



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Sauk Centre Public School Board calls for a special election on Tuesday, November 2, 2021, to renew existing technology levy and authorize general obligation bonds not to exceed \$26,450,000 for facility improvements

SAUK CENTRE, MN – In January 2020, Sauk Centre Public Schools leadership, staff, community, and school board refreshed their Mission and Vision through a series of workshops and input sessions. This resulted in the following Mission and Vision to guide the district forward:

The mission of Sauk Centre Public Schools is to ***provide educational opportunities that reach ALL learners; fosters student interests and passions; and encourages collaboration through community partnerships that provide real world skills and training.***

The vision is to ***provide safe and innovative facilities that will continually develop 21st Century Learners who are ready and adaptable for a successful future.***

These sessions lead us to the question, “Can our facility (built in 1965, 1970, 1995 & 2000) take us into the next 30-50 years and honor the current Mission and Vision of the school district?” Session discussion focused on:

- Looking at district facilities and assessing the needs of 21st Century learners.
- Seeking out examples of schools that have been transformed from “old” to new.
- Taking inventory of district current structure and schedule to see what is working and what is not conducive to 21st Century learning.
- Exploring scheduling options to provide more real-world learning opportunities.
- Focus on trades and future careers by creating new, flexible spaces.
- Consider additional space in the elementary to allow a natural PreK - 12 progression through the building.
- Determining what a 21st Century classroom looks like in Sauk Centre.

In addition, a comprehensive facility assessment study, from the rooftops to the pavement, was conducted by SitelogIQ in November of 2020. The study included information about the life expectancy of the current equipment and infrastructure, indoor air quality, temperature and humidity, lighting, acoustics, and utility usage. Results from the study were presented to the school board in May of 2021.

The care of district facilities has always been a point of Mainstreet pride. "Our facilities have always been maintained with an understanding that the better we take care of them the longer they will last," School Board Chair Brad Kirckof proudly shared.

Superintendent Pat Westby was pleased to add, "The conclusion was yes, the 'bones' of the buildings are good to take us into the next 30-50 years." He continued, "But, we learned that the building systems and learning environments need to be addressed if we are to provide a safe and healthy environment for staff and students and fulfill the charge of the School District's Mission and Vision."

Improving building systems includes air purification, dehumidification, and various health and safety items. While the building equipment and systems have been well maintained, they are original to the building and over 55 years old, past their useful life, and require updating. Completing this work also provides increased energy efficiency and reduces overall operating costs for the district – money that can be used to focus on student learning.

Learning environment considerations include utilizing existing space more effectively and reflecting the world they will live and work in. Making these changes will provide educational opportunities relevant to Sauk Centre students that are needed to enhance their success after graduation.

In July of 2021, the school board approved a \$18,375,000 Long Term Facility Maintenance (LTFM) plan. This plan allows the school board to use its authority (voter approval is not needed) to address significant health and safety facility maintenance needs. The State of Minnesota expects boards to use this authority to take care of basic needs for the functioning of buildings and the health and safety of students and staff.

In August of 2021, school board called for a special election on Tuesday, November 2, 2021, to (Question 1) renew the existing technology levy and (Question 2) authorize general obligation bonds not to exceed \$26,450,000 for facility improvements. Unlike the LTFM plan, these two questions will be presented to voters for approval.

While LTFM project areas are exposed, the school board and district leadership agree that taking care of secondary building maintenance and learning environment projects, like those addressed in the Question 2 project scope, makes fiscal sense, and aligns with the School District's Mission and Vision.

Question 2 project scope includes:

- ADA-accessibility improvements to existing restrooms in the secondary building
- The construction and equipping of an early childhood center, storm shelter, and outdoor projects yard at the elementary school
- Remodeling and improvements to the existing elementary school library and computer lab

- Remodeling and improvements to create learning communities at the elementary school
- The remodeling and equipping of the elementary school special education suite, the addition of a sensory room at that site, subdividing existing elementary classrooms to create smaller classrooms and break-out areas
- The construction and equipping of a learning commons in the secondary building
- The remodeling and equipping of the media center, staff lounge, career and technical education spaces
- The construction and equipping of a new cafeteria and storm shelter at the secondary school building
- Remodeling and improvements to create a culinary arts learning space with break-out areas
- Renovations to the existing science lab to create classrooms and storage areas.
- Upgrades and improvements to lighting, boilers, water distribution systems, the central clock and public address system
- The construction of roofing repairs and improvements at the elementary school and auditorium

“Many times, you have heard me say that it takes a whole community to raise a child, and the support that Sauk Centre has for its students is absolutely amazing,” added Superintendent Westby. He continued, “While we know this is a financial investment for our taxpayers, we believe these investments not only maintain one of the communities most vital assets – its schools, and it also positively impacts student opportunity.”

Fortunately, the Minnesota Ag2School Tax Credit is a great benefit to the members of the Sauk Centre agriculture community. This tax credit reduces taxes for agricultural property owners on existing and future school building bonds. Ag2School is a 60% automatic tax credit (for property taxes payable in 2022) provided to all agricultural property. By law, the tax credit is scheduled to increase to 70% for property taxes payable in 2023 and thereafter. The total impact of the Ag2School credit will result in the State of Minnesota paying a significant portion of the total bond project cost.

Learn more about the technology levy and bond referendum:

A detailed informational community mailer will be arriving to district mailboxes in the coming month. Community members can also visit www.isd743.org/ref21 to learn about project details, frequently asked questions, tax impact, Ag2School credit, voter information, and more.

Two informational open house/tour opportunities will also be available to voters. Open House #1 will take place on Thursday, September 30, 2021, from 5:00pm – 7:30pm at the Sauk Centre High School Cafeteria. Open House #2 will take place on Tuesday, October 12, 2021, from 5:00pm – 8:00pm at the Sauk Centre High School Cafeteria.

Additional questions can be directed to Pat Westby, SCPS Superintendent, at patrick.westby@isd743.org or (320)352-2258 Ext. 4001.

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