

Chalkboard

By

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So, when would you like to build a new high school? There is no need to rush to your medicine cabinet for blood pressure or other medications. I assure you the question is valid but not imminent.

I ask this question because a Gentry committee of seven administrators, three classroom teachers, and a school board member are in the midst of working on the latest Facilities Master Plan for the 2009-2011 biennium for the Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation. This plan is to be an update of our 10 Year Plan first filed in February of 2006. This plan was to be a guiding document for the district until the year 2016.

If you have ever worked on a committee you can relate that early stages of any task prompt many “what if” type questions. On a committee charged with making recommendations on the future of school buildings obviously the early questions have to do with both existing structures and those that might need building in the future.

For some background to this discussion I offer some history of the existing facilities now in use. In the late 1950s and 1960s the majority of the buildings on what is now the Intermediate Campus were built. I say majority because the “main” building was completed in 1972, the structure north of the bus tunnel, the “multi-purpose rooms” were finished in 1982, and the classroom building fronting Giles was opened in the fall of 1986.

Gentry High School was built in 1980. In 1982 an auditorium was added. A middle school built in 1995; an addition added to it in 1999 at the same time a new VoAg building was constructed. The Middle/High School Cafeteria was opened in 2001, a 12 classroom addition was built onto the high school in 2006 and finally, the district built a new Primary School which opened in 2006-2007.

The last building, the new Primary School, was probably the first built, since those wing buildings in the early 1960s, due to the old structure reaching the point where new construction was a more viable option than renovation. Of course in the same line of thinking, what is now the Intermediate “Main” building was originally built as a new high school, then transitioned into being a middle school, then being an elementary school, and finally now being the Intermediate school. All the other new construction listed was mostly precipitated by student enrollment growth.

It was this type “transitioning” of one structure to being used by a different grade level that lead to the following “what if” questions.

“What if in the future instead of building a new Intermediate School, the district were to build a new high school? What if we did that and moved the middle school to the existing high school and the Intermediate school to the existing middle school? Would that be more feasible than trying to renovate all the buildings on the Intermediate school campus? Would it be more feasible than adding classrooms onto the new Primary and again joining the Intermediate and Primary schools together in a shared space?”

That of course was not the only questions raised but maybe I have shared enough to give you an idea of the deliberations. I began this *Chalkboard* with the premise that the need to answer the above questions and others was not imminent. For the last two years the student enrollment at Gentry has “flat-lined” or reached a plateau. In the short term, using all the structures named earlier, the district has space to serve the current student body. But in the long term, with long being a relative term, something will have to be done with the buildings of the current Intermediate School.

Planning for the future is an uncertain task. Yet, even if it were not being mandated by a regulatory state agency, the need to plan would exist. School buildings do not pop up over night like mushrooms.

The words I began this article with have already slipped into my past while they remain to be read in your future. The future is coming. Poor grammar but true, the future has to be planned for. "For wete you well the tyde abydeth no man."

Let's say the title for next week will be akin to “Sure we're planning but who's paying?”