

First, the current status, i.e. excess capacity in our schools.

In 2003, the district commissioned a Bond Advisory Committee made up of parents, community members, and senior staff to study the immediate and long-term needs of the district. After studying a wide variety of factors, from educational impact to operational efficiency, the committee recommended, among other things, the expansion of Lakeway, Bee Cave and Lake Pointe Elementary Schools to a core capacity of 850, and the rebuilding of Lake Travis Elementary at that same size. These expansions allowed us to delay the construction of a 5th elementary school until this year. If we had not done these expansions, we would have been over the limit at Lakeway Elementary last year, and would be at capacity in the other schools next year, forcing us to construct two schools instead of one, at a much higher cost than the expansions. When you look at current student enrollment, you will see that Lakeway Elementary is already almost at capacity even with the expansion, and will be next year.

It is impossible to achieve “balanced enrollment” at every school without moving students around from year to year. For example, moving next year’s “above capacity” students to another school just to make the numbers look better. That is something we are not willing to do just to achieve more efficient operations. The most rapid growth has still been in the most central portion of the district, so that area was addressed first. Serene Hills Elementary will relieve the overcrowding at Lakeway and Lake Travis Elementary Schools. Our next elementary school will be to the west. Growth never happens at the same rate in all areas of the district.

Regarding the location of Serene Hills Elementary, the Board spent considerable time trying to locate a site suitable for that school. We looked at land across RR620, in Rough Hollow, and a bit further to the west between Serene Hills and Hwy 71. We needed to find at least 12 acres that were flat, had utilities, safe roads and could serve a large area. After months of discussions, we kept coming back to that site, and eventually realized that it was the only one that satisfied all the requirements. One interesting fact, the City of Lakeway owned that property. When the city purchased that land years ago, there was a deed restriction as part of the contract that stated that, if the city wanted to sell the land, it could only sell it to the school district.


We are also expanding our current middle schools to a capacity of 900 students each. This will help us delay the construction of another middle school for a few years. The re-drawing of attendance zones will bring better balance to the two schools next year, which will also help the numbers at LTMS.

Our high school is being expanded to a capacity of 2,500 students, with a “core” capacity of 3,000, which means that cafeteria and other support facilities could serve an extra 500 students who were housed in portable buildings if necessary. Again, this has helped us delay the construction of a second high school for several years, at considerable savings to the district. Otherwise, we would have had to open the second high school next year at the latest.

Now, regarding the future.

You probably have read in the news about the rapid development of our area, especially to the west. Our most recent demographic study, completed in December, confirms this fact (but we can already see it!) If you want to look through it, the study is posted on the district’s website,

<http://www.ltidschools.org/12331052672847750/blank/browse.asp?a=383&BMDRN=2000&BCOB=0&c=54062>



The latest projections, which are based on fairly conservative estimates, have the enrollment of our school district increasing by 75% in the next 10 years. The study also confirms the need for seven facilities over those years, as was proposed by the most recent Bond Advisory Committee of 2005. We

will exceed capacity at the middle school level in 2011, at the high school in 2014, and at Bee Cave Elementary in 2010. It takes 2 ½ years to design and build the larger facilities, meaning we will have to begin working on the next middle school late next year. The process for the elementary construction is only about 1½ years, so we will begin looking at that next facility at that time as well. We need a new transportation facility now, as our current “bus barn”/maintenance facility is very crowded, and more busses mean more crowding. Also, it has become increasingly unsafe to run busses in and out several times a day through the high school/middle school complex with so many students.

The 2005 Bond Advisory Committee, once again made up of community members, parents, and key senior staff, had no input from the Board. They studied a wide range of issues, and recommended the components of the last bond to the Board; the voters passed the bond in September 2005. In that recommendation, they saw the need for future land out west, and also the rapid rate at which land was being purchased by developers. They knew that finding suitable land would be difficult, and the longer we waited, the more difficult it would become. For instance, finding 100+ acres of land for a high school would be very hard if we waited until 2011; by then, a great part of the land available now will likely be purchased, and much will be platted. Once a developer buys a large tract of land, the price becomes significantly higher, and they are most often very reluctant to sell their valuable property to the school district. In order to have the opportunity to seek out the land we will need in the next few years, work with landowners who have not yet sold to developers, or to work with developers before they have their subdivisions platted, the committee included seven tracts of land in the 2006 Bond. The Board is currently working with several landowners to satisfy that part of the Bond, which included \$15.7 million for land purchases. If we wait two or three years to purchase that land, we will not be able to fulfill that responsibility to purchase all seven tracts within budget.

We are not in a “desperate” search, but a serious one. As more and more land to the west of us becomes developed, bringing the need for more schools, we will strive to time the construction of those facilities to avoid having to purchase portables at either Bee Cave Elementary or Lake Travis Middle School. We will have our demographic study updated in a couple of years to see how the projected growth compares to actual growth, and adjust our schedules as needed. Also, we have already seen that land prices are quickly escalating, and we must work diligently to find the property we need at the price we can afford. In the future, we may not be able to find large tracts of flat land anywhere that aren’t covered with houses.

Our first priority is to the students, who we want to give the absolute best education possible, and who we don’t want to move around just to make us more efficient. Secondly, we are accountable to the taxpayers, and we have been charged with finding seven tracts of land totaling over 315 acres for the budgeted \$15.7 million. If we wait several years, that task will be almost impossible, and we would have to come back to the voters to approve additional money for those purchases.