consequence of depleting STEM qualified teachers from existing schools.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New progressive programmatic school shines a bright light on Amphi district – positive perception and brand effect. • Geographically, the new school has the great potential to draw open enrollment students from other districts. • Can establish Amphi as the Leader in STEM • Can reduce loss of ADM to Charter Schools • School will be a flagship for our district, Southern Arizona, and the State of Arizona in terms of design, curriculum, and instruction • School will be completed and in operation as Oro Valley grows as a community; currently there are 2,100 planned homes for Oro Valley (approximately 350 already under construction just around the corner from our site) • Students in Oro Valley, other Amphi schools, and from other districts (accepted as OE) will be provided a unique educational experience • STEM education is our future; jobs in the STEM industries are high paying and available; this school will be a model • Teachers will be highly trained in STEM and can share their expertise with other teachers in the district • The school could become a training hub for all of our elementary teachers in the area of science • It will provide a unique opportunity to look at STEM education in a building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State capital cuts could necessitate cuts to other district schools in order to open. • It will cost \$17 Million just to build, plus FFE. • Could lead to increased district utility costs (although we are hoping for net-zero effect). • Costs of the development of a STEM curriculum (paid for with Title II funds) • Cost of professional development in STEM (paid for with Title II funds) |
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<p>that facilitates this type of learning without having to retrofit (very costly and ineffective) a building for our curriculum needs</p>	
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Pros of Not Building the School	Cons of Not Building the School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could allow accrued capital to be used by all schools for STEM (or other purposes) • Low Risk – Capacity available elsewhere • Could allow new bond sale with no tax increase • Could allow the district rather than a single school to have the STEM affiliation • Capacity for near term growth exists at existing sites. About 1,400 seats available in northern area of District. • Leads to lower tax rates when bonds sold are refunded. • Constituents may interpret and credit as financial responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have the funding now, and based on the state formula we will not be able to fund a new school with state funding for decades • Public supporters of school may become disenfranchised and be unsupportive of future bonds to build. • We currently receive one to two calls per week from parents both within our district and from other districts, asking about how to enroll their students and what our process of acceptance will be • Currently, there are 2,100 planned homes for Oro Valley (approximately 350 are already under construction just around the corner from our site). Growth potential may go unmet in term of community’s educational need. • We have already assembled a top notch architectural firm and general contractor who are committed to and who understand the need to protect the taxpayer dollar while meeting the curriculum design needs of the school. • Loss of students to other Districts, charters, and schools with “STEM identities” • When built in the future, the cost to build

	and to equip with FFE will exceed current \$17 Million.
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Obviously, there may be other considerations (other “pros” and “cons”) which the Board or others may identify. This listing, however, supplemented with information to be presented by the Superintendent and staff will certainly facilitate discussion and understanding of the multiple levels of issues to be considered and perhaps resolved through that discussion.

RECOMMENDATION: This item is presented for the Board’s study and discussion. At this time, no recommendation is presented.

INITIATED BY:



Todd A. Jaeger, Associate to the Superintendent

Date: March 23, 2015



Patrick Nelson, Superintendent