

"What Could District 204 Do if Request for Money Fails?"

by Howard Crouse, Superintendent

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On April 5, Indian Prairie will ask its voters to approve a \$130.5 million referendum to build a third high school, to purchase land for the school, and for bonds to fund major maintenance and technology projects. The referendum is based on a Citizens Advisory Committee's recommendation that we need the space to house students who are here now as well as those who will be here when we reach build out.

The question we hear from the public most often is, "What is Plan B?" What happens if the referendum fails? At its town hall meeting in January, the Board of Education asked the assemblage if describing Plan B for the public would be seen as informative or coercive. The vast majority of the community members present indicated that although the news might be bad, it was better to be informed.

If the referendum fails, Plan B must include finding a way to house 10,200 high school students in space for 8,400 and 7,850 middle school students in space for 7,000.

Class sizes will increase to delay the more detrimental options. Portable classrooms can be a small but short-lived band-aid. Their use is limited by the space available and a five-year life span. Without a long-term solution, they merely put off the inevitable.

The first critical task would be to re-draw boundaries to share the enrollment burden. Neuqua Valley's enrollment is expected to far exceed Waubonsie Valley's, so students would have to be moved from Neuqua's attendance area to Waubonsie's. Similarly, the middle school boundaries would need to shift students with all schools overcrowded instead of just a few.

The high schools cannot handle 5,100 students without drastic measures. There are not enough classrooms, cafeteria seats, and hallway space to handle that many students. We would have to take actions that limit the number of students in the building at any one time.

Split shifts could be used to accomplish this. The student body would be split into two groups, one of which attends classes from 7:00 AM to noon, the other group from noon to 5:00 PM. There are many significant ramifications to that schedule, none of which are positive. In a five-hour day, students can only take five classes; currently most of our students take seven. There is little room for electives or exploratory classes. Participation in extracurricular activities is impacted by student and athletic schedules and by transportation.

Split schedules are universally denounced. I believe there would be significant negative impact in the public perception of the district. People with high school students would think twice before staying in, or moving to, a district on split shifts with no relief in sight.

Another alternative is to move to year-round school at the high school level. This would impact students' lives significantly. One district on a year-round schedule surrounded by districts on a traditional school year makes it more difficult for students to participate in activities outside of school, such as park district or church events. It limits summer job options, making it particularly difficult to save money for college.

Plan B provides alternatives to a third high school, but none of them benefit our students.