



Finneytown Local School District

History of Our Buildings

Superintendent Terri Noe

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Hello Finneytown Fans and Favorites,

Terri Noe, superintendent, here with my first ever attempt to blog. Thank you to everyone who came to our Forum last week to here an update on new facilities. Also thank you to all who let me know you couldn't make it but will check the website for information and want to be involved going forward. As I stated at the forum, the Finneytown Board of Education voted in June to move forward to look at a bond issue on the ballot in November 2019 to build new schools. The state will match 60% of the base cost of the buildings and our community (we) will be responsible for 40% plus any extra costs (these are called Locally Funded Initiatives or LFI).

The bond issue will be for 7.68 mills and will generate a little over 27 million dollars. We will be able to start on the first phase, the elementary (K-6) building as soon as the bond issue is approved by the voters. It takes about 3 years start to finish to move into a new building so we want to start ASAP. The bond issue PAC (Political Action Committee) is being formed by Angela Hursh as the chair and Veronica Bishop and Mel Hensey as the treasurers. All other information about that will need to come from Angela and team. No public or school money can be spent on a political campaign so employees of the district cannot work on the committee while on school hours. We cannot use our email or web page to promote the bond issue. After hours, employees, as citizens, can volunteer but it has to be separate from their paid time and duties.

We can, however, give you facts, and that is what I plan to do. I have a lot to fill you in on so check back often for more facts. Tomorrow, I will cover why two buildings instead of one.

The reasons behind two buildings

I have been asked why we, as a community, chose to build two buildings instead of one. Let me fill you in on a few facts. The OFCC (Ohio Facilities Construction Commission) is the state office that oversees new school building construction. They are also the ones who release the matching percentages for each district. That percentage is determined by the wealth or lack of in your district and the condition of your buildings. We are at a 60% state/40% local percentage. We currently have just at 1400 students. With under 1500 students, the OFCC will only match funds for the cost of a K-12 building. To build two buildings, our community has to pick up the extra cost of two buildings over one. For Finneytown, that is about 4.6 million dollars that the state will not match so we have to pay the entire cost.

As we met last year, many options were considered. Here are the obstacles we face with one building: The Secondary

Campus is our largest property. It is the only one large enough for a secondary campus or a K-12 building. The pre-bond architects have determined we could build a K-12 on the secondary campus. It would be tight, would have to be three stories, and would have limited access, but it could be done.

Roadblocks include that the county/township does not allow a 3-story building in this area. Preliminary inquiries were met with disapproval. Neighbors who back onto the property were also not in favor. Another concern for the township/county/district is the traffic and congestion on Fontainebleau. It would be double what it is currently. The congestion and lack of parking on the secondary campus are also concerns. The county previously denied an inquiry to add another light at Cherry Blossom.

On the other hand, the township is in agreement with moving the Fontainebleau light to anywhere between Fontainebleau and Cherry Blossom wherever the main entrances from the Brent and Secondary properties would need to be. There was also concern from young parents about small children being on the same campus with high school students. Those are concerns we could take care of with proper management. We cannot create more space, cannot afford to purchase land, nor can we mitigate the traffic and parking concerns on one campus. The solution became building a K-6 on the Brent property and a 7-12 on the secondary property. Brent is the only other property that is large enough to build on. Whitaker and Cottonwood are both too small. This allows the campuses to be right across the street from each other. We will realize immediate cost savings by combining the two elementary schools. We would only have one set of elementary bus routes instead of two, etc. I could continue, but, you see what I'm saying. Two buildings allow us room to expand in the future if needed as well. One building would not give us that capacity. So, two buildings are more expensive but meet the needs and restrictions the community is facing. It will allow us to create safe spaces conducive to teaching and learning. As it turns out, it also allows us to move forward now with the ELPP. We can start with Phase 1, the elementary building, then continue to Phase 2, the secondary building. If we had decided on one building, we couldn't build half of a building so could not get started right away. Tomorrow, I'll give you a history of Whitaker, our oldest building.

History of Whitaker Elementary

Whitaker Elementary School was originally built in 1935 as a two-story building. The original entry was on Winton Road. It is named after Telford Whitaker who was a teacher, principal, and superintendent from 1930 to 1965. That original building had 14,490 square feet and housed grades 1-8. At

that time, kids went to Hughes, Mt. Healthy, or Wyoming for high school. A 28,294 square foot addition was added in 1953, tripling the size of the building. Finneytown was growing quickly so needed more space. In 1956, just three years later, another addition of 9,664 sq. ft. was added. About that time the state decided if a district didn't offer high school, it would have to be combined with another district. Finneytown built the current secondary campus and started offering high school. We became a 1-12 school district.

