

# School District 129 operating rate increase request a matter of simple math

By Superintendent Dr. Jim Rydland

After more than a year of studying District 129's financial situation and the current and future needs of our students, the Board of Education Monday night decided to ask voters to consider a modest 0.5 percent increase in the district's operating rate. The operating rate supports our basic day-to-day operations. Our current rate is 3.03 percent, meaning just over \$1,000 per \$100,000 of fair market value. The increase would raise our rate to 3.53 percent, or about \$167. Currently, the majority of surrounding school districts impose a rate above 4 percent, reaching as high as 4.73 percent, or close to \$1,600 per \$100,000 of fair market value. An operating rate referendum will be on the April 17 ballot.

The Board's decision is based on many factors, the most important of which is the simple fact that we now have to spend more money than we receive. If our enrollment were the same as it was 20 years ago, we might be able to make ends meet. But since the last operating rate increase, back in 1988, enrollment has grown by more than 5,000 students. To meet their needs, we have, over the years, had to hire more teachers and other staff, build additions and other modifications to our facilities, and pay ever-increasing costs for energy and other necessities, all while making due with funding designed for District 129 as it existed nearly 20 years ago.

Our enrollment growth has brought new demands on both what happens in the classroom and on the classrooms, themselves. Obviously, serving 5,000 more students requires more space. While we have added portable classrooms over the years – and are even now using some of our remaining capital funds to add still more – the long-term health and strength of our schools requires that we develop long-term plans for our facilities. We have begun the process of identifying our most pressing needs, along with the most cost-efficient ways to meet them. But it would not be prudent to move forward with a potentially costly long-term facilities improvement plan without first getting our operating budget in order.

Today, we educate some children whose parents were our students when voters last approved an increase to the operating rate. Education, including the expectations of the state, has changed since then, as has the face of our district and our community. But our local funding rate has not.

During the past year, the Board of Education and I have done our best to listen to parents, staff, students, and others about what they see as the needs and strengths of our district, as well as their vision of its future. We have had a great deal of very helpful feedback, and our sincere thanks go to all those who took

time to participate. Over the coming three months, we will continue to provide factual information about District 129's funding, budget and our needs. A citizens committee plans to actively campaign in support of the referendum.

My hope is that citizens will stay involved, ask questions, and take part in the election. My promise, and the Board of Education's promise, is that during this process and beyond, we will remain committed to the needs of our students, and the District 129 tradition of excellence our community has come to expect.

*Editor's note: Dr. Jim Rydland is Superintendent of School District 129, serving West Aurora, North Aurora, Montgomery, and Sugar Grove.*

*Your feedback is important. Please contact Dr. Jim Rydland at any of the following:*

[jrydland@sd129.org](mailto:jrydland@sd129.org)

630.301.5033 (Office)

630.740.9303 (Cell)