



## Dunlap schools seek breathing room

Referendum will ask District 323 voters about need for new elementary school

By **SCOTT HILYARD** (shilyard@pjstar.com)

Journal Star

Posted Oct 07, 2010 @ 09:27 PM

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.



**DUNLAP** — A decade of unrelenting growth in Dunlap Unit District 323 has school officials in a familiar spot - the front end of another major building project.

"We believe we have a compelling case to take to the voters about the need for a new elementary school," Superintendent Jay Marino said. "We are at capacity and still growing."

A referendum question on the Nov. 2 ballot asks district voters whether the board should issue \$11.5 million in bonds to help build a \$21.1 million elementary school for grades kindergarten through fifth.

The rest of the money, \$9.6 million, would come from an existing building fund (\$5 million) and education fund (\$4.6 million). The district has an option to buy land in the northwest corner of Allen and Hickory Grove roads in Far North Peoria for \$651,602, an amount included in the \$21.1 million total.

The two-story, 90,000-square-foot school would be built to initially hold 450 students, with core facilities - cafeteria, gymnasium and other common areas - built large enough for 600 students. The design also contains plans for future classroom expansion to accommodate the full capacity of 600 students.

"The idea is to plan for the future but not overbuild a school that has lots of extra, empty space," Marino said.

The elementary school would be the district's eighth major construction project since a new Dunlap Middle School opened in 1999. If construction of the elementary school is approved, the district will have built three new schools, a freshman academy wing, auditorium, 19 new classrooms at the high school and a six-classroom addition at Banner Elementary in 11 years. Total cost of the construction would exceed \$75 million.

The construction boom has been driven by student population growth. In 2001, the year Ridgeview Elementary School opened, there were 2,270 students in the district. This year, there are 3,582, an increase of 1,312 students or 58 percent growth over the timeframe. Projected growth pushes the enrollment well past the 4,000 mark by the 2014-15 school year.

With the middle school and high school space issues addressed for the moment, the overcrowding problems are now most acute in the elementary schools. The four elementary schools that housed 964 students in 2001 now house 1,625 students.

"We're at the point where every room is being used every moment of every day," said Greg Fairchild, principal of Banner Elementary, a school that added six classrooms in 2006 and 32 students from last year. "We're now using hallway space."

Students are receiving reading help and occupational therapy in hallways and the foyer. A half-day kindergarten class transforms into a band room in the afternoon. The art teacher rolls her supplies from room to room on a cart because there is no art room. Teachers are using the principal's office for their routine grade level meetings, displacing Fairchild from his own space.

"Every school has its challenges," Fairchild said. "But we are really out of room to move."

Marino said the \$11.5 million bond issue is projected to raise the school district portion of the property tax rate about 10 cents per \$100 of assessed property value, to \$4.17. The current rate of \$4.07 is the second lowest in Peoria County and would remain second lowest even with the additional 10 cents.

The proposed increase would cost the owner of a \$150,000 home an additional \$50 on their annual tax bill.

"The School Board has been fiscally responsible by saving money for facility needs in the future and has come up with a plan that is much needed and a bargain to the taxpayers," Marino said.

Scott Hilyard can be reached at 686-3244 or at shilyard@pjstar.com

Copyright 2010 pjstar.com. Some rights reserved

### Secret Door for Home or Office

Hide A Door Secret Doors Starting at \$1098. All Solid wood  
HideADoor.com

### Kyrene Elementary School District

Local Experts.  
QuickLocal.com

### Kyrene Elementary School District

**Tempe**  
Info you need.  
QuickYellow.com

Ads by Yahoo!

Comments (2)

kpr200

2 hours ago

Report Abuse

You must be logged in to report abuse.