

# Chalkboard

By

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This will be the sixth article of a seven-part series dealing with the work of the **Gentry Public School District Facilities Ten Year Master Plan Committee**. If you have been reading you know that one tool the committee used was a voluntary survey that allowed you to share your opinions as to what direction the district needed to be moving with regard to facilities. Last week I gave you the partial results of Question 18 along with the open response answers that were received. Here is the “statistical” information again after the final responses were tabulated.

Question 18. “*Should the district’s next major building program be to:* 5.6% renovate the buildings at the Intermediate School, **27.8% build a new Intermediate School**, 12.9% add classrooms to the Primary School and make a Primary/Intermediate Campus, 2% build a P.E. gymnasium at the Primary Campus, **27.8% build a new high school**, 1.6% expand the middle school, 5.6% None of the above, 16.5% What I want.

Of the 248 responding to this question, the highest need identified was tied between building a new Intermediate School and building a new High School. I will share five of the open response answers from some of the other questions that might help explain why those two items came out on top. The answers that follow are verbatim with no editing from me.

“My grandchildren attend Gentry Intermediate School and as a tax payer I am humiliated by the condition of those buildings. That campus is a money pit that can never be renovated properly to make it a sound facility. I wish the district would make a plan to build an area where those children can be educated without having to walk outside in the cold/rain to the cafeteria and gym. They must walk outside to the nurse's office when they are ill and I think that is foolish. The district built 3 beautiful buildings for other children, so why has Intermediate been left to exist in that shambles?”

“The appearance of any town's school and it's facilities is always a huge draw to new people moving in. Gravette's new school is a perfect example, as well as, Prairie Grove, their school may not be brand new but how they keep it and the school grounds manicured has always been very impressive. Thus, part of the reason their town continues to grow. My family moved to NWA last year, and we chose Gentry school district over Siloam Springs because the facilities were mostly tied together and we liked the atmosphere of the smaller school. However, the Gentry Intermediate School is a definite downer for the appearance of the town. It is time to upgrade. Also, a school's football program draws a lot of support. Gentry

has finally hired a good coaching staff, now it is time to follow suit with the appearance of the football facilities. Although, this may seem petty, one of the first things we noticed after becoming involved within the school sports, is why doesn't the school maintain the pioneer on the press box. It is old and worn. Appearance goes a long way to first impressions.”

“Gentry has fantastic teachers and for the most part, good facilities. The condition of the intermediate school deserves more attention than athletics or activities. Anyone who has been in the building can see that. Leaking roofs, moldy carpets, poor ventilation, poor restroom facilities, the list goes on and on. The buildings just have not been maintained. There are LOTS of things that could be done to improve the situation in a cost effective manner. The old, has to be moldy carpet could be removed and floors painted, rooms repainted, roofs resurfaced, heat and air repaired or replaced, restrooms remodeled. Those buildings could be updated at nowhere near the cost of building a new school. I would hope that a new intermediate school is in the near future, but unfortunately, I just don't think the community would vote to raise taxes again anytime soon. In the meantime, something has to be done about the intermediate school. I'm sure that you could get volunteers to help with removing carpet and painting. Local (Gentry, Decatur, Siloam Springs) businesses could be sources of advertising revenue - Wal-Mart, Little Debbie, Lowes, Simmons, Allens - to benefit athletics and activities. (Sorry, I just have to say it) They do at Siloam, just look at the fence at their football stadium. Building a new football stadium or baseball or soccer facilities is not the first thing that people look at when looking at the overall quality of a school. It's the teachers and the rooms that the kids are going to be learning in that's most important. Athletics ARE important, but they've GOT to be secondary to education. New families looking to move in will look at educational facilities first, before they look at the football stadium.”

“The Intermediate School is in desperate need of repair. If a new high school is built, the the Intermediate school could be moved into a different building. The problem of the Intermediate school needs to be addressed ASAP. The roofs leak and classrooms have mold growing in them. The plumbing is terrible and most of the rooms smell bad. The restrooms are disgusting and is desperate need of attention. Safety is also a major issue on the the Intermediate campus, which is open and allows anyone to enter.”

For our town and district to grow we have to promote the strengths we have, and work to improve our weaknesses. We should brag about our test scores. To grow we have to compete with other communities. Siloam, Gravette, and the big 4 have or are building new high schools and the accommodating athletic facilities. Facilities should not be the most important determining factor in people choosing a school, but if you look at growth numbers and talk to people it often is.

Community pride also largely comes from athletic success and at times facilities. Ask the people of Gravette, Bentonville and Prairie Grove. Maybe it is time to strive to be the next Bentonville, and not be satisfied with staying one step ahead of Decatur. This isn't a problem for the school system but our community. I feel like Gravette has taken those steps a few years ago and are reaping the benefits now. Times are tough for everyone, but there has to be a vision and a goal to strive for. Is our community striving for excellence or mediocrity? Those are questions I feel need to be considered before you as a committee can plan for the next 10 years. Do we want to grow. Are we actively pursuing industry and small businesses. Is it fix the roof and patch the holes or go for the home run? Good luck.”