

Guest column for The Chatfield News

We listened to the community to develop new bond proposal

By Ed Harris

I suppose some Chatfield school district residents don't know who I am, but many who do would probably say that I am passionate about the success of the students at Chatfield Public Schools. Not only am I a father of two girls in the District, but as the Superintendent of Schools I care about every student and I know the same is true for every teacher and staff member that works here. We care about kids and we believe their success makes for a stronger community.

Last year voters approved a much needed operating levy increase, and for that we are grateful. We avoided making some very hard cuts and preserved successful academic programs. On behalf of the students, staff and families of Chatfield schools, thank you!

Two bond referendum questions were not approved, and we received terrific response to two surveys, mailed to every district residence, to help us learn why they didn't pass and what aspects of a facilities investment the community would support. We learned that you want us to focus on academics while we maintain our facilities.

Specifically, 78 percent of you were somewhat or very likely to support a referendum that includes funding for the high school's long-term building maintenance. Seventy-four percent would support updating science, Ag, and tech ed classrooms. Sixty-four percent would support expanding and updating the kitchen and high school cafeteria/commons; 59 percent supported updates to the library/media center; 70 percent supported renovations to general education classrooms. On the other side of the coin, less than half of those that responded supported significant expenditures on activity spaces.

We heard you loud and clear. We appreciate your feedback and we designed a new plan that includes the maintenance and updates that were prioritized by the community, and we did it at a lower cost. The cost of the project to taxpayers would be less than \$4 per month for a home valued at \$140,000. This is significantly less than last year's proposal due to (1) new money from the state of Minnesota for long-term maintenance projects (2) interest rates that have gone from good to great and (3) reduction in project scope.

We think it's a good plan that meets many of the needs identified by the High School Facility Task Force in 2015. We'll still be a bit tight on scheduling for activities, but our maintenance needs would be addressed and students will have increased access to science, Ag, and technology programming and 21st century study spaces. These investments will assure that our high school remains a viable community asset long into the future.

This facilities investment was designed to meet the community's feedback: it focuses on academics and is substantially more affordable. We are working together for a strong future. Go Gophers!

- Ed Harris is Superintendent of Chatfield Public Schools

