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 working in hallways with kids. We have all classroom space being used, so if you want to work with kids you have to get a desk or table out in the hallway,” he said. “In some cases, we have art on a cart traveling instead of in their own rooms.”

The overcrowding of Dunlap grade schools has also caused reshuffling of students. Many kids have been shipped from the school closest to them to another school, depending on where there is room.

“In instances right now, we take kids with Peoria addresses and bus them all the way to Dunlap Grade School. There might be space in that grade and in that school. They might even be able to be bused to a whole other school,” Marino explained.

With a new grade school, the district will be able to schedule classes, teachers and students around, so that each school will have some “breathing room,” according to Marino.

The new school has been in the works for a couple years, as district officials kept an eye on enrollment.

A committee was put together of different community stakeholders, such as parents, community members, teachers and board member Lisa Parker, among others, to discuss the design of the new school.

“We met several times and came up with a design which we felt correlates nicely with our focus on 21st Century Learning in the Dunlap school district,” Parker said. “The building will be student and community focused with an emphasis on teamwork and empowering our students to learn in a global society.”

The district is asking for $11.5 million from taxpayers in the referendum. The cost of the building will total almost $21.2 million.

“We're only asking for just about half of that amount. The board has been planning the last couple years and saving that up, so when it came to the voters, we thought it would be more manageable, and it would have more support to ask for that amount rather than the full amount,” Marino said.

If the referendum is approved, work will not begin until the spring. The new school is expected to be open for the 2012 school year.

If it is not passed, the board will come back either in the spring, or wait a year to try to get the referendum passed again.

“What you do is you can come back to the voters and do a better job of explaining the need, explaining the project, explaining how the community can benefit from this,” Marino said.

Until then, if enrollment continues to grow, the district would have to find other ways to house the growing number of students.

“You start adding portable classrooms, which isn’t real pretty, and it’s not exactly the best environment. Safety is kind of an issue with that too. It’s not a preferable method of making space. You can add onto a school without a referendum,” Marino said, but these options 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.
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 issue 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 highway.

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.