



## ***Superintendent's Corner...***

### **An Update on Jefferson Elementary School**

The topic of a vacant Jefferson Elementary remains alive and well as a subject of discussion around our community, so I wanted to take this opportunity to update everyone on where MAPS is regarding the future of that building. First, some background:

Two years ago the district decided to consolidate our elementary schools as a way to streamline instruction and be fiscally responsible in response to declining enrollment. Through that process, Jefferson Elementary was closed and, other than some occasional use, has remained largely "off line" while the district considered options for that facility. After the failed November referendum, one of the things that became very clear is that our community wanted the Jefferson Elementary issue addressed. Regardless of whether we keep it and use it, or decide to sell it, something had to be done with it. Now, deciding what to do with an empty building is not a decision to be made lightly. For starters, Jefferson is in pretty good shape and likely serves some purpose to our district and/or community. However, before MAPS were to consider disposing of it, prudence would suggest that we should be sure that we're not going to need it, or some similar space, in the future since new construction is very expensive.

In addition to understanding our current facility needs better, there is this perception in our community that we could simply sell it for a million dollars and all of our budget issues would be solved. That is simply not the case. In fact, to keep things in perspective, the Sparta School District recently sold a vacant elementary school (this winter) for \$10,000. Now, that's not to say that Jefferson would sell for a similar amount, but it does show the reality when thinking that selling will provide some large financial windfall to MAPS.

So, given these things to consider (and many more), I asked the Board this winter to permit a facilities study of all of our buildings to see how Jefferson Elementary fits into our current and future instructional needs, to understand all of our facility conditions, and to ensure that we are making the best use of our best facilities. That project was awarded to the team of Bray/Miron.

Over the past few months, the Bray/Miron team has come into our district on several occasions and evaluated all of our facilities - from Pine River, to Central Office, to the school forest, and everything in between - to understand what we have, the condition of all of our buildings, future

needs regarding maintenance and upkeep, etc. In addition, they have worked with staff and administrators to understand how our remaining buildings serve our students from an educational standpoint and what challenges and opportunities exist. At the end of March, the Bray/Miron team presented their initial findings to the Board in a workshop that included a rundown of the state of our facilities and provided a number of options to consider. These options, of which there were many, covered virtually every scenario under the sun from simply maintaining what we have and disposing of Jefferson, to grade reconfigurations, to adding on to some buildings, etc. Everything is being looked at. Of course, not all of these options are realistic for our district and community at this time and many will be eliminated over time, but we wanted to be thorough and make sure no stone is being left unturned during this study. As we move forward, the options will be whittled down as we work toward a solution - making best use of our best facilities.

To use a baseball analogy, we are basically in the bottom of the second inning on this project and there is a lot of work to do moving forward. Understanding the costing and savings of the different options is an important upcoming step. In addition, more input from staff, families and the community is needed, and those opportunities will be provided over the next few months. However, we are taking our time and doing it right, and we continue to progress nicely toward that goal.

I believe a vacant Jefferson Elementary school represents a real opportunity for our district and community if handled well. So, as we go through this study and process, please know that we are working hard to come up with a thoughtful solution that includes community input so that we can ensure that MAPS is making the best use of our best facilities. I appreciate your patience and I will keep you updated on our progress.

Shannon Murray