

Voters will impact the future of Park Rapids Area Schools

I care deeply about our communities in the Park Rapids area, which is why I've served as a school board member for over 25 years. My six children graduated from the district, and now many of my grandchildren attend Park Rapids Area Schools. I take great pride in our district, and I know our residents do, too.

Our school district helps make our region of Minnesota a wonderful place to work, live and play. The quality of our schools helps attract new families and new businesses to our area, and our skilled graduates are stepping forward as the next generation of workers and leaders.

I graduated from Park Rapids Area High School in 1974, four years after it was built. As a student, I was grateful for those who invested in the facilities that supported my education. Now, after careful research and years of planning, the school board unanimously believes that it's the right time to make investments in our facilities for our next generation of students.

On Nov. 2, the Park Rapids Area School Board is asking voters to consider one ballot question seeking \$51.65 million that would address our most urgent facility needs at both the High School and Century School. The plan would improve security, renovate classrooms, and add space for career and technical education. The plan would also support grade realignment, bringing together our PreK-6th graders at Century and our 7th-12th graders at the high school.

As a small business owner and farming family, I realize that the cost of the referendum must be carefully considered. Our school board has worked hard to minimize the impact of the plan on local taxpayers.

We reduced the cost of the plan by dedicating district revenue sources to pay for some infrastructure needs. In addition, nearly 10% of the project's cost (or about \$5 million) will be paid by the State of Minnesota through the Ag2School tax credit.

The Ag2School tax credit provides an automatic 60% tax credit to all agricultural property except the house, garage and one acre surrounding the homestead. By law, the tax credit is scheduled to increase to 70% by 2023.

If the ballot question is approved, a residential property in the district with a median value of \$200,000 would see a tax increase of \$9.00 per month starting in 2022. To determine the estimated cost of the referendum on your home or business, use the tax calculator at Project309.org/cost.

Without significant investments in our facilities, our district won't be able to make major health, safety and education improvements. If the referendum doesn't pass, the school

board will need to use other district revenue sources for some infrastructure updates, but these funding sources are not nearly enough to address the major renovations our facilities need – especially at our 50-year-old high school.

Ultimately, PProject 309 is about preparing for our district's future, and you voters have the final say. I encourage all residents to learn more about the plan at PProject309.org. If you have any questions, please share them with me at ssafratowich@parkrapids.k12.mn.us, and don't forget to vote on or before election day.

Sherry Safratowich
Chair - Park Rapids Area School Board