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Fairfield Middle School Construction Project Advances

FAIRFIELD, IA — Over the past several years, the district has remained committed to providing a modern, functional, and inspiring learning environment for our middle school students. One of our district priorities is connected directly to facility improvements. While we have had three unsuccessful General Obligation (GO) bond attempts to fully fund a new middle school, that commitment has not wavered. Instead, it has challenged us to think differently and act creatively.

In response, we have developed a thoughtful, fiscally responsible plan that maximizes the use of our existing SAVE (Secure an Advanced Vision for Education) funds—generated through a statewide 1% sales tax dedicated to school infrastructure. These funds stay in our community and can be used for building improvements, safety upgrades, and technology, rather than daily operations or salaries. By leveraging SAVE dollars, we can reduce the need for property tax increases while moving forward with renovations and an expansion of our current middle school. Over the past four months, the Board has engaged in multiple work sessions, along with numerous committee meetings, to shape a multi-phased approach that best serves our students and community.

Phase 1 of this plan represents a significant step forward. It includes bonding against SAVE for approximately \$22.5 million, along with the use of \$4 million from our existing SAVE fund. These resources will allow us to construct a 50,000 square foot addition to the north of the current middle school. This will be an academic wing for students in 5th-8th grade consisting of 31 classrooms and a new secure entrance. Most importantly, this phase will be completed without increasing taxes for our community.

In addition to the new construction, we will invest a portion of the funds into targeted improvements within the existing building, with a primary focus on addressing drainage issues and water infiltration. These upgrades will apply to all areas except the current two-story section on the east side, which is scheduled for demolition following completion of the new addition, anticipated in September 2028. Building assessments indicated that modernizing the two-story wing would not be the most effective use of resources. The existing 5th grade wing will remain in place and may be repurposed in the future as a central office facility or for other uses that support student opportunities.

A key priority throughout this process is maintaining continuity for our students. We are pleased to share that students will not be displaced during construction, allowing learning to continue without interruption.

This work is being guided by a dedicated core team that includes district staff, architects, engineers, and construction professionals. This group meets every two weeks to ensure the project stays aligned with our goals, budget, and timeline. Additionally, we have hosted four feedback sessions with middle school staff to gather input and ensure the design reflects the needs of those who know our students best.

As part of the improvements, the bus lane will be re-routed to enhance traffic flow and safety, with completion anticipated in the spring of 2027.

Our current **Phase 1** project timeline is as follows:

- Initial design completed by June 2026
- Final design completed by October 2026
- Construction bidding documents issued in late November or early December 2026
- Bids awarded in January or February 2027
- Construction beginning as early as April 2027
- Complete phase 1 by fall of 2028

Looking ahead, we are actively planning **Phase 2** of the project. This phase would allow us to construct new fine arts spaces, two gyms, a library, CTE areas, a commons/lunch space, and a new kitchen. To support this work, we are exploring three potential funding sources: a smaller GO bond referendum that would not increase the current tax levy, a capital campaign led by a Board-appointed committee with a focus on funding a new competition gym, and grant opportunities. We have partnered with Pathfinders in Fairfield to identify additional funding sources that can help offset costs through the grant writing process.

While this journey has required patience, persistence, and creativity, we are confident that this plan positions us to deliver meaningful improvements for our students while being responsible stewards of community resources. We are excited to take this next step forward together and will continue to keep you informed as the project progresses.

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