



VALLEY HEIGHTS USD #498

HOME OF THE MUSTANGS

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Dear Valley Heights Parents, Families, and Community Members,

I wanted to take a moment to share an important update following the October 20 Board of Education meeting regarding the future direction of USD 498 Valley Heights.

Over the past several months, our Board and administrative team have spent considerable time reviewing enrollment trends, district finances, building conditions, staffing, and the long-term educational needs of our students. These have not been easy conversations, but they are necessary as we consider how to position Valley Heights for the future.

At the October 20 meeting, the Board approved moving forward with a long-term facilities planning direction centered on developing a new Pre-K–6 educational facility and gymnasium at our existing 7–12 campus, with the ultimate goal of creating a consolidated Pre-K–12 campus.

The Board also provided two additional directions:

- The district will actively pursue educational partnership opportunities with Vocational/Technical Colleges, including potential future uses of our existing facilities.
- At least one of our current elementary attendance centers will close beginning with the 2027–28 school year. **No decision has been made regarding which elementary building will close.**

I want to emphasize that second point. While the Board has established that a change in our current three-campus structure will take place beginning next school year, it has not determined whether Blue Rapids Grade School or Waterville Grade School will close. Additional planning, evaluation, and Board consideration will be necessary before that decision is made.

I recognize that this announcement may bring questions, concerns, and uncertainty for our families and communities. Our schools have tremendous history, tradition, and community pride. They are places where generations of families have learned, grown, and built lasting relationships. I understand that decisions involving our schools impact much more than buildings.

Why are we considering these changes?

Valley Heights, like many rural Kansas school districts, continues to experience declining enrollment. As our student population decreases, the funding available to operate our schools is affected. At the same time, the costs associated with maintaining multiple facilities, including utilities, insurance, staffing, and repairs, continue to increase.

Our Board has spent considerable time examining these challenges and considering different options for the future. Maintaining our current structure without making adjustments would place increasing financial pressure on the district and could eventually affect the educational programs and opportunities we provide students.

Our responsibility is not simply to maintain buildings. It is to ensure that our available resources are being used in ways that provide the greatest educational benefit to our students.

Throughout these conversations, one question has continued to guide my thinking:

How do we create the strongest educational system possible for the students we expect to serve over the next 30–50 years?

What happens next?

Last night's approval establishes a long-term direction for facilities planning. It does not approve construction, a final project cost, or a bond election.

Our next steps will include developing a Facilities Steering Committee, evaluating educational and facility needs, exploring private fundraising and additional financing opportunities, and providing opportunities for community involvement.

We will also continue exploring partnerships with Vocational Tech Schools and other organizations that may provide educational, workforce development, or community opportunities within our existing facilities. Finding meaningful future uses for district properties is an important part of this process.

As we prepare for the 2027–28 school year, we will need to carefully evaluate student placement, transportation, staffing, educational programming, and building utilization before bringing additional recommendations to the Board.

We are also committed to examining multiple funding sources for any future construction project rather than assuming the entire cost must be supported through a property-tax-funded bond. Our goal is to develop a responsible plan that balances educational opportunities with the financial realities of our district and the taxpayers we serve.

Our commitment to Valley Heights has not changed.

While much of our long-term planning involves facilities and finances, our greatest strength continues to be the students, staff, families, and communities who make Valley Heights special.

We have a proud tradition of academic achievement, extracurricular success, community involvement, and strong relationships. Those traditions and expectations will remain central to our district regardless of where our students attend school.

I understand that change is difficult, particularly when it involves schools that have been part of our communities for generations. I also believe that responsible leadership requires us to address challenges proactively rather than waiting until circumstances limit our options.

We will continue communicating as this process moves forward and provide opportunities for families and community members to ask questions, share perspectives, and participate in discussions about our future.

Our work will remain focused on three priorities:

Strong educational opportunities for students. Sustainable facilities. Long-term financial stability.

I appreciate our Board of Education for its willingness to work through these difficult decisions, and I appreciate our families and communities for their continued support of Valley Heights Schools.

This is the beginning of the next phase of planning, not the end of the conversation.

Our goal remains the same: **Position Valley Heights Schools to provide outstanding opportunities for students for generations to come.**

Thank you for your continued support of Valley Heights.

Sean Spoonts
Superintendent
USD 498 Valley Heights