

Please direct inquiries to:
Cory Jenness, 712-852-3201
cjenness@e-hawks.org



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Community to Vote on Debt Levy Measure on September 10

West Elementary to host open house on September 4

EMMETSBURG, IOWA — Registered voters who live in the Emmetsburg Community School District will go to the polls on Tuesday, September 10, to consider a ballot measure that is necessary for the proposed construction of a new elementary school.

The measure on the ballot specifically asks voters to consider increasing ECSD's debt levy limit. Voter approval of at least 60% is required by state law for the measure to pass.

ECSD currently has the authority to levy up to \$2.70 per \$1,000 of taxable property value for debt service. If approved on September 10, that limit could increase to \$4.05 if voter voters approve a future project.

"This measure would not officially increase property taxes," said Superintendent Cory Jenness. "Instead, it would give the school district the option to raise the debt levy in the future if our voters approve a new project."

District officials have invested significant time and effort studying the facility needs that exist today and exploring potential solutions. Through the course of this work, it was determined that continuing to spend limited financial resources at West Elementary School was not a practical or cost-effective plan.

The oldest portion of West Elementary, which is home to preschool to 4th grade, was constructed in 1952. In the more than seven decades since, multiple additions and renovations have been completed, with the most recent work being a 2013 project that yielded a new gymnasium, commons and lunch room, kitchen, offices, and a secure entrance.

However, the list of issues at West Elementary is extensive and expensive, according to assessments and estimates provided by architects and engineers that have partnered with the district. This includes outdated heating systems and window air conditioners; aging mechanical systems; obsolete plumbing systems and hardware that is difficult to repair and replace; floors, fixtures and furnishings that are damaged and dated; aging windows that routinely leak; classrooms with poor configurations; narrow halls and doorways; and insufficient storage space.

Music classes are taught in a portable building originally transported to the campus in the 1970s as a "temporary" solution. The structure remains in use and occupies space on the east side of the school, and regulating the temperature inside is difficult year round.

West Elementary is also home to one of the smallest playgrounds in northwest Iowa for a school of its size and enrollment due to the land-locked nature of the site and no room for expansion. The school's parking lot also has extensive drainage and settling problems.

The existing elementary school sits on 3.6 acres. The new site [encompasses 24.2 acres](#), providing ample space for school access, parking, outdoor play and learning, and potential expansion to accommodate a fifth-grade wing.

“Our students, teachers, and staff members face many challenges every day at West because the school is not conducive to 21st century education and expectations,” said Jenness.

The September 10 election is the first in a two-step process the district has proposed in hopes of constructing a new school that would replace West Elementary. On Tuesday, November 5, voters will consider a \$29.75 million general obligation bond.

ECSD reached an agreement over the summer to acquire land east of Iowa Lakes Community College as the site of a new school. The agreement is contingent upon the outcome of the two upcoming elections.

ECSD has no plans to abandon the West Elementary property if a new school becomes reality. The district would demolish the oldest portion of the building along the north side and use revenue it receives from the statewide one-cent sales tax fund (known as SAVE) to reimagine some existing classrooms to be leased as an early childhood center.

According to Jenness, maintaining daycare space is critical when it comes to attracting staff and young families to the community. ECSD would continue to maintain and utilize the school's offices and gymnasium for its own staff and programs.

“The goal throughout this process has been to pursue projects that allow us to improve student safety and security, prepare for the next generation of learners, and ensure that West Elementary continues to serve the school district and community in some capacity,” said Jenness. “This proposal would fulfill that mission.”

Community members are invited to attend an open house event at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 4, at West Elementary. Attendees will be able to tour the school and speak with district leaders to learn more about the measures on the ballot in both September and November.

For more information, please visit www.emmetsburgbond.org.

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