

West Central Area Schools

Serving the communities of Barrett, Elbow Lake, Hoffman, Kensington & Wendell

October 29, 2021

The Minnesota Department of Education issued a “Positive Review and Comment” for the Building Bond Referendum proposed by the WCA Board of Education. As required by Minnesota Statute, the MDE addressed the “educational and economic advisability” of WCA’s proposed school construction project and authorized the District to proceed with voter approval.

The WCA Board of Education has intently examined data and facility options for over three years. They devoted time during the same period to learning more about WCA’s academic programs, programs of support and co-curricular programs. Over time, it became evident to Board members that WCA program needs were directly linked to facility and site deficiencies. Through their assessment and planning, the Board’s ultimate goal has been to address all needs to improve upon opportunities for current and future students.

The three questions of the Building Bond Referendum are the Board’s proposal to collectively address all facility and program needs in the most fiscally responsible manner. For the Board members, being fiscally responsible does not translate into spending less to partially address structural and mechanical needs of a building while postponing or ignoring additional cost to attend to other needs. They believe that is short-sited, if not irresponsible.

For example, the Board eliminated renovation of South Elementary from consideration due to facility age, the extensive amount of necessary repairs and improvements, available space for expansion, and the total cost renovation, repair and expansion. Construction cost for renovation and repair of South plus an addition for academic and program needs are projected to cost approximately 70% of the new construction costs. MDE’s Guide for Planning School Construction Projects states, “that when the estimated costs of renovating/improving a school facility approach 60 percent of the cost of replacing the facility, a school district needs to seriously consider replacement of the facility.” Site size is a major deterrent to continuing with an elementary school at the current South site. A South Elementary addition of adequate size to provide for identified academic and program needs would eliminate all off-street parking and all open green space on the northwest section of the property.

Renovation, new construction, and site development at the North Elementary School do provide a distinct financial advantage over a complete new construction project. Projected construction cost savings are in the \$5 million range for North and the North site is large enough to provide for ample playground and green space, off-street parking, and separate bus and parent drop off locations.

The Board’s comprehensive approach to facility and site needs and academic and program enhancement extends to the Secondary School with Referendum questions 2 and 3. These proposals positively and directly impact various groups but collectively improve and broaden opportunities for all students in the secondary school. Since these projects will enhance student opportunities, the Board wanted to seek voter approval at the same time elementary school needs are addressed. The intent is to seek commitment for all three projects now and avoid additional referendum requests for at least 20 years; the life of the bond.

The three ballot questions prepared by the WCA Board are proposals presented for voter approval. The District’s website contains an abundance of factual information that the Board took into consideration over the past three years. With any Building Bond Referendum, there will always be district residents who do not support a proposal. You may have seen financial figures and other information that is not consistent with information provided by the District. The Board members, the contractors hired by the District, and I are held to a high level of accountability. Other individuals however, are not obligated to

be accountable to the same standard. Whether you agree or disagree with the Board's proposal, I encourage you to carefully review the information provided on the District's website to gain an understanding of the proposals. Thank you for your interest in the referendum and for your past support of the students, staff and District.