

# FCSD officials: Schools need more room

Board members see gym bond addressing academic and athletic needs

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

FALLS CITY — In the last three years, Falls City School District's enrollment has increased by 36 students, according to the latest enrollment numbers.

That doesn't seem like a big jump, but for a district with fewer than 200 students, it's notable.

"For a district of this size, it's huge," said Superintendent Jack Thompson.

Thompson said the district enrolled 145 students when he took over as superintendent three years ago. The last tally has the student count at 181.

He attributes the growth to efforts to improve the atmosphere in Falls City schools, engaging teachers and simply making school more fun.

"Staff in this district worked really hard to change the culture and the way people view Falls City," Thompson said.

It appears to be working, as Falls City schools have enrolled students from Dallas, Monmouth and Kings Valley in recent years.

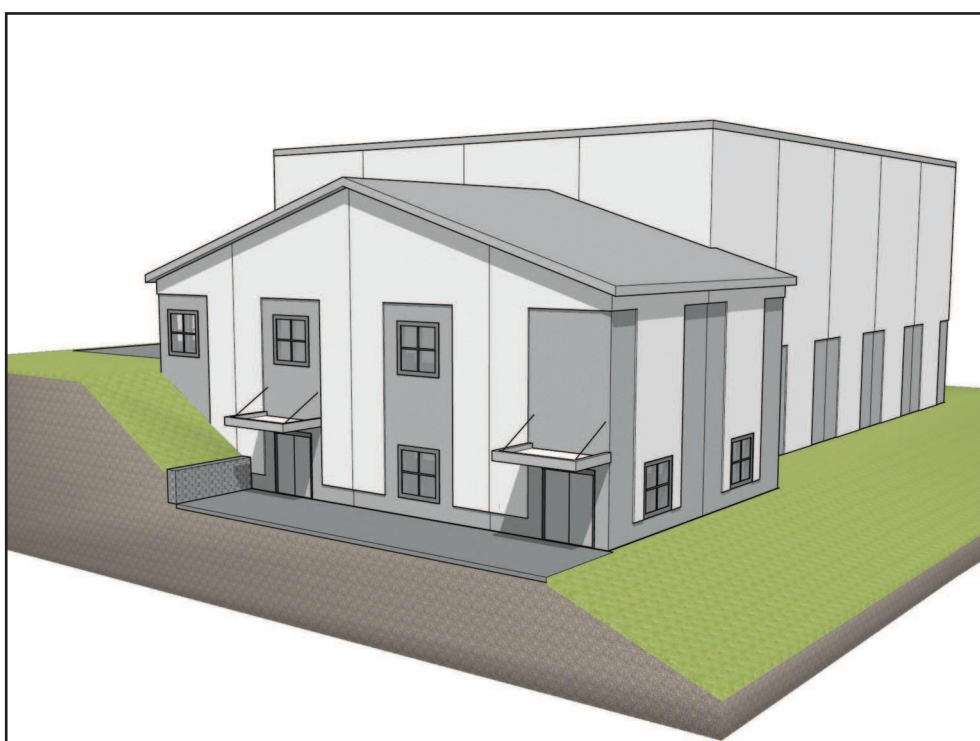
Falls City has always prided itself on small class sizes, but the bump in the number of students is making that claim a stretch in some cases.

With 30 kids in the seventh-eighth grade class now and if enrollment holds, 35 next year, Thompson is recommending separating the grades for the 2016-17 school year.

Not that school officials are complaining, but the growth creates a planning challenge.

"We're starting to get adequate funding and a little more sustainability that we can hire and fund a teacher, but we lack the space," said Jami Kidd, the school board chairwoman.

That scenario brings to



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This preliminary drawing provides the basic idea of what a new multipurpose gym would look like if built next to Falls City Elementary School with bond proceeds.

light one of the reasons members of the school board believe it is critical the district build an elementary school gym: It wouldn't just be for athletics, but academics, too.

Currently, the multipurpose room in the basement of the elementary school is the "gym" and music room.

