

OUT WITH THE OLD

A 61-year-old school looks to get reinvented with bond measure

It's not that principal, keeps a brochure from when the school first opened more than 60 years ago. He says he's thankful for NEHS, which he attended. What sticks out to him, though, is that the school has only been slightly updated since the brochure was printed in 1958.

NEHS could see itself in a new building if Eugene School District 4J's \$319.3-million bond measure passes in November. The bond measure will dedicate \$135 million to rebuilding a new 1,200 capacity high school building modernized to current student needs such as bigger classrooms, earthquake safety and preventing school shootings.

The building's classrooms are a tight squeeze for a growing student population that is nearing 1,000.

One of the Spanish language classrooms typically has 38 students in the class. For courses that are only offered once a year, like calculus, 40 students cram into classrooms that were built in the 1950s, Udosenata says.

He adds that NEHS classrooms weren't meant for that many students. The building's old classrooms were intended to house 24 students.

"North has the smallest classrooms of any high school in the district," says Kerry Delf, the district's associate communications director.

In addition to adjusting classrooms to current class sizes, Udosenata says he's excited about the prospect of updating the school's career technical education (CTE) program. He sees a program that would allow the school to offer multiple life pathways, from advanced placement classes to courses teaching students skills that translate immediately into the workforce.

CTE programs, he says, keep students motivated to show up to school because of the experiences they have in hands-on courses.

Udosenata says he imagines the school would have a larger computer-aided design (CAD) program. It would provide students with experience in designing products in a wood or metal shop setting, as well as seeing what it would cost to mass-produce them while creating a business plan.

That's what board member Jim Torrey imagines, too. During the Aug. 15 4J board meeting, he said the district needs to invest in its students so they can graduate high school and be equipped with skills necessary to have higher-wage jobs.

Jobs that require CAD knowledge have a median pay of \$44,110, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Aside from smaller classes and updating the building, a new \$135 million NEHS would allow the district to update its buildings to deal with a new school phenomenon: school shootings.

At NEHS today, it's easy to walk right by the school's administrative office and enter a classroom or the theater, which is a security issue.

"You should not be able to walk into the school and walk right down the hallway," Delf says.

A new building would change the layout of NEHS, making a single point of entry in the office, Delf says.

School shootings aren't the only danger in public

for the 2016 to 2017 academic year shows 59 percent of NEHS' student body is economically disadvantaged, compared to 27 percent at SEHS.

The report also shows that SEHS has a graduation rate of 89.4 percent. NEHS' graduation rate is 77.9 percent.

The measure's \$319.3-million ask is the largest the district has ever presented to taxpayers. That's the reason the school board waited until the last minute to submit its bond to the ballot.

The district initially considered investing \$150 million into NEHS. To get the bond measure under \$320 million rather than the initial \$350 million, the board shaved \$15 million off by cutting down on any excess design or construction aspects.

As a result, NEHS won't be the "Cadillac" of high schools, board member Anne Marie Levis says.

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If the bond measure passes and NEHS gets a new building, the 61-year-old school would move. Rebuilding NEHS would result in merging Yujin Gakuen Japanese Immersion School and Corridor Elementary School temporarily to Kelly Middle School during construction of NEHS. Afterwards, the district will decide where those schools will be located.

locations. Oregon has the potential for an earthquake greater than a 9.0, according to the state of Oregon. As of now, NEHS couldn't withstand such an earthquake — and very little in Oregon could.

Rebuilding NEHS is an opportunity to have a building in the Santa Clara area that would not only allow students to survive a high-magnitude earthquake but also have a place that could serve as a relief center, Delf says.

At the district level, an educational performance divide is apparent between north Eugene and south Eugene, and the bond is a way to work toward district equity.

Before the 4J board agreed on a \$319.3-million bond measure for the general election, Superintendent Gustavo Balderas announced that South Eugene High School (SEHS) was named the number-one high school in the state of Oregon, and followed it with an amendment: Every school in 4J is great.

Oregon Department of Education's annual report card

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A problem the district could face in constructing a new NEHS is President Donald Trump's love for tariffs. The high tariff on steel, for example, places a burden on the district's construction plans and means it'll have to look into other materials — like wood and concrete.

Regardless of how much the district budgets on construction and design, the north Eugene area will welcome a new building.

"The history of being non-incorporated for several years leaves us a feeling of disconnection sometimes. But it also leaves a feeling of deep-seated community with pride," Udosenata says. "A new high school building would be a gem and be something the community could be proud of." ■

KAVA CONTROVERSY

Kava bar stops serving after conflicting communications

Eugene's only kava bar stopped serving kava for about a week in July after a misunderstanding between local and state health authorities about what's a food and what's an additive.

The LovaKava Bar and Restaurant downtown serves a selection of teas from kava root, Piper methysticum, said by users to infuse a sense of calm.

"My staff at the kava bar got a phone call from Lane County Environmental Health (LCEH) telling us and warning us that we had to immediately stop serving kava," says LovaKava owner John Sholar. "Quite frankly, that made no sense to me at all."

Sholar says a county health inspector told him that LCEH was following guidelines from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) on the legalities of serving kava. He closed the restaurant around July 10, he says, and sent all 12 part-time and full-time employees home.

LovaKava then opened again for a few days but refrained from serving kava.

"My whole restaurant was shut down for a week," Sholar says. "It was pretty bad. We really took a hit. After that, we had to shut down all these other kava products that I carry in-house and prepare for people."

He adds in an email, "This action would have affected every kava bar in the U.S."

After receiving a letter from Sholar's attorney, OHA contacted the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in mid-July. FDA decided kava tea is a food and not an additive.

"My attorney proved to them it isn't a food additive, but it's actually been a food that's been consumed for 4,000 years. Adding a food to water does not change the constitution of the food. The water is a delivery system," Sholar says.

OHA reversed its decision within days of receiving the letter from Sholar's attorney. "The FDA came back and said this is OK," says Brett Sherry, OHA program manager with the Food, Pool and Lodging Program.

Lane County spokesperson Devon Ashbridge says LCEH told Sholar around July 10 that he couldn't serve kava as an additive to food. In an email to EW, Ashbridge writes:

"In June, Lane County Environmental Health (LCEH) received an update from Oregon Health Authority (OHA) stating that kava was not on the Food & Drug Administration's list of approved additives — meaning that it could not be added to food prepared and served at a restaurant, but could be sold as a dietary supplement. LCEH was aware of one restaurant using kava and, after receiving the above notification from OHA, as a courtesy called the restaurant."

Sholar says the daily routine at LovaKava Bar downtown is back to normal. His team of employees quickly returned to serving kava tea, which comes in different strains like Vanuatu (billed as "relaxing, pain-relieving and heavy on the body").

"We're just a little kava bar, trying to do our little thing," he says. ■