

Long-term plan to provide learning space for youngest learners

As I look back at the eight years I've spent in the Albany School District, I can't help but be proud of the positive impacts we have made within the district for our students. We have enhanced educational programs and services and expanded and improved our facilities. All of this while remaining fiscally responsible with our budgets and spending.

As our enrollment continues its slow and steady growth, I believe the Aug. 9 referendum is a cost-effective, long-range solution to district space needs.

With slow and steady growth to our enrollment, we've given our best efforts to manage growing space needs and maintain small class sizes at Avon and Albany elementary schools. And yet, these schools have surpassed their capacity, leaving some students to learn in rooms never intended to be instructional spaces. This dilemma impacts whether our teachers have small enough class sizes to customize teaching methods to fit their students. Without a long-term solution that creates additional space for students within our current schools, our class sizes will increase.

Furthermore, our elementary schools cannot support anticipated growth. They lack enough space for our growing programs and elementary school enrollment is projected to grow by 2025. The fact Avon Elementary School houses early childhood programs only compounds our space needs.

After our conversations with residents about space constraints and looking into several potential options, we are proposing a plan to purchase the former Albany hospital and transform it into an Early Learning Center. The plan will be put before residents for a vote Aug. 9. The one-question referendum requests a total of \$16.98 million that, if approved, would alleviate space constraints at Avon and Albany elementary schools by recapturing space for current students



ALBANY AREA SCHOOLS
BY SUPERINTENDENT
GREG JOHNSON

and securing room for future growth.

Renovating the hospital would provide 16 classrooms; various break-out and collaborative learning areas; space for an office; kitchen and serving area; and specialist space for physical, occupational and speech therapy. We also plan to build an addition that would serve as a multi-purpose and large motor space for students, staff and our community.

We believe renovating an existing community building would create ample space for our youngest students to learn while living up to our obligation to be financially responsible.

Updating the former hospital costs almost \$10 million less than building new, and the site comes with educationally-beneficial features such as a close proximity to the city park and green space, a playground and parking lots.

If the referendum is approved, the estimated tax impact on a \$150,000 residential home in the district would be about \$5.75 per month starting in 2023. If you are an agricultural landowner, you will benefit from a dollar-for-dollar credit called Ag2School, which is automatically applied with no application. Ag2School is a 70% tax credit applied to all agricultural property except for the home, garage and 1 acre around the home. To find your individual tax impact or learn more about the Ag2School tax credit, please visit our tax calculator at ourhuskiesourfuture.org/cost.

Our staff and educators are excited to once again work with the community for the sake of our students' success.

For more information about our district's needs, steps we've taken so far to address them and the proposed long-term plan, please visit ourhuskiesourfuture.org.

I am also available to answer additional questions and can be reached at gregjohnson@district745.org or phone at 320-845-5050.