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Why We Began Planning: **Planning For a Growing District**

One of the questions I've heard most often over the past several months is, "Why is the district considering a referendum now?"

It's a fair question, and one I understand. A decision like this begins with understanding where you are today, where you are headed, and whether you are prepared for what comes next.

A few years ago, as we worked through the process of updating our district's strategic plan, we took a closer look at enrollment trends and the future of our district. Part of that work included an enrollment study, and what we learned confirmed something we're both seeing and feeling firsthand: our district was growing, and that growth is expected to continue.

That raised an important question: Are our current facilities meeting the needs of our students today, and will they be able to meet those needs as our district continues to grow?

When our current school opened in 2014, it was designed to serve approximately 625 students. Today, United South Central serves approximately 745 students, and enrollment projections show continued growth in the years ahead. That growth is a reflection of high birth rates and our retention of students, and it is something to be celebrated. At the same time, that growth has created challenges that require us to think carefully about how our facilities support student learning, programming, and the experiences we want for our students.

From there, the district formed a task force to begin studying the challenges we were seeing and exploring potential options. As that work continued, we recognized the importance of taking a deeper look at our facilities, educational needs, and future growth. The district then partnered with consultants to guide a comprehensive process that included facility assessments, educational adequacy evaluations, enrollment and demographic studies, financial analysis, and community engagement opportunities.

Throughout this work, we heard from many people who care deeply about United South Central Schools. Staff members shared the challenges they experience every day. Families and community members shared their priorities and perspectives. Those conversations helped us better understand not only the challenges we face, but also the values that should guide any decision about the future.

For me, this process has reinforced the importance of taking time to listen and learn before making decisions. The space challenges facing our district are real, and addressing them responsibly required more than a quick solution. It required careful study, open conversation, and a willingness to consider what will best serve our students and community for years to come. Most importantly, this conversation has never been only about adding space. It has been about making sure our schools continue to provide the opportunities, support, and learning environment our students need, both today and in the years ahead.

Engaging in this planning process allowed us to be proactive rather than reactive. It gave us the opportunity to understand the challenges, study the facts, listen to our community, and consider responsible solutions before making a recommendation.

I encourage everyone to learn more about the process, ask questions, and stay engaged. The strength of United South Central has always been the people who care about our schools, and I am grateful for the thoughtful participation that has helped guide us to this point.

Taylor Topinka
Superintendent, United South Central Public Schools