St. Joseph-Ogden High School

District No. 305

Principal's Office
Phone: 217-469-2332
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301 N. Main Street
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St. Joseph, Illinois 61873

Superintendent's Office
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August 29, 2023

SJO Students/Parents/Guardians:

I hope everyone had a great summer, and is having a tremendous start to the school year!

The purpose of this letter is to provide some detailed information for everyone about the facility projects at SJO that have taken place over the last year and a half. I apologize for the length of this letter but feel that it is important that our stakeholders get both an update on everything, as well as how we got here.

Once these projects are complete, we will have upgraded the following areas of our facility and campus:

- Renovated our old gym into a fully dedicated auditorium.
- Upgraded all of the hallways in the 1926 building with new ceilings, lighting, paint, and graphics.
- New doors on all classroom and offices in the 1926 building.
- Removed window air conditions, boilers, and radiators in the 1926 building and replaced that with a geothermal system for heating and cooling to create a much better academic learning environment in those classrooms.
- Converted our old weight room into a dedicated wrestling practice facility.
- Added on a new weight room that will be utilized by every student who takes PE or Strength Training, in addition to all of our student athletes.
- Added a new parking lot, as well as created new parking spots in the current north parking lot that are wider and deeper.
- Put field turf onto the football/soccer field, which brings soccer on campus, and provides more space for our band, PE, and other activities. (SJO Football and Soccer both opened up the new field with victories!).
- Brand new track that will fix our previous drainage issues on the track, as well as give us a truly level track. We were previously running slightly uphill or downhill in some areas.
- Brand new shot put and discus areas in a similar location as they had been, and a new long and triple jump area where our softball field was previously.
- Brand new practice field that football and soccer will share. It will also be another space for our band as well. This will be located east of the new softball field.
- Brand new softball field that will be all field turf. The new location also allows us to have regulation distances for our home run fence, which we could not have in our previous location.

What is still left to be completed, and when will this happen?

- The track surface installation process is set to begin sometime today, **Tuesday, August 29th. Once they begin this process, NO ONE will be able to enter the fenced area to the track and football/soccer field. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT.** The track surface cannot be touched at all during this time, or it will be permanently damaged. It can be fixed, but it will not be finished exactly as intended. This process of

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installing the surface, and then spraying the track with the finished color of maroon will take around a couple of weeks to complete. We will continue to make public announcements about this.

- While the track is shut down, we will not be able to host any football or soccer games or practices. Soccer will play at BJ Hackler Park in St. Joseph. Underclass football games will be moved offsite to either play away games or at the St. Joe Youth Football Field on the east side of town. The varsity home football game on September 8th is scheduled to be played on Dick Duval Field. Mr. Franzen is handling all of the scheduling of these events and communicating this with the coaches.

- The actual lining/striping of the track will most likely not take place until later October. However, we will still be able to utilize the football/soccer field once the track surface is completely installed.

- The football/soccer practice field is the one part of the project that is behind schedule due to a delay with the irrigation installation. The irrigation system is now mostly installed, so they will be laying sod shortly. Once the sod is laid, it will probably be 3 to 4 weeks before our teams can practice on it.

- The brand new softball field will be completed this fall. This will be an all-turf field. A new scoreboard and batting cages will be installed sometime after everything with the field is complete. The new location of this field (northwest side of campus) gives us enough space to have regulation distances for our home run fence. We could not do that at our former location.

- We will be putting a brick sign on the nortn side of the new parking lot that signifies the St. Joseph-Ogden High School campus as people enter St. Joseph. This will be done this fall.

- We will have various landscaping installed within and around our new parking lot. This will entail grass, rock, mulch, trees, bushes, plants, etc. We are planning for this to be done in the fall as well.

- We will have new perimeter fencing installed along the west and north sides of our campus once the projects are complete.

We are extremely excited for our students, staff, and community as these projects start to wrap up. These upgrades provide a better academic environment for our students and teachers, provide better facilities for our extracurricular programs, and we believe is something our community and SJO alumni can be proud of.

As great as all of this will be for SJO, it certainly isn't perfect nor has everything been done that we all would like to have been done. Our campus provides many chailenges due to its size and being in the middle of town. But that is one of the things that also what makes SJO a very special place. There are some things that we couldn't do within some of the projects right now due to finances, but we may be able to do some of those items in the future.

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These project upgrades are ideas that have been discussed and in planning for the past 8 years by our Board of Education and I. Total project costs for everything will be around $11.5 Million, and is being paid for with revenue bonds ($10 Million), the Champaign County 1% Sales Tax Money for school districts, and a small amount of our reserves will also be used to finish off the project. A few things were very important to us as we entered into these projects:

1. We wanted to do facility upgrades that touched every student in some way.

2. We wanted to do the projects in a manner that would be positive for our school district and stakeholders both now, as well as for many years to come.

3. We were only going to borrow and spend an amount that would keep our Property Tax Rates the same or lower than they were pre-projects (2020 Tax Levy). This was very important to our Board of Education and I.

   We started the process of obtaining funding through bonds late in 2020 due to interest rates being very low at the time. Little did we know what was coming shortly thereafter in terms of the rates that are out there now. The net interest cost of our three bonds ended up at 2.37%, with our bond interest rates ranging from 1.35% to 3.0%. Below are St. Joseph-Ogden CHSD #305 Property Tax Rates pre-project (2020) through the 2022 Tax Levy. I anticipate the 2023 Property Tax Rate being within a penny of the 2022 Tax Rate. We have one of the lowest High School District tax rates in the state of Illinois. There are very few high school districts in the entire state who have tax rates below 2.00.

   a. 2020 Tax Rate: 1.99
   b. 2021 Tax Rate: 1.96
   c. 2022 Tax Rate: 1.94

I want to thank everyone for their patience and understanding throughout these projects. I know it has been challenging in a variety of different ways not only for our students and staff, but also our parents, guardians, and community members.

If you have any questions regarding the projects, please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I hope everyone has a fantastic 2023-2024 school year!

Sincerely,

Mr. Brooks
Superintendent
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