

March 22, 2018

In this week's article I would like to discuss the process that has led us to the April 3rd Referendum. It all began back in March of 2016 when a high school student, Courtney Eberle, approached her building principal with the idea of starting a letter writing campaign to area corporations seeking donations for a new auditorium. The principal asked Mr. Jon Delray, the high school choral director, to establish a committee to investigate and explore possibilities for enhancing or creating a new performing arts space that would be utilized by the school and community. The committee presented to the Buildings and Grounds Committee and School Board and received full support to move forward with the project.

Shortly thereafter, the Kiel Booster Club recognized the need to improve the outdoor athletic facilities and activity spaces to address safety and condition issues that the district has been unable to address due to budgetary issues. In January of 2017, the Kiel Booster Club presented their ideas for renovating the athletic complex to the Board of Education, who supported their efforts as well.

Throughout 2017, these groups continued to assess the needs of our facilities and worked with outside contractors to develop a vision, plans and costs for the projects.

In conjunction with this work, the district in an effort to enhance transparency and educate the public on school finance, presented a "financial state of the district" at the September 6th board meeting. In October, we learned that the school district was experiencing continued financial challenges, which was shared with the public on October 16.

In November, the board began discussing options that would help our financial situation, as well as trying to determine the amount needed to support the school district moving forward. After much discussion and after considering many different options, the school board looked at how the Kiel Area School District compared to other districts in terms of the amount of state funding that we receive per student. It was shocking to learn that the Kiel Area School District receives approximately \$700 less per student than the state average. Based upon this information, the board determined that a number of \$840,000 was sufficient for Question 1.

In an effort to bring the community together, in November 2017, the school board asked the two groups to join forces in a collaborative effort to improve our facilities; they named themselves the "Raider Nation Community Project" Group!

At the December 20th board meeting, the Board approved two referendum questions. The first question (Question 1 on the ballot) asks taxpayers to help us enhance programming and resources for students as well as maintaining and upgrading our aging facilities; from our boilers, to our HVAC system, to our roofs, etc.; it was quickly realized that the only way that this can happen, without continually reducing staff and resources for students, is to ask the community for help, through this referendum question.

The second question (Question 2 on the ballot) asks the community to renovate the athletic facilities and to build and equip a new performing arts center at Kiel High School. The school board has reviewed a number of different ways to finance the projects and the board supported the advice of our school financial advisor and our business manager and has clearly communicated that process and shared this information at board meetings and finance meetings.

In January 2018, we invited legislators to a board meeting to “Tell Our Story,” which included our current financial challenges. We shared that part of our financial challenges relate to the school funding formula established in 1993. For years, this formula has provided the district with significantly less funding per student than the state average. The fact that Kiel students have received millions of dollars less in state aid over the years than students in other school districts is not acceptable! We will continue to advocate in the future for change at the state level.

Following this presentation, the administrative team and I continued to review the district’s financial situation and develop a staffing reduction plan to be shared with the School Board. Unfortunately for the staff and students of our school district, the staffing plan presented to the School Board on March 7, 2018 showed a reduction of \$1,000,000 in staffing and spending to ensure we begin next year with a balanced budget.

In an effort to share as much information as possible, members of the Raider Nation Community Project group and I have been doing everything we can to provide as many opportunities for the community to “hear our story”. We have been to town halls, civic groups, community organizations, parent teacher organizations, fundraising events, etc. Our third open house/community forum will be on Saturday, March 24th at 8 am at Kiel High School. We have met with people at coffee shops, in their homes and in the community. We have used local newspapers, the media, social media, email and mailers to continue to share our message. We want to make sure everyone understands the facts, as well as the current situation that we are in, in regards to our budget and our facilities.

The Raider Nation Community Project Group also has been actively meeting with businesses for fundraising opportunities as well as updating the school board monthly on their progress. These groups will continue fundraising efforts after the referendum.

We are not asking the community to take care of our current budget situation, as we have done that. We have balanced our budget and have our financial house in order and now need help from the community to move us forward. We have prioritized our needs and have done everything that we can to be clear and transparent about those needs.

I have been asked a number of times in the community, “what happens if this referendum does not pass?” I have always answered that our only option is to continue to reduce staff and spending to take care of our maintenance, technology and programming needs and that we currently do not have money in our budget to take care of these needs.

Our current reality.....THE SCHOOL DISTRICT NEEDS YOUR HELP!

My hope is that we have provided you with the information that you need to make an informed decision regarding the future of the Kiel Area School District on April 3.

If you have questions, please continue to reach out to me!

Brad
District Administrator
Kiel Area School District