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STEPHANIE HACKE



Cast members from Brentwood Middle/High School's upcoming musical "Mary Poppins" sang and danced across the stage, as large patches of wallpaper peeled off the walls inside the auditorium.

There are a lot of great things happening in public schools in Brentwood, leaders told a crowd of 100 elected officials, business owners and parents who were invited to the "Charting the Course for the Brentwood Borough School District" event on March 27.

But, there also are problems with the facilities that need to be addressed.

"To continue doing what we've been able to accomplish, we need to invest in our infrastructure. That's where we're at," Superintendent Amy Burch said.

Schools in Brentwood are old. Moore Elementary was built in 1914. Elroy Elementary was constructed in 1920, and the middle/high school was built in 1930.

There have been many renovations over the years at the middle/high school alone, the latest occurring in 1999.

Today, the building shows its wear, and heavy rains in October only made things worse.

The middle school gymnasium floor was flooded and had to be replaced. Classrooms were damaged and repaired over Christmas break and the auditorium wallpaper, damaged from the rain, will be taken down this summer and the room painted instead.

Luckily, district leaders say, it all was covered by insurance.

However, the cause of much of the flooding still needs to be addressed. The roof at the middle/high school needs replaced, along with fixes to the mortar and replacement of windows.

The district's main goal, leaders said, is to provide a safe and secure environment for its 1,200 students.

After working with architect HHSDR to conduct a facilities review, the district has crafted a plan for repairs and upgrades that will take place over the next several years.

They include:

- A list of what Burch called "emergency projects" to be done this summer. It includes relocating and replacing the district's more than 20-year-old fire and phone systems. The phone system, Burch said, is "obsolete" and still uses copper wiring. Both upgrades will impact the entire district. The "most critical" parts of the roof at the middle/high school that needs replaced will be done this summer, as well, Burch said. The other parts of the roof will be replaced in 2020.
- With the replacement of the middle school gymnasium floor, district leaders now are considering swapping the middle and high school gyms and adding more bleachers to what is now the middle school gym to increase capacity to more than 700 and turning it into the high school gym. The current high school gym is small — so small that at times, spectators have to walk through a coach's huddle to get to their seats because there's no other way to get there, high school principal Jason Olexa said. That project could happen in the summer of 2019.
- In the summer of 2020, the district plans to replace the roofs at both elementary schools, fix and/or replace the masonry and windows at the middle/high school and reconfigure the middle/high school library to turn it into a more modern, student-friendly facility.
- The pool at the middle/high school has been out of commission this year after the heater broke and the cold water in the pool caused it to start losing water through a crack the runs more than half of its length. A short-term fix will be to use hydraulic cement to fill the crack

so that Brentwood can have home meets next season — something they didn't get this year, said Jeff George, director of facilities. The pool, then, will be replaced in 2020.

- Longer term plans for 2021-24 include converting the libraries at Moore and Elroy into makerspaces, addressing HVAC needs in all buildings, classroom updates and site work at all three schools.

The district anticipates borrowing \$21 million over the next three years to pay for all of this, business manager Jennifer Pesanka said. The loans would take the district's debt out to 2048.

However, with its debt ending in 2023 and the district only owing about \$6 million in past debt, Pesanka said district leaders worked with the district's financial consultants, PFM, to ensure no additional tax increases will be needed solely to fund debt for the planned renovation projects.

"The board was extremely mindful about being fiscally responsible," Burch said.

While the \$21 million won't get everything done, it will "put us in a solid position," she said.

"It will be functional, it will be safe, it will be secure for our students," she said. "We're excited about the future of the Brentwood Borough School District."

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