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*"Striving for Excellence"*

## Iowa Falls Community School District New Elementary/HS Expansion Project Informational Update

January 26, 2021

This communication will serve as the first of several releases of information related to our upcoming building project that will be voted on by our community on **Tuesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>**. The purpose will be to provide various pieces of factual information to our community. Our goal, as a school district, is to simply inform and educate community members about the current status of our buildings and the impact the bond would have here in Iowa Falls.

We have created a website that allows community members to access information related to various topics. These same pieces of information will also be shared out regularly, but in smaller chunks of information. To access the website, you can click (or retype) the link below:

<https://sites.google.com/ifacadets.net/buildingproject/home>

The website will be updated as more information is available. Sections that get updated will be dated to alert you to more information provided. The most amount of information can be found in our FAQ section.

The website has a link that will allow anyone to submit questions to be answered on our FAQ. We will also try to provide a direct response to each question asked. We are working collaboratively with the Times Citizen to answer the questions they have collected.

We will be scheduling a community open forum in February. More details on that date and format will be provided at a later time in our communications.

Attached to this communication is the first set of FAQ's. These questions focus on the General Questions that have come up so far.

Thank you for your continued support and please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions using the form or contact information provided.



## General Questions *(updated 1-25-21)*

Q1. What is included in this plan for the bond referendum?

A. This bond referendum will include the construction of a complete new Elementary Building, outdoor Elementary Spaces (Playgrounds, Outdoor Classroom), High School Band Room, High School Art Room, High School Shop Addition and High School Locker Rooms. The Elementary Project includes classrooms for all of our students in Preschool through 5th Grade, Elementary Gym, Elementary Cafeteria, Elementary Library, Art Room, Music Room, Main Office, Student Service Offices, Flexible Learning Spaces and two outdoor age-appropriate playgrounds.

Q2. How will this impact education at Iowa Falls CSD?

A. This building project will allow our Elementary Students to have appropriate-sized classrooms that will allow students to work with teachers, peers and independent work time without the fear of overcrowding. The classroom Pods will allow teachers to collaborate as grade-level teams to best meet the needs of all of our students. The central location of all of our elementary students will allow teams to work with all grade levels to develop a more complete educational experience that fosters daily collaborative opportunities for our staff. Our elementary students will also benefit from increased air quality and consistent classroom temperatures (compared to our hot classrooms in the summer and sometimes cold classrooms in the winter). Our High School students will benefit from larger Fine Arts spaces (Band, Art) that meet the needs of our growing programs and will have more access to Career and Technical Education Opportunities with the additional shop. Locating the Elementary school at the High School will also provide an auxiliary gym for after school events.

While a new building will not have a direct link to improved test scores, working in an appropriately-sized environment with improved air quality will improve the learning process. Collective teacher-efficacy will also improve with enhanced opportunities for professional collaboration on a daily basis. Common areas and shared learning spaces will improve the educational experience of all students and staff. Shared resources will be more efficient and there will be less instructional time lost due to building transition time. Larger classrooms and more future-ready learning spaces will allow for more hands-on opportunities for students.



Q3. How will this impact busing for the Iowa Falls CSD?

A. The relocation of our two elementary buildings will most likely increase the need for busing in our district. We will work with our families to ensure we have adequate in-town pickup and drop-off locations to meet our needs. This should also reduce the time spent on the bus for our youngest students with the majority of our students being educated in one central location.

Q4. Why do the plans include an expansion of the High School?

A. The school board was originally considering an expansion of our Band and Choir rooms that did not meet the physical needs of our program, looking for ways to increase the educational opportunities of our High School students in the Career and Technical courses and has also been working with the Athletic Boosters to build another gym for our community. This project ties all of those earlier projects into one building. With the desire to attach the two buildings, the location of the originally planned HS addition, it made logical and financial sense to bundle this all together.

Q5. Is the district concerned about locating Elementary Students with High School students?

A. The school district is excited for the learning opportunities available for our High School and Elementary students with a central campus. The academic wings will be separated by two Cafeterias, two Gyms, Fine Arts classrooms and multiple other spaces. The high school parking lot will also be relocated to keep the feel of two different buildings (Elementary and High School) while still allowing for collaboration between the two. We have a long tradition of High School mentors for our elementary students. This project will allow the expansion of that program.

Q6. What will happen to the existing elementary buildings?

A. The school district is currently working with several groups for the future use of each property. Every option will be considered to best meet the needs of the school district and community. The gymnasium at Rock Run is still an important asset to the district and we are identifying ways to best use this space in the future. The board will ask for community input for these spaces, as well as continuing to work with local organizations, to help identify the best possible uses for the land and buildings in the future.



