

School vote could be held in April

Written by Carol Pomeday
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With debt paid off, officials say taxes wouldn't rise with \$6 million project

The Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board may hold another referendum in April, this time seeking \$6 million and not raising taxes.

The board will also explore having community-based, 4-year-old kindergarten programs in child-care centers, such as Stepping Stones Children's Center in Belgium, churches or other places.

In November, residents soundly defeated a \$20.7 million referendum to build a middle school and technical education center in Cedar Grove. The vote was 1,240 to 648.

A \$4.5 million competitive pool attached to the new middle school was defeated by an even greater margin, 1,377 to 499.

Now, school officials are looking for ways to alleviate crowding at the elementary school, upgrade the middle school and provide a better technical education program.

"When I wake up in the middle night, I think about things we can do," Supt. Steve Shaw told the School Board Monday when it met to review responses to a survey about why residents voted as they did.

"In April, the elementary school will be paid off. That's 48 cents of the tax rate, which equals \$6 million.

"For the same taxes you're paying now, we could get \$6 million, build a technical education center and put \$5.2 million into the middle school."

Board member Jim Lautenschlaeger said safety and security issues at the middle school are his major concerns.

"We have to move that office first (next to the entrance)," he said. "We need a new generator and need HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning)."

Board President Les Paul said the renovations at the middle school would not

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include the house concept that is desired because it would be too costly.

“We were criticized for not maintaining the middle school better,” Shaw said. “We have to get that building fixed up and we can’t do that with our fund balance.

“If we could get \$6 million, we could get something done. This is not going to fix it, but it will buy us maybe five years.”

Although he was one of the strongest proponents for a central campus, Shaw said the survey results show it isn’t a major concern for residents.

“Right now, one-third of the schools in the state are community based,” Shaw said. “I don’t like it, but we may have to start thinking about that. We could move some of the kids out of the elementary school. It’s cheaper to do than bringing in portable classrooms.”

Board members agreed that nothing should be done with the swimming pool, which does not meet state standards and requires major repairs.

“Just run it until it dies and then shoot it,” Lautenschlaeger said.

The reason main reason for voting against the referendum, survey respondents said, was not wanting a tax increase in the uncertain economic climate.