It's not half the size of a true gym, but it could be converted into two classrooms if indoor play could be moved elsewhere, Kidd said.

The district is asking voters to approve a \$2 million bond the May primary to build the gym. If approved, the district would get \$2 million more from the state to pay for the project through a grant program.

Falls City is one of nine districts in the state to be approved for the state funding, Kidd said.

The multipurpose facility would include two full-sized courts and a cafeteria, solving the problems of inadequate sports practice space and

cramped kitchen facilities.

Preliminary plans include space that is yet-to-be determined that could be used for locker rooms or more classroom space.

Board members see this election as an opportunity that shouldn't be missed, both because of the state's offer of a dollar-for-dollar match and the need for room to grow.

Kidd said Falls City schools need to grow to have a strong future and provide a quality education to students. If enrollment and funding decline, the outlook is dire.

"It is all of our beliefs (school board members) that we will not provide a mediocre education for a small group of students," Kidd said. "If it starts getting to that point and we are losing funding, we will close."

The current trend points in the opposite direction, which comes with difficulties of a different nature.

"Our student population is increasing, which we ap-

## Falls City March Enrollment

Pre-K	— 10
Kindergarten	— 14
First grade	— 10
Second grade	— 12
Third grade	— 10
Fourth grade	— 12
Fifth grade	— 8
Sixth grade	— 15
Seventh grade	— 20
Eighth grade	— 10
Ninth grade	— 20
10th grade	— 10
11th grade	— 11
12th grade	— 19
<b>Total:</b>	<b>181</b>

Source: Falls City School District

preciate, but it is causing a problem," she said. "We tried to answer as many problems as we could with one solution. That we get something that we can grow on, but meets the most amount of our needs right now."

# Polk's budget plan approved

Committee 'tentatively' approves the county's 2016-17 fiscal year budget

By Jolene Guzman  
The Itemizer-Observer

POLK COUNTY — Following four days of hearings, the Polk County Budget Committee "tentatively approved" the 2016-17 budget with no major changes from the proposed budget.

Thursday's approval is not final. The budget committee will reconvene in May to make any adjustments necessary.

"We will probably have some revenue adjustments between now and May," said County Administrator Greg Hansen.

The overall budget proposal is \$64.9 million, an increase of 10 percent over the current budget. The general fund — the fund that contains budgets for such departments as the sheriff's office and jail, district attorney, community corrections and assessor — comes in at \$22.2 million, a 12 percent increase.

Next fiscal year's budget carries a \$3,931,378 contingency, a \$1,139,902 increase from the current year. About half of the general fund increases of \$2.4 million was placed in contingency to offset anticipated cost increase, mainly due hikes in the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System rates coming next year.

Transfers from the general fund to support other programs increased by 27 percent, including two new transfers for the fair fund and soon-to-be-added veterans services program. The transfers include: \$830,000 to the juvenile fund; \$275,000 to public health; \$107,500 to dog

## 2016-17 budget basics:

<b>General Fund:</b>	\$22.2 million
<b>Contingency:</b>	\$3.9 million
<b>Total budget:</b>	\$64.9 million
Source: Polk County	

control; \$75,000 for the fair for operations; and \$40,000 to veteran services.

Public works also received \$80,000 from the general fund, but that transfer is the result of state timber revenue sent to the county for road work.

Approval included recommended salary adjustments for all elected officials that would increase pay by 4 percent, excluding the district attorney, who is paid by the state. Polk's Compensation Committee, consisting of the three non-elected member of the budget committee, made that recommendation in January.

The Polk County Board of Commissioners has the final say on that. For the current fiscal year, the commissioners increased pay for other elected officials, but declined a raise for themselves.

The budget committee will meet to vote on a final recommendation on May 25 at 10 a.m. in the Polk County Courthouse conference room, 850 Main St. Dallas.

"In May you will have a fine-tuned budget for your approval," Hansen said, adding he anticipates the meeting going smoothly. "I don't see any major changes on the horizon."



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