Q7. How will this project improve safety and security?

A. The new elementary school will now have limited access to the building without visitors first entering the office. Both current locations allow visitors access to the entire building without having to first walk into the office. The new gymnasium and cafeteria will also be accessible to organizations after hours without having access to the main academic wing of our building.

Q8. What is the proposed timeline to complete this project, if the bond passes?

A. If the bond were to pass the Public Vote on March 2nd, 2021, the goal would be to finalize and publish plans for bids in December of 2021. Our current timeline has construction beginning in February of 2022 with a goal completion date of August 2023. The entire process from approval to completion of the project is two and a half years.

Q9. Is now the best time to do this? Has the board considered the economic impact caused by the pandemic?

A. The school board and facility committee have been very mindful of the economic impact caused by the current pandemic. One of the positive outcomes of the global pandemic has been falling interest rates. Compared to last year at this time, the school would be able to levy five-million more dollars with the lowered interest rate. This means that more public funds would be used for a direct impact on our students instead of paying off a higher interest amount.

Q10. Why are we using funds to buy a new building instead of hiring more teachers/increasing staff salaries and benefits?

A. Iowa school finance laws provide different "pots" or "pools" of money and dictate how these funds can be spent. Staff salaries and benefits are paid from the General Fund. The General Fund revenue comes from State Funds, Property Taxes and miscellaneous. The General Fund is formula funded (based on student enrollment) and the district has little control on the revenue stream. The General Fund expenses can only go towards Salaries, Benefits, Services, Materials, Supplies and Instructional Materials. The General Fund cannot be used to purchase items that are "more suited" to be purchased from another funding source (i.e. Student Activity, Construction Projects). The proposed Elementary/HS Expansion project would be paid from the approval of a General Obligation bond. That revenue does not enter the general fund, it is paid for from a different funding source that is generated completely from local property taxes.



Q11. Why is AC being considered for the Elementary with limited need during the school year?

A. The cost to install a completely new system that has AC included is negligible. While there will be more energy costs associated with utilizing the AC, the efficiencies of a new system should pay for the cost compared to the inefficiencies of our current system.

Q12. What are the plans for Pineview and Rock Run if all elementary students are relocated to the new building?

A. The school district is working with the City of Iowa Falls, Ellsworth Community College and other interest groups to determine the best use of the facilities after students are relocated to the new elementary school. There will still be a need for building space for Central Office and storage. The school district also sees value in utilizing the Rock Run Gym, but some of the building will most likely be demolished.

Some of the properties/land may be sold. The money could be used to help pay for this project, but we cannot sell the properties/buildings until the project is completed.

Q13. Why are we looking at a whole new building instead of fixing the HVAC issues we have now?

A. While fixing the HVAC in both elementary buildings is a top priority, it is not the only concern we are addressing with this proposed project. We have multiple space concerns (classrooms are undersized, Pineview does not have an appropriate sized gym, cafeterias are small in both buildings, collaborative space is lacking, etc) that this project will correct that is not possible with our current facilities.

If we tried to improve classroom sizes at our current sites, we would need to add on to both buildings, remodel existing classrooms and try not to disturb the learning environment while this is all progressing. Construction at the High School allows for limited to no disruption to the learning environments and more flexibility in the scope of the project. Renovations of existing rooms would be limited by existing infrastructure and time.





Q14. What resources will be at this new building that are not currently available? Please leave the gymnasium out of this conversation.

A. The proposed Building Project will have re-designed classrooms that are not feasible with our limited space right now. Larger classrooms will allow for more educational opportunities in the classroom.

Outside of the classroom, we will be able to design and develop some hands-on learning spaces that simply are not possible in our current locations. We can work within the scope of our current classrooms, but they simply were not designed for interactive technology and the electrical demands of today's teaching resources. This could include a STEAM/STEM Lab, Collaborative Learning Space, Boost-Up Room, etc.

The elementary would also have more access to the newly acquired outdoor learning lab at the high school. Partnerships can be developed between high school and elementary programs to provide mentoring opportunities, role models and increase school pride.

Q15. How many jobs would be lost due to this consolidation of elementary schools?

A. The number of staff members we employ on an annual basis is driven but the number of students in our programs. Consolidating the two buildings would allow for efficiencies, but there would probably be very few jobs eliminated due to this project. While there may only be a need for one building principal, this consolidation would allow for the creation of a district-wide administrator to help improve learning. This position would not be possible with keeping two separate buildings. Many districts our size have similar positions, whether it is title Curriculum Director, Director of Teaching and Learning, School Improvement Coordinator, etc. While this may decrease the number of principals in our district, it may not change the number of administrators we employ.