

Eau Claire Area School District Facilities Referendum by Superintendent Ron Heilmann March 7, 2011

On April 5, 2011, Eau Claire Area School District voters will go to the polls to determine the fate of two referendum questions... the most significant and controversial being whether to authorize the issuance of \$51.9 million in general obligation bonds to pay for the cost of various facilities repairs, renovations and improvements at four of the District's schools.

Superintendent **Ron Heilmann** made some opening and closing remarks, and responded to questions, but for the most part, let the District's 18-minute video do the talking.

As presented in the video, the primary goals of the two referendums are to:

- Address increasing elementary enrollment in selected areas of the District,
- Address the needs of some of the aging facilities that cannot be fully met with general budget monies, and
- Centralize early learning programming that is currently offered in District facilities.

The video goes on to make the case for each of these stated goals. In the area of increasing enrollment, the District commissioned a study that looked at enrollment trends for the next 10-15 years. The study indicated that the District enrollment is expected to grow by over 500 students over the next nine years, and according to **Tim Leibham**, Executive Director of Administration, the District simply does not have the space to accommodate this growth.

In the area of facilities, Heilmann stated that over the years, with limited resources, the School District has made the decision to invest in student programs and services at the expense of allowing facilities to continue to age. The District has over \$300 million of real property, and the School District has only been able to invest, on average, \$1.6 million per year in maintenance and upkeep of these facilities, which is approximately 10% of what he says is the private industry standard for maintaining real property.

According to Heilmann, despite the challenging economic times, the timing of this referendum is actually ideal. Bonds for as long as 20 years can be floated for less than a 2% interest rate. Contractors and other vendors are aggressively bidding on projects of this nature in hopes of securing the work. In addition, with certain existing bonds scheduled to be retired by the end of the 2011-12 fiscal year, this new debt can be taken on without raising the debt service and without adversely affecting the tax rate.

The video goes on to present, in convincing detail, the specific needs that would be addressed at Robbins Elementary, Sherman Elementary, Putman Heights Elementary and DeLong Middle School. These needs are quite varied and include everything from significant overcrowding to safety/security issues at the three elementary schools, to a total and complete upgrade of DeLong. According to Charlie Kramer, Director of Buildings & Grounds, there really hasn't been anything significant done with the DeLong facility since it was built in 1972... almost 40 years ago, and things are just starting to wear out. From the outside, it looks really nice, but on the inside, the boilers, plumbing, air handlers, and internal walls are all deteriorating and should be, or in most cases, must be replaced.

To see the complete 18-minute video on You Tube, which is split into two parts, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=78ZoAwvx0jA&feature=related and www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCjRS268KQg&feature=related.

And for more information on the entire referendum, go to www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/coa_referendum.cfm



Eau Claire Area School
District Superintendent
Ron Heilmann
(file photo)