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Board Unanimously Supports New Elementary School

EMMETSBURG, IOWA — The Emmetsburg Community School District School Board voted unanimously last week to move forward with plans to construct a new elementary school.

A recommendation was presented to the board on April 3 by members of the Community Task Force, the latest step in the district's continued evaluation of its facilities and future needs by board members and administrators. District officials believe this will strengthen early childhood and elementary learning, and facilitate daycare services that are needed in the community.

The proposal calls for construction of a 65,000-square-foot school for grades PK-4 at an alternative site. Once complete, the district would repurpose West Elementary School to become an early learning center.

ECSD would retain ownership of West Elementary and space would be leased there for daycare services. The gymnasium would be maintained for district athletics and other programs.

A voter-approved bond issue will be needed for the project to move forward.

"Constructing a new elementary school presents an opportunity to reshape the way our community's children learn," said Superintendent Cory Jenness. "Our district strives to provide students with the educational setting and tools they need to be successful, and this project would fulfill that mission for our youngest students. We look forward to continuing this important conversation with our community in the months ahead."

ECSD has proudly educated students for 70 years at West Elementary and the school is home to more than 300 students today. But district officials believe that investing funds in West Elementary is not practical or cost effective given the limitations of the existing facility and property.

West Elementary faces more than \$6 million worth of immediate facility and equipment needs. The list includes a mechanical retrofit to improve ventilation and air conditioning; updates to the safety system, fire alarms, and camera system; parking lot and drainage improvements; and updates to classroom finishes.

"The top priority of our school district is keeping students safe," said Jenness. "West Elementary is not fully equipped with the safety and security enhancements that can be found today at modern schools. This project would address those deficiencies and create a safer environment with more educational opportunities, making ECSD and our community a better place."

West Elementary currently has one of the smallest playgrounds in northwest Iowa for a school of its enrollment size. A new building site would feature green space with a more suitable playground, and provide safer vehicular circulation. A larger elementary school property would also provide ECSD with room for future expansion, such as a 5th grade wing.

A general obligation bond requiring 60 percent voter approval will likely appear on the November 5 ballot. The district will continue to share information with the community, right up to election day. This will include brochures and mailers, community meetings to learn more and provide feedback, and updates on ECSD's website and social media pages.

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