In 1997, a third and final addition was built onto Whitaker. This time 13,636 sq. ft. was added. The current building has 66,084 sq. ft. in total. If you haven't been in Whitaker, you should take a tour. It is obvious it has been added onto. Halls go up and down, there are three different basement areas that don't connect. As happens with older buildings, renovations have been made to help with handicap accessibility but it is very hobbled together. There is no central air and the central heat is sporadic. Because of additions and rooms being divided, air flow is not optimal. Just last fall, we had to close school because it was over 105 degrees in most of the classrooms. Our maintenance department has been diligent in maintaining the equipment and infrastructure. When Cottonwood was torn down, our maintenance people scavenged every usable part and have been using them as replacement parts. Things like hinges and door knobs or blinds and window glass have all been used to maintain and repair Whitaker and other buildings in the district. Those parts and pieces have all been used. When a heating unit failed last winter, we discovered that parts are no longer even available for the unit. Our maintenance people were able to fabricate parts to keep it going. We were not so lucky on some of the other break downs over the winter but I'll discuss that more tomorrow.

History of the Secondary Campus

Next came the secondary campus. It currently houses grades 6-12. It was originally constructed in the late 1950's with three buildings for a total of 87,812 square feet. The administration/Multipurpose building and the 200 and 300 buildings were all there was to start with. In 1964 the gym was built adding 30,288 square feet. In 1969 the auditorium/PAC (Performing Arts Center) and the 100 building were added with an additional square footage of 51,356. At that time, what is now the counseling offices was an open-air breezeway between the 200 and 300 buildings. In 1997, that area was enclosed adding another 5,318 square feet of space under roof. The current building has 174,774 square feet and 2 basements that do not connect. The hallways have ramps and inclines. The building is one story in the front and two stories in the back. There is no air conditioning and the heat, like Whitaker, is not reliable. Several units failed this last winter and the repairs and maintenance was quite expensive. New equipment would be even more expensive so our maintenance department is trying to keep things going until we can build a new school. We are trying very hard not to throw money into the building that will have to be torn down when a new school is built. We want to spend money wisely.

One of the main constrictions of the secondary campus buildings is the electricity capacity. When the building was originally built, there were 2 plug outlets in each classroom. Since very little was electronic in those days, that was more than sufficient. As you know, everything plugs in these days. We have quickly run out of spaces to plug in, although our maintenance department has added a slew of outlets. The problem isn't more outlets at this point, it is not enough capacity. We would need to upgrade every one of the 6 buildings to bring them up to speed just on available electricity. Estimates start at around \$250,000 per building just to upgrade the electrical service. That would give us more electricity but we would still have old, inefficient, and failing buildings in every other way. Plumbing is failing, the building is not energy efficient, furniture is a hodgepodge, and lighting is not optimal. There are over 90 doors on the secondary campus making it very difficult to ensure the correct doors are locked when they should be. The current design has a massive amount of flat roof space which is not optimal in Ohio. Leaking roofs are one of our most constant problems. There are a lot of other issues, but, you get the point. The extreme heat in the classrooms last fall prompted closing school for a couple of days. When we had school, windows were open and fans were used to circulate hot air. This makes it noisy and distracting to students and teachers alike as they try to teach and learn. This is just part of what we discussed last year when the community reps decided to build instead of fixing the existing facilities.

The Cottonwood Building & Brent Elementary

Cottonwood was built in 1962 and was subsequently torn down in 2010 because it became too difficult to maintain. The roof leaks were continual and there were other issues. Brent Elementary was built in 1964 with 29,161 square feet. The gym has steps to go down into it and the hall floors are inclined in places. In 1986 enrollment had drastically declined in the district and the building was leased to Springfield Township. They used it as a community center and air conditioning was added to the classrooms. As enrollment went back up, the district regained use of Brent. In 1998, 6,580 square feet were added. The total 35,741 square feet houses K-1 students and staff today. Modular units were added 3 years ago to provide four more classrooms. This was not ideal as no plumbing for restrooms could be added. Students had to go in and out of the weather just to go to the restroom. Besides that, the classrooms were very small and it inhibited teachers in creating small groups to help differentiate instruction which is so important in the younger grades. Because of this crowding issue at Brent, we looked to see where there was space already in the district. We found space at the secondary campus. Sixth grade was moved from Whitaker to the Secondary Campus. Second grade was moved from Brent to Whitaker. If you look out across the softball field at Brent today, two of those modular units have been removed. The other two are sitting by Brent ready to be hauled away. This softball area is where the new K-6 elementary school will be built. Brent is the newest and smallest of the buildings in the district. It was decided that

