

Closing a school is the hardest thing for a school board or a superintendent to recommend. As school officials and board members, our decisions always are guided by what is best for our students and best serves the interests of our communities as we manage district enrollment, finances and the buildings and grounds. However, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that operating four aging school buildings is not sustainable for Central A&M. As a result, the Board of Education will vote on December 11 on the recommendation to close Bond Elementary School.

Our recommendation is made in light of the following facts:

- Our total district student enrollment has dropped 40 percent compared with 20 years ago. The decrease in students translates to a decrease in state funding over and above the state funding cuts we have seen in the past several years.
- Based on the most recent Health, Life Safety Assessment required by the state, the building most in need of repairs is Bond Elementary School. Currently, Bond requires over \$1.7 million in asbestos abatement, security improvements, life safety improvements and other state mandated infrastructure improvements.
- Outside of these necessary repairs, it costs the school district approximately \$300,000 per year to operate Bond Elementary.
- CAM Middle School has additional space that is currently used for storage. The Board believes a renovation of the Middle School would provide enough room to house all of the students and staff from Bond, as well as the District Offices.

While change is always challenging, we believe this shift would not be overly disruptive for our students as they would still be attending school in Assumption, and the building environment would be improved thanks to the renovations to the Middle School building. The recommendation also takes timing into account, planning for a Summer 2019 closure to ease the transition at the start of a new school year as opposed to mid-year.

Similarly, the change would not be drastic for parents and community members because the same number of students would still be attending school in Assumption and numbers will not change in Moweaqua. Bus routes would not change and the district office also would be relocated to the Middle School and remain in Assumption. We believe this shift would make the most efficient use of our limited resources and allow us to hold the line on property tax increases.

We want to make sure we keep our communities informed and provide the opportunity to share input. To that purpose, we have scheduled two informational meetings open to the public where we will entertain questions and comments from the community about this upcoming decision. The two sessions will be from 2 -3 p.m. Sunday, December 3 and 7 -8 p.m. on Monday, December 4, both at the Middle School Library.

Even when given the points mentioned above, the potential closing of a school building is a significant change for our community and not something we recommend lightly. We understand that many

members of our community and CAM alumni have strong emotional connections to a school building. We understand that a school is much more than bricks and mortar; a school is defined by its students, teachers, staff and the communities it serves. We welcome and appreciate your input as we chart a path forward that best serves our students and our communities.

Central A&M Board of Education and Dr. Heck