

Faribault County Register

Faribault County Register Article Dr. Topinka - February 2026

It has been an exciting winter at USC! Winter activities are winding down, and we are past the midpoint of the third quarter of the school year, and we will very soon be in the process of wrapping up the 2025-2026 school year.

On February 19, United South Central Schools held its second Community Engagement Meeting at the Golden Bubble Event Center as part of our ongoing facilities planning process. We had around 120 community members join us, and I continue to be grateful for the time and thoughtful engagement our community brings to these conversations. Since our first community meeting in October, we've completed a demographic analysis, facility condition assessment, and educational adequacy study to better understand enrollment trends, the current state of our building systems, and how well our spaces support today's learning expectations. The evening focused on sharing those findings, answering questions, and beginning to frame possible options as we look ahead to a potential November 3, 2026 referendum. We also reviewed preliminary financial information, including the Ag2School and Minnesota Property Tax Credit programs, which could significantly reduce the local tax impact if a project moves forward. No decisions have been made at this point, as this phase is about building shared understanding and gathering input. We'll reconvene our Community Task Force on March 2 and continue collecting feedback, including a mailed survey in April, as we work toward a plan that reflects both our district's needs and our community's voice. I'm thankful for the strong turnout and the steady, respectful dialogue. It says a lot about USC and the pride we all share in our schools.

As we head into the final three months of the school year, we're also beginning to turn our attention toward summer and the projects that will take place once students are out building for the summer. We have an awesome school facility, and it is our goal to keep our building and grounds in the best possible shape we can. Over the past few summers we have converted our entire building to LED lighting, replaced our stadium seating, expanded our playground area, resurfaced our parking lots and gymnasium floor, and repainted all of our corridor hallways. We are in for a much lighter summer on the project front this year and are looking at some minor sealing of our prestressed concrete panels, and some additional minor adjustments around our campus. The summer months present a great opportunity for us to keep our building maintained, and this is not too far off in the future.

One of the real strengths of United South Central is the healthy balance we have across generations on our staff. With that balance, retirements are a natural and meaningful part of the cycle. At the conclusion of this school year, we will be saying goodbye to four outstanding teachers who have each made a lasting impact on USC. We extend our sincere gratitude to Anne Feist (16 years), Brad Huse (27 years), Pierre Stencel (27 years), and Amy Stenzel (26 years) for their dedication, leadership, and unwavering commitment to our students and school community. Change is never easy, especially when it involves individuals who have shaped our schools for decades. At the same time, these transitions create space for new educators to step in with fresh energy and perspective. While the teacher shortage is very real and candidate pools have narrowed in recent years, we continue to feel fortunate at USC. The strength of our students, the support of our colleagues, and the positive climate within our district have positioned us well in the hiring process. At this time, we are on track to be fully staffed and are

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excited to welcome several excellent new faces to our team next year. As enrollment continues to trend upward, we are also closely monitoring select grade levels. Adding additional sections can be challenging with our facilities currently at full capacity, but we remain attentive and proactive as we plan for the year ahead.