



Frequently Asked Referendum Questions:

School District of River Falls

Please Vote -- Referendum -- April 3, 2018

**Please note, this document is in draft form and will be revised (added information) throughout our referendum communication with the public. As more questions are asked, we will add information to this document.*

Q #1: What are the main goals of this referendum?

A: There are four main goals associated with the referendum:

- 1) Add Elementary classroom space (regular full-sized classrooms; special education space) due to steady enrollment which is causing capacity challenges.
- 2) Create collaborative learning space at all of our schools (some new space and some revisions to existing space).
- 3) Invest in our aging facilities. Although the district commits approximately \$1M annually to maintain and protect our facilities, many systems have outlived their useful life and due to state limits on funding allowances we simply do not have operational dollars to appropriately address these growing needs.
- 4) Exit the 1920/40's sections of the Academy Building respectfully. Following our community developed strategic plan which called for an exit plan to be developed for the aging 1920's/40's Academy Building, this referendum includes the demolition of those two oldest sections while placing a small addition onto the 1990's section to continue serving as our Public Montessori Elementary School. Efforts would be made to preserve historical woodwork and architectural "keepsakes" from the older sections of the building.

Q #2: Why do we need a few more elementary classrooms added at this time?

A: We are at capacity within our elementary schools currently although increasing class size will allow for some future enrollment growth. This referendum plan is intended to address current and *future* classroom space needs. Construction would not be complete until 2019. We are confident in our enrollment projections and elementary space needs based on historical trends, local housing trends, economic conditions, and other related data analysis.

Q #3: Why are we not adding any classrooms at the middle or high schools?

A: Meyer Middle School and River Falls High School both have existing space that can/will accommodate for future enrollment growth. The case is different in our elementary schools where we have very little flexibility for expanding for future enrollment growth.

Q #4: How many elementary classrooms would be added to our elementary schools?

A: The best way to answer this question is to describe three phases:

Phase A: Six regular/full-sized (30'x30') classrooms would be added as follows: one at Westside; one at Rocky Branch; four at Greenwood. Greenwood currently has zero options for re-purposing existing space (every full-sized classroom is currently used). Also, based on housing projections (Highview Meadows and Sterling Ponds sub-divisions) we anticipate the need for more classrooms to be added at Greenwood.

Phase B: Re-purpose existing space -- Special Education space (20'x30') will also be added at Westside and Rocky Branch which will allow some existing full-sized classrooms (that are currently used for small group special services), to be "re-purposed" for future full-sized regular classrooms.

Phase C: With the demolition of the aging 1920's/40's sections of the Academy Building, we will add three full-sized classrooms for the Public Montessori Elementary School. Currently the Montessori uses parts of the

1940's section and therefore the new classroom additions would not only replace that space but also ensure we have space for future growth.

Question #5: How many students are attending the Montessori currently?

A: We currently have 185 students at RFPME and anticipate 200 next year. If the RFPME did not exist, we would need to add several additional classrooms at our other elementary school to accommodate those 185 students.

(See link for further information related to our Public Montessori School) <https://goo.gl/oWoQNP>

Q #6: Why demolish the 1920's and 40's?

A: The District and the community has held much debate over the past 15+ years about "what to do" with the Academy Building. Currently the 1920's section is not being used for any purpose whatsoever. The cost of renovating the 1920's and 1940's has been studied by various committees, architects, engineers, and construction firms. It is determined that the cost of renovation far exceeds the limited long-term benefits. It is simply not a cost effective option to continue to maintain, renovate, and/or otherwise invest in these structures - not surprising considering the 1920's is 90 years old and the 1940's is 70 years old.

Q #7: What about the historical value of the Academy Building?

A: Respecting the site/location and preserving some of the history are important commitments the Board is making with this plan. For example, much effort will be made to preserve certain elements of the Academy Building through our design of the new addition onto the 1990's Montessori section. Specifically, we will strive to incorporate some of the woodwork from the older sections into the new addition. We plan to move an old, but beautiful trophy case from the 1920's and relocate it at our current high school. We will also save other smaller historical "keepsakes" and conversation pieces. Lastly, the Board is committed to continue having a school (Montessori Elementary) at this site/location where there has been a school since 1854.

Q #8: Please explain the need for Elementary "collaborative space" additions?

A: This plan includes additions of new flexible space for use with robotics, Lego league, small group, large group, break-out stations, maker-space, mobile technology, and a wide range of next-generation/21st Century learning space.

Next century learning does not displace the traditional core learning of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but rather, engages learners in an environment, with relevant tools, technologies, and methodologies to meet the needs of elementary foundational skills, while also providing space for creativity and innovation to enhance the learning. Providing the right kind of learning spaces is important to continue our instructional progress based on best-practice research related to teaching and learning. Simply stated, educational practices, teaching, and learning are done differently in this century than the past, so too are the related space needs.

Students will have access to new learning resources that provide engaging and challenging experiences throughout most of each day while the new space can also serve as a cafeteria a few hours each day.

Before and after school Kids Club will be provided in this new flexible space -- this will free-up existing gym space to be used for school use while also providing our community with greater access for lifelong learning and recreational use. (See related link for further information) <https://goo.gl/P243fL>

Q#9: Why do we need artificial turf, lights, and parking behind the high school?

A: The artificial turf proposal in the second referendum question is geared toward a multiple/flexible use field that could be used by marching band, spring sports teams (baseball/softball) when fields are too muddy to practice. Community youth teams could have expanded use including into the evening hours with lights. Yes, we would also use the field for football practice and freshman/JV competition. The parking lot would provide greater community access and a much shorter walk to watch softball and baseball games.

Q #10: What technology needs are addressed in this referendum?

A: Technology infrastructure needs are part of this plan to include only such items as routers, servers, security, switches, etc. No individual computer devices will be purchased with referendum money. As long as we focus on infrastructure needs, the district can be reimbursed with approximately \$300,000 in federal e-Rate dollars.

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Q #11: Is there a plan to maintain these facilities to avoid coming back for repeated community support?

A: Currently the district spends appx. \$1M annually to maintain our facilities – and we will continue to follow a prioritized maintenance plan into the future. We simply don't have enough annual operating budget dollars to address ALL of our current needs. With over half of our school building being at least 45 years old, there are mechanical and infrastructure needs that once replaced, will not need to be addressed for many years to come.

Q #12: Were other options considered rather than adding elementary classrooms?

A: Yes. We looked at several options such as placing all 5th graders at the middle school; reconfigure existing elementary schools to have 1 school serve K-1, another serve grades 2-3, another serve grades 4-5. After vetting these options and hearing from community focus groups, these options were deemed to be ineffective and/or generally not acceptable in upholding our efforts to maintain "neighborhood schools". After careful consideration, our Board believes this plan best represents what the community supports while also addressing enrollment/capacity challenges.

Q #13: What is the length of this tax impact? How long will the bond (mortgage) last?

A: There are two parts to this answer. Short answer is that this bond would be schedule for a 20 year pay-off. However, the long answer is notable, which is that in 10 years the district will pay off some *other existing debt*, which will either reduce taxes, or provide the opportunity for another referendum (if needed) to be minimized on tax bills.