

# Referendum Facts and Information

**Providing a safe learning environment for all ages of our students is our first priority.**

To that end, our largest need is to provide our youngest students (Pre-Kindergarten and Early Childhood Special Needs) with school locations to be updated from portable buildings to brick and mortar attached classrooms at our elementary school location. The District's current mobile units or portable classrooms are 30 plus years old. The WSSD maintenance and custodial teams have worked hard to keep these units operating past their building life expectancy. Each year the district continues to spend additional funds to make maintenance updates to all portable classroom buildings. The buildings are inspected annually for occupancy by the district's architect. The board feels strongly that safety is measured in building access as well as the type of the building housing our students.

Safety Concerns with current portable classrooms:

- Accessibility
- Safety (active shooters and intruders)
- Weather related incidents
- Maintenance and upkeep

**We are striving to reach the highest level of academic excellence.**

Whiteside SD 115 has made significant improvements the past three years throughout the school district. We overhauled our reading and language curriculum to include a district wide reading series and implemented Orton Gillingham reading strategies. We continue to provide improved technology for all classrooms. These upgrades included new Active Panels for all teachers and moving all classrooms to a 1-to-1 Chromebook environment. The district has continued to make investments by adding online educational tools such as IXL. We are now including Social Emotional Learning tools

for all classroom teachers throughout the district. Just within the past year, we were able to move our middle school designation on the State Report Card from targeted to commendable within one year. With all of our current improvements, we realize that an improvement to the Pre-K and EC educational environment would provide students with the opportunity for increased success by creating equity in accessibility along with reducing safety concerns.

**Even with all this improvement, we've maintained strict fiscal responsibility.**

Our financial position has been difficult in the past, but under the leadership of our current board we worked to institute a responsible budget philosophy. Our current budget shows positive funds balances and each school year a reduction to deficit spending within the different budget funds. We are working to maintain a balanced budget and have utilized federal funds due to COVID to make positive changes to curriculum, staff professional development, and technology reducing the need on our operating budget for such items.

- In 2020, the Board of Education allowed the middle school building bond included in the yearly levy to return to taxpayers.
- In 2020 and 2021, the Board of Education used short-term loans due to a delay in levy payments associated with pandemic tax collections. In both instances, the district repaid the debt within the 6 month window without changes to the tax levy.
- 2023, the district sold working cash bonds to increase the tax levy for building needed updates including middle school roof replacements, elementary roof repair, HVAC upgrades, and replacement of middle school parking entrance.
- 2024, the district will add solar to the roof at the middle school. This improvement will reduce energy consumption and cut the district's energy cost. In addition, the district will receive State and Federal payments for the installation of solar at the middle school.

**Finally, we're doing our best to invest in capital development to support our students' safety and learning.**

While our budget is limited, we're investing in urgent needs including increasing security, addressing life safety needs, and extending the life of our infrastructure and mechanical systems. District has identified that our next focus needs to be the mobile classrooms housing our youngest and most needy students. We are asking that our community come together to address the challenges faced by our Pre-Kindergarten and Early Childhood programs.

#### Initial Project Information

- TOTAL COST – Elementary Pre-Referendum Planning - Est: 10.2 million
  - Elementary Site Improvements and Additions include
    - Permanent classrooms (total 6) for Pre-K and EC along with space for possible expansion
    - Additional primary student bathrooms
    - Upgraded playground for Pre-K and EC
    - Basic storage space to due non-used portable being removed
    - Building wide solar project
  - Approximate Avg. Tax Impact: