

Highland CUSD No. 5 parents and staff,

Highland CUSD NO. 5 has been busy for several months planning and coordinating a number of projects. The new construction of a Highland Primary School will house Prekindergarten through Second grades and house approximately 600 students. The district had the ground breaking ceremony on August 9th on site at the south end of Poplar Street, where Poplar Street turns into Arkansas Road. The building site is approximately 23 acres with a total project budget of roughly \$38 million. The building is designed to house 40 classrooms and has nearly 89,000 square feet. The building was designed by FGM Architects and Korte Construction is acting as the construction managers on the project. Highland Primary was the highest priority identified in the strategic plan due to safety and security issues of housing 600 students under three different roofs and having students moving in and out and through the parking lot throughout the day.



Another major project is currently underway at Highland Middle School. The district is constructing a classroom wing to create nine additional classrooms. The HMS addition was also designed by FGM Architects and Korte Construction will again serve as the construction managers of the project. This project was the second highest priority in the strategic planning due to overcrowding. The original HMS building was designed for two grade levels, but the district needed to move 6th grade into the building a few years ago to address overcrowding at Highland Elementary. The additional space has been necessary due to the continuum of special services now available to students in all grade levels. The budget for the HMS addition is approximately \$6.2 million and consists of just under 14,000 square feet.



These two projects were included in the referendum that passed in June 2022 for \$40 million. The district timed the additional bond payments during a time it was retiring nearly all other debt so that the tax rate would remain the same. We have paired these dollars with \$2 million from the federal ESSR fund (COVID money), approximately \$1.5 million anticipated interest from investments, \$500,000 of Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax revenue that was not anticipated, nearly \$900,000 of National School Lunch Program reserves (cafeteria expenses), and approximately \$1.8 million in reserves from the district.

The district plans to provide some renovations to the current Highland Elementary site once students have moved from the old Highland Primary to the new one. It is anticipated that parking lot renovations, cafeteria design, and a new playground will cost approximately \$3.15 million. The demolition of the current Highland Primary will also be part of that phase of the project.

Another significant project the district is moving forward with is the installation of \$5.75 million worth of solar arrays located on each district building (exception of Highland Primary). The solar project will be financed through debt bonds that will not impact any tax situation. The entire financing of this project will be covered through energy savings over the next thirty years. It is anticipated that the payback

period will be approximately 8.8 years with additional savings to the district nearing well over \$3 million in the first 20 years. If we project out the full 30 years of energy savings, the district could benefit by nearly \$7 million after payback. The solar panel project will break ground over the next couple of months. The solar project was designed and will be installed by GRP/Wegman.

Another much smaller project is taking place in the next week or so is a video board at the Highland High School stadium. The video board will enhance the experience when attending events at the HHS stadium and create opportunities for advertisement revenue to support other athletic needs. Thanks to a very generous donation by Apex Physical Therapy, the district will only incur a few installation costs.

Besides the excitement of these projects, Highland CUSD No. 5 has been very busy over the summer to fill positions in all areas of school personnel. We introduced **42** new employees at the Back to School Welcome on Monday. These numbers included twenty-eight new teachers and four new administrators. The district has worked very hard to be competitive with surrounding districts during a significant teacher shortage that has taken the State by storm. We thank our supportive community for being the impetus for continuing to attract strong educators to serve our students and families.

The district has also taken additional initiatives to become more efficient and user friendly when it comes to registration and lunch accounts. The move to an online registration process within the Powerschool suite of programs and the change to Lunch Time will allow parents to access more programs with a single login rather than working with a number of different programs. It also moves student information directly into Powerschool. There are also some changes in our transportation software that will allow smoother transitions of data. We did encounter an issue with bus times that we worked through and hope to solve those issues for future use. We anticipate our processes becoming even better now that they have been implemented.

We are off to a great start and hope that this school year offers a great experience for all of our students, families, and staff. I will be sending periodic updates on our projects and other initiatives as the school year progresses. Thank you for supporting our students and staff and have a great school year!

Michael S. Sutton, Superintendent
Highland CUSD NO 5