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## FAIRFIELD BOARD OF EDUCATION

# \$28.1M expansion proposed

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**FAIRFIELD TWP.** - Residents will be asked to approve a \$28.1 million expansion of Stevenson and Churchill schools in a referendum this fall, the grades K-6 Board of Education decided at its meeting Wednesday, Jan. 29.

The district aims to hold the vote in September and to complete the renovations in 2023, Superintendent Susan Ciccotelli said.

She said the expansions are necessary because the district's enrollment has reached its capacity and is expected to grow even more.

The plans would move third graders to Churchill, which now houses grades 4-6. Stevenson would house preschool through second grade.

Churchill would gain 11,451 square feet, which would include a gym, kitchen, and boys and girls bathrooms. The school also would get 26,442 square feet of new classroom space as the fifth and sixth grade wings would be expanded and connected. The area that now houses fifth and sixth graders would be used for third graders and specialized classrooms as well as two sixth grade classes.

The new area would hold seven fifth grade classrooms; six fourth grade classrooms; four sixth grade classrooms; a science lab; a STEAM room (for science, technology, engineering, arts and math); and two sets of boys and girls bathrooms.

Ciccotelli said the new gym would be full-sized with additional seating. The current gym has extremely narrow sidelines and little seating for spectators, she noted.

The new gym would be used for lunch while the two current gyms would be repurposed. The larger and newer gym, used mainly for physical education, would be used as instructional space, while the smaller gym, used mainly for lunch, would become a band room and music room.

Churchill also would be renovated. The kitchen would be converted into a pull-out space, the main office into special-education classrooms, and the small-group instruction area into a main office next to the principal's office.

Churchill would gain more parking as well as a bus drop-off lane, said Lyanna Rios, district business

## PLANS: For school expansion

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administrator and board secretary.

The renovations at Churchill would cost about \$22.3 million.

The renovations at Stevenson would cost about \$5.8 million.

The debt service paid for the project would be about \$3.6 million, Ciccotelli said.

A 7,100-square foot wing would be added to the northwest side of Stevenson. It would include two basic-skills instruction rooms, two occupational-therapy rooms, a STEAM room and an English as a Second Language room.

Stevenson's main office would be renovated to include a new principal's office.

The library would be renovated to create an office for the information-technology manager, and the servers in the library would be separated by walls. Ciccotelli said the improvements to the library would reduce noise.

Four classrooms and every bathroom at Stevenson also would be renovated.

### Several Options

At the Jan. 29 meeting, Germano "Jerry" Rubino, principal of Di Cara Rubino Associates in Wayne, presented three plans for Stevenson expansion and two for Churchill.

Option one for Stevenson called for a 9,500-square foot expansion with a cost of about \$6.9 million. It would have required two 4-foot-high ramps to keep building areas out of flood plains.

Option two, the one the board approved, has almost the same features but it requires only one ramp and the school wouldn't lose a baseball field as it would have in option one.

Option three would have expanded Stevenson northward by 16,700 square feet, maintained the district's grade-level alignments, cost about \$10.1 million, and disrupted the school's playground. It also would have increased administrative costs, Ciccotelli said.

A second option for Churchill to keep the district's grade configuration also was presented.

Ciccotelli called the board's choice the best option educationally.

For one reason, the third grade aligns better to the curriculum for grades 4-5 as does preschool to grades 1-2. It also was the cheapest option.

Rios said the district started plan the expansion last spring, when it surveyed staffers about what improvements they would like to see, then asked the same of parents.

In June, the district conducted a demographic study based on state mul-

tipliers; it showed that the district's student population had reached its capacity and was expected to expand further.

Ciccotelli said that by June, 69 apartment units had been approved in the township. Since then, it has been looking at adding 155 to 254 units.

The superintendent said she expects those units to result in increased student enrollment. Another factor is a growing trend of older families without young children renting out their Fairfield homes or moving away. Younger families with school-age children are taking their place.

Since the beginning of this school year, the district has added 20 students, the highest figure Ciccotelli has seen in her seven years as superintendent.

"If it (the referendum) fails, we're going to have major problems because we have no space," she said. "So we'd have to look at alternative space, which might be temporary spaces, which will not look very nice in a town like this."

"But we're growing, and we want to offer the best for our students. We want to maintain those small class sizes that we have. So we need room."

The school board will meet next at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 27 in the Stevenson School library.