Dear Winnetka Resident:

At the January board meeting, the Winnetka Board of Education (K-8) unanimously voted to place a $47.3 million bond referendum before the voters on April 17th to finance a comprehensive capital plan for all of our five schools. This decision—reached after a facilities review process that spanned several years and drew on the expertise of administrators, teachers, architects and community members—has been guided by the goal of providing safe school buildings that sustain the high quality educational program long associated with the Winnetka Public Schools, balanced by fiscal constraint. We understand this request is a significant long-term investment in the education of Winnetka’s current and future students, and we urge you to become informed about this important decision by consulting the Facilities Review section of the District website: www.winnetka36.org.

The Process:
In the fall of 2004, the Board evaluated our buildings in light of current codes and requirements in preparing a state-mandated Life Safety report. This report confirmed that our neighborhood school buildings, ranging in age from 37 to nearly 100-years old, were in need of investment well beyond the $600,000 budgeted for ordinary annual maintenance. In the fall of 2005, we launched an extensive investigation into the condition of Crow Island, Greeley, Hubbard Woods, Skokie and Washburne schools. With the top priority of keeping our buildings safe, we first examined maintenance issues throughout the five schools. This assessment revealed that approximately $14MM of work needs to be undertaken to update all buildings to current ventilation, plumbing, electrical, and other standards.

Community Voices Heard:
We then turned our attention to the delivery of curriculum and instruction and, after studying enrollments and space issues at each building, found that educational quality was most constrained by space limitations at Greeley and Washburne and by the need to upgrade technology across the five schools. The Board then created three sub-committees comprised of administrators, teachers, board members, and community members to delve into those three areas. In the fall of 2006, we held neighborhood meetings at the five schools and addressed community groups such as the Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood and individual preschools. We shared what we knew about the state of the buildings and the current educational needs and asked for community feedback on emerging space plans. At all nine of these meetings, the Board recorded the questions, concerns and ideas from the approximately 150 members of the public in attendance. In addition, the 2006 Winnetka Caucus survey showed that among the 1,028 respondents answering a question about the need for additional space at Greeley and Washburne, 59% favored some sort of expansion. All this information was taken to consideration when the Board made its final decision and ultimate plans.
The Decisions:
At the October, 2006 board meeting, the School Board approved additions for Greeley and for Washburne. The costs for these additions are now estimated at $9MM and nearly $23MM respectively. The Board also approved $2MM in technology infrastructure such as upgrades to hardware, wiring, storage, and cooling to improve the District’s ability to imbed technology into quality instruction. These amounts are in addition to the $14MM in maintenance/capital repair work previously mentioned.

On January 30th, the Board finalized a $47.3MM facilities referendum question for voter approval in April. The proposed 20 year bond will fund the required maintenance, technology, and expansion projects highlighted above. Property tax bills would first be affected in Fall, 2008, increasing an estimated $246 per $10,000 of taxes paid.

Again, to obtain more detailed information concerning current educational practices, enrollments, the buildings and the Board’s facilities review process, please consult the Facilities Review section of the District website: www.winnetka36.org.

Sincerely,

Anne Kelly  Penny Lanphier  Pete Cruikshank  Susan Harris
Jeff Hoch  Becky Hurley  Bob Linn