

Dunlap district spreading wings

By Chelsea Peck
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Dunlap, Ill. — **Nov. 2 ballot to have school referendum**

Enrollment in Dunlap schools has been increasing for some time, according to [superintendent Dr. Jay Marino](#).

Due to the rise in students, Dunlap District 323 is seeking a referendum for voters to approve a new grade school Nov. 2.

The kindergarten-through-fifth-grade school would be located at Allen and Hickory Grove roads.

Marino explained the need for such a large step.

"It will relieve over-crowding. Right now we have teachers being used, so if you want to work with kids you have a cart traveling instead of in their own rooms."

The overcrowding of Dunlap grade schools has also caused students to travel closest to them to another school, depending on where they live.

"In instances right now, we take kids with Peoria addresses in that grade and in that school. They might even be assigned to be bused to a whole other school," Marino explained.

With a new grade school, the district will be able to share the space, a "breathing room," according to Marino.

The new school has been in the works for a couple years.

A committee was put together of different community members, including member Lisa Parker, among others, to discuss the design.

"We met several times and came up with a design which is a modern Dunlap school district," Parker said. "The building will be designed to empower our students to learn in a global society."

The district is asking for \$11.5 million from taxpayers.

"We're only asking for just about half of that amount. If the full amount came to the voters, we thought it would be more manageable," Marino said.

If the referendum is approved, work will not begin until next year.

If it is not passed, the board will come back either in two or three years.

"What you do is you can come back to the voters and explain why the community can benefit from this," Marino said.

Until then, if enrollment continues to grow, the district will have to find other options.

"You start adding portable classrooms, which isn't really a long-term solution that too. It's not a preferable method of making space. Portable classrooms are only patching up the problem."

Marino said the board is expecting the referendum to pass.

"We believe the need is here. When people hear about Dunlap what do you hear about? Growth and good test scores," he said. "We have a very strong support base from our parents. We think this is something parents who move into our district expect. They expect low class sizes. They expect high quality facilities, and this is an opportunity to bring that to them and deliver what we believe they expect."

The school board will hold meetings to explain the plan for the new building and the referendum.

These meetings are at 7:30 p.m. Oct. 4 at Dunlap High School, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 5 at Wilder-Waite Elementary School, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 14 at Dunlap Grade School, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 18 at Banner Elementary School, 7 p.m. Oct. 21 at Dunlap Middle School, 6:30 p.m. Oct. 26 at Dunlap Valley Middle School and 6:30 p.m. Oct. 27 at Ridgeview Elementary School.

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Why do we continue keep building small grade schools and why are we building one right in the middle of Banner and Wilder Waite. Has anyone looked at school campus from large Chicago districts. My nieces attend Huntley School Districts and they have campuses. One building contains K-2, one building is 3-5 and a Middle School is across the yard. There are corridors for each grade with up to 25 class rooms per wing. Then you have maintenance, staff, overhead etc. on one building instead of 5 or 6 grade schools.

Also, from what I'm hearing the new Valley Middle School is at capacity. Has it been considered to build a new high school somewhere, move the 2 Middle Schools to the existing high school and then that frees up the 2 existing middle schools for grades school.

Also, something NEEDS to be done with the high school ball fields. I'm sure the gas station on the corner loves the business but someone is going to get killed crossing Rt. 91 to go to baseball, softball and football games. This is an issued that needs attention!! When those fields were built back in the late 70's early 80's no one ever dreamed of Dunlap being as large as it is and that on any given sporting day, hundreds of people would park in empty lots across the high way.

I'm all for quality education but I think building another grade school in the suggested location is not going to solve the current growth issues.

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