

## **Pillager Public School Referendum Frequently Asked Questions and Answers**

### **Why is there a need for a referendum for additional classroom space?**

Our district enrollment in 2012 was at 875 students with an expected increase to 1,177 by the year 2018. This growth has, indeed, been happening thanks largely to the image and quality of our school. Average elementary class sizes have increased from 58 students per grade in 2010 to an average of 83 in 2016. The district is currently using both portable classrooms, as they are being used and shared by several special education teachers. The district has also added a third music teaching staff member to meet the needs of instruction and will be short a classroom which will mean that some classes will be taught with music on a cart.

### **How much is the school district growing?**

Historical and projected enrollment figures estimate district enrollment will maintain the class average size of between 85 – 100 students per grade. This information was also stated in the independent organizational study conducted by Roger Worner and Associates.

### **Where is our increased enrollment coming from?**

Pillager families are simply choosing to stay in their resident district because of the quality of education they have with the excellent programming and the opportunities that they have available right here in their own community. We have more families choosing to stay in our district and not attend another school, more families moving into the district, and also more families choosing to open enroll into our school as well. Adding those three factors together, the district has gained about 300 students since 2010.

### **Does the school district need a performing arts and community events center?**

Most neighboring districts of similar size have a performing arts auditorium, which often serves as a resource to the entire community. Simply put, we do not have one. Our current space that we use was built in 1940 and it also serves as a practice and performance space for musicals and plays, our elementary lunchroom, and a space for after and before school for our Fun Stop daycare. This requires extra staff time to set up and take down for events and it displaces programs at various times throughout the year. It also takes away from learning or practice time. Not to mention that the acoustics are poor and it is not ideal for large gatherings or events. A performing arts auditorium would greatly benefit the music, theater, and fine arts department and could serve as a venue for regional events and competitions for school sponsored activities, staff development training sessions, and district-wide meetings. Other regional events could be held there such as the annual fiddlers contest, community meetings, public assemblies, visiting speakers, dance competitions, traveling choirs and music concerts, and many other area events.

### **How does the community benefit from this facility project?**

A strong school system is the nucleus of a community. Many people live in our area because of the strengths of our school district. A thriving, growing, competitive school district will continue to attract new families and businesses to our area. This growth is good for our businesses, tax base, city, and school district. A performing fine arts auditorium will allow for greater community access and improves the quality of life for our residents and will allow the district to host local and regional events that will bring revenue to the school district and our local businesses. Last year alone, the net tax capacity grew in our district by nearly 11% as a result of increased property values and new property.

### **How does the district benefit from open enrollment?**

Open enrollment for our district brings in additional revenue of over \$3.3 million. When the district sets the levy each year, every \$1 in the operating budget that is levied due to open enrolled students, an additional \$7.15 is generated in state aid that benefits all of students in our district. This money is used for programs such as college in school, additional teachers and staffing, added technology purchases, staff development, new programs such as AG and FACS, just to name a few. It would be a challenge to offer those programs without the additional revenue. When people want to move to an area, a common question a homebuyer may ask a realtor is: how are the schools in the district? Having a good image and being a school where people want to send their children creates a positive environment that draws more people to the district. That increases future home sales and property value increases and will eventually lower the tax burden by increasing the net capacity. The net tax capacity grew by over 11% for the district last year with increased property values and new growth.

### **Is it true that the district has an open enrollment policy that caps the total number?**

Open enrollment is good for the district as long as the district continues to manage it. The Worner Independent Organizational Study stated, "Observable benefits include enhanced staffing, programs, services, and organizational finances". The board did set a policy this past year that closes open enrollment in a grade K-12 when a grade reaches a total number of 105 students. The School Board chose the number of 105 students based on being a benefit financially and as to what the current facility would be able to accommodate as a four-section high school.

### **How has the referendum changed from the 2017 plan to the current 2019 plan?**

The Pillager School Board surveyed residents last September to obtain feedback regarding the result of our 2017 referendum and to get additional input as we began to prepare for a restructured building referendum in 2019. Beginning in early 2018, the District presented the revised plan to a task force of nearly 30 members made up of community leaders, landowners, county officials, business owners, parents, grandparents, and school personnel. Our engagement with the community has led us to the decision to restructure the plan. Both questions will have significant impact on our District's ability to meet the educational needs of our students. Some of the key components of the referendum that changed are as follows; one question ballot to a two question ballot, eliminated the additional classrooms of the early childhood center, added space and for technical and vocational programming, remodeling of needed spaces, and reduction of the cost of the auditorium by reducing it from a 500 to a 350 seat facility. The complete plan is available on our website at [www.isd116.org/future](http://www.isd116.org/future).

### **Is it true that voting yes for question number one verses no would actually be cheaper for landowners? How can that be?**

Yes, due to the new legislation of the AG2School Tax Credit Act, all current and future building bonds are eligible for a 40% tax credit for Ag homestead landowners. If question 1 fails, the board will be forced to adopt the full amount of the (LTFM Levy) for over the next 10 years to repair the roof. This course of action would not provide sufficient funds for any other maintenance, nor would it provide for the classrooms and remodeling that is needed if question 1 was to pass. The dollars generated on the (LTFM Levy) levy **DO NOT QUALIFY** for the AG2School Tax Credit. As a result, voter defeat of question 1 will **INCREASE** taxes on homestead agricultural land valued at \$5,000 per acre by **\$.65** per acre per year and only the roof will be replaced

### **How much debt does the district currently have and how much was paid down on that debt?**

The district currently has building debt of \$15,268,960 and paid down the overall debt last year by \$733,200. Since the passing of the 2011 referendum, the district has paid down \$4,270,000 on existing debt.

**If the referendum fails, is it true that our taxes will still go up?**

Yes, the board will have no other choice then to tax the full amount of the nonvoter approved dollars of the LTFM levy to its full amount available to repair the roof. Increasing the LTFM levy would cause taxes to go up. It is estimated that on a \$150,000 home, the total cost of both questions passing would be \$7 per month. If the question fails the estimated tax increase of the LTFM levy would be \$3 per month. The important factor to consider is that for the additional \$4.00 per month, the residents would approve all of the improvements on the referendum with the additional elementary classrooms, added vocational spaces, and all of the maintenance needs getting completed. If the question one fails, only the roof gets redone. It is a great value for the additional dollars.