the district should keep Brent and use it for many purposes. It is so small, the state will not provide any funds to renovate it. The smallest buildings they will match funds for is one that will house at least 450 students. We currently have about 200 at Brent and the capacity isn't much more. As we build new buildings, we have to think about space for the district offices, maintenance, grounds, and other departments and storage since all of this at the secondary campus will be torn down. The OFCC does not match funds to provide extra space to house these departments. Space has to be taken from instructional space to include these. Instead of doing that, we can move all of these departments to Brent without a big investment. Classrooms can be converted to office space for very little cost. In addition, the current Kindergarten rooms can be used to bring preschool back into the district. At the moment, we pay Hamilton County to house our pre-school over in Mt. Healthy.

This building is in the best shape and can be used to save instructional space in the new buildings. The softball field will be relocated to the Secondary Campus after a new building has been completed there. The tennis courts at Brent are cracked and in poor shape also. These can be relocated to the Secondary Campus and actually used for PE classes instead of just after school tennis matches. They would still be available to the community outside of school hours just like they are now and just like the track at the football stadium is. More tomorrow.

Project Recap

To recap, we have three schools in Finneytown. We have Brent K-1, Whitaker 2-5, and Secondary Campus 6-12. We have just over 1400 students in these 3 buildings. OFCC recommends any district with less than 1500 students should build one K-12 building. Through the 35 meetings held last year, it was decided that the best plan is to build two new buildings. A K-6 on the Brent property and a 7-12 on the secondary campus property. If you missed it, I explained why on the second day of my blog.

Once the new buildings are being used, the old secondary campus and Whitaker will be demolished and abated. All old buildings have to be abated in the event there is asbestos in any of the materials used to build that long ago.) At that point, we can sell the Whitaker and Cottonwood properties as we should no longer need them. The proceeds from these sales can be used to prolong the need for an operating levy. I have been asked if we will have to find temporary places for our children while we build. The answer is no. We have very carefully planned to hold classes at Brent and Whitaker while the new elementary is built on the softball field behind Brent. This will save our community around a million dollars. The construction will be separated from the students by fences and workers will stay on one side while students stay on the other. The district also owns the property right next to the softball field to the south. It is a house and some land. That house will be removed and that land will be used for the new school as well. By shifting the building south a little, we plan to keep the baseball field where it is.

While the buildings are being built, we will have to be very strategic about outdoor sports. The softball field will be out of commission almost right away until the secondary campus is completed. Our Athletic Director, Gerald Warmack, has already been busy checking with surrounding schools, parks and other facilities to find places we can use until we build our new field. As I mentioned, the plan is not to disturb the baseball field. We may have to get creative about how it is accessed during construction but we can make it work.

Brent school, driveway, parking, and playgrounds will be unaffected and available during construction so should be business as usual. Whitaker, since there will be no construction there, will be normal with no interruptions. Cottonwood will continue to be used as practice fields and is even being looked at as a possible softball field for a few years. It will be maintained as it is now. At first, the secondary campus will not be interrupted by construction. What will happen though once the bond issue passes, is that the football stadium will get turf.

This helps in many ways. Currently our field is grass and it is easy for it to become muddy if it is used too much because the grass wears off. It is also costly to maintain with mowing and continually putting lines for different sports. With turf, we would have unlimited use of the field. That field is used by football (varsity and JV), band, soccer (boys and girls), and track. All of them practice other places because the field cannot handle the use. Turf would allow all to use the field as timing and schedule allow. Schools around us have turf. Those in our league have turf. Research shows that turf is better and there are less injuries. Also, with turf, the district can rent out the field in the off seasons. Mr. Warmack often has adult league groups contact him about renting the field. He was offered a 2 day weekend tournament for \$5000 but when they found out we didn't have turf, they backed out. We would not be able to do a lot of rental, but, having some would help offset the cost of sports and help us continue to be the only one in our league who does not charge students to play sports.