

## An Elementary Discussion

In this time of fiscal constraints and lower elementary school enrollment in Council Rock, a public discussion of our district's plan for elementary facilities is warranted. Evaluation of all factors that drive facility needs, including enrollment trends, school size philosophy, differences in classroom usage, regular education sending areas, and special education assignments may lead to cost efficiencies in educating the district's 5533 elementary students and planning for the future. To aid this discussion, Citizens For Education has assembled a summary of current and planned elementary school facilities (see **In the Numbers**, p. TBD). This data includes square footage, number of classrooms, and student enrollment for each of the 10 district elementary schools.

Since Council Rock's Growth Committee, comprised of community members, parents, school directors, staff and administrators first started examining architectural reports and future enrollment projections much has changed. The committee, which was active from April 2005 until August 2008, prioritized eliminating 49 elementary classroom modulars (trailers), renovating to keep buildings warm, safe and dry for the next 20 years, and updating buildings to meet evolving academic standards. Since 2005, the elementary population declined by 458 and the district's regular education students require 12 less classrooms (total sections have dropped from 254 to 242).

Given the low cost of borrowing money and the competitive atmosphere in the building trades, the School Board moved forward with the recommendation of the Growth Committee. In August 2008, the Board approved \$30 million, which will add 18,099 sq. ft. to Churchville Elementary and 17,155 sq. ft. to Holland Elementary. More recently, on April 8, 2010, the School Board approved the schematic design for a renovation and proposed addition of 18,985 sq. ft. to Goodnoe Elementary at a projected cost of \$13 million. These three capital borrowings of \$43 million will add 54,239 sq. ft. of elementary building space and remove 21 modulars totaling 18,144 sq. ft. for a net addition of 36,095 sq. ft.

To economically achieve the district's elementary facility needs and to include the public, Citizens For Education is promoting the following discussion topics:

- ⇒ Enrollment trends: How do decreased regular education sections, current birthrates, and the housing market affect Council Rock's future classroom needs? (While the loss of 12 sections over 5 years does not remove all the modulars, it could lead to a strategy that reduces the need for some newly constructed classrooms.)
- ⇒ School size philosophy: Would adopting a school size philosophy bring equity benefits? (Proposed renovations will make Goodnoe, already the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest elementary school, the largest elementary school at 99,959 sq. ft.)
- ⇒ Classroom usage differences: Would renovations aimed at adding additional small group instruction sized classrooms achieve space and financial economies? (Only Hillcrest, Newtown, and Richboro have more than 5 small or medium sized classes, and the district has only 15 medium and 18 small sized classrooms out of 350.)
- ⇒ Sending area adjustments: Would slight adjustments in neighboring schools' sending areas reduce the need for some added square footage when a school is renovated? (For example, Newtown, Goodnoe's neighboring school, now has 5 less sections.)
- ⇒ District Special Education assignments: Could District Special Education students, whose instructional classroom is assigned to a specific school, not necessarily in the student's neighborhood sending area, be distributed more equitably in the elementary schools? (Per October 2010 enrollment, populations per school range from 0 in three schools to 74. There are 140 special education students district-wide and 74 are educated at Goodnoe Elementary.)

Since the Growth Committee has not met in over two years, and Council Rock's revenues remain challenging, Citizens For Education would welcome a public dialogue on the above subjects. It is Citizens For Education's hope that this discussion will bring economies to the district's elementary facilities plan. Even if a public dialogue does not result in strategies to reduce the need for capital expenditures to fund elementary projects, the community will have a better understanding of how these decisions affect the operating budget and/or level of taxation.