New Elementary Schools to Open for 2020-2021 School Year

The two new Grand Rapids elementary schools and the remodeled Cohasset Elementary School are slated for opening in time for the 2020-2021 School Year.

“We are very excited to be able to open the schools ahead of schedule," said ISD 318 Interim Superintendent Sean Martinson. “Moving forward in preparation for next school year allows our kids and staff to take advantage of updated learning spaces even sooner than anticipated.”

“Our construction is on budget and ahead of schedule. We have been meeting regularly to accomplish the necessary steps before opening and will have no problem meeting the new opening date,” said Martinson. The school district has put together a timeline of expected announcements prior to the new schools opening.

Principals Announced

Last fall, The School Board approved creating 12-month lead principals for both the Grand Rapids and Cohasset schools. Due to the large size of the Grand Rapids schools, they will also have 10-month assistant principals.

At Cohasset Elementary, Jill Wheelock will remain the principal, but will now be working through the summer in addition to her regular duties. Cohasset Elementary will have two classrooms per grade, K through 5, and will assume the district’s Title I duties.

At the West Elementary, the team will be made up of lead principal Sean Martinson and assistant principal Clayton Lindner, who is currently the Southwest principal. The East elementary will have Ryan DeBay as the lead principal and Bruce Goodwin as assistant principal. Ryan is currently the assistant principal at RJEMS and prior to that served as principal at King Elementary in Deer River. Bruce also served as assistant principal at RJEMS and is currently the interim principal at Murphy Elementary. Forest Lake principal David Lostetter will move to RJEMS as the new assistant principal.

School Naming Committee

East and West have worked as designations for the new schools thus far, but the district has put together a committee made up of teachers, principals, school staff, parents, and community members to help find permanent names for the two new elementary schools. Throughout December, the committee asked residents and students to submit their suggestions. The results will be presented to the committee in January. The committee will work to narrow the choices and ask the community to rank their favorites. Results will be presented to the School Board in February.
New School Elementary Schools, Continued

School Boundaries

The School Boundaries committee will make a recommendation to the School Board in January. Throughout the summer and fall of 2019, the district invited community members, parents, and staff to work with the Transportation Department and Administrators to make a recommendation for new school boundaries and potential bus routes to the School Board. The group worked to balance the schools in student population, socio-economic status, and transportation routes.

The boundaries and policies will be shared with parents in late January. There will be an implementation period of two years, after which the Board will return to the public for feedback and suggestions. Bus routes will be released as usual in August.

Teacher and Staff Placements

In 2018, as a part of the planning process for the new schools, administrators and staff created a process for staff placements in the new schools. Teachers will choose their new building based on seniority and grade level openings. Teachers will not be able to move between grades based on seniority unless a position opens due to retirement or resignation. The process of staffing the new buildings with teachers will take place in March 2020. Announcements will be made to families in the Spring, but students will not be assigned to teachers until Summer 2020.

When the principal positions were extended to 12-months, the School Board approved creating a 12-month lead secretary position at the East and West sites along with a 10-month assistant position. Cohasset will now have a 12-month secretary as well. These positions will be posted for internal application in 2020. The positions will be announced in February 2020.

Kindergarten ESPs will accompany their current teachers to the new buildings. ESPs in Elementary Special Education positions will also accompany current teachers in most cases. Other para positions will be posted as a part of the ESP realignment process in the summer.

Food Service staff who are displaced with the closing of current elementary schools will choose positions in the new schools based on seniority.

Any changes to the bus routes will be done during the route realignment process in the summer.

Program Design

In our current elementary schools, we have been limited in the number of electives (also called specials) we can offer to students due to a lack of available space and scheduling constraints. Our new elementary schools will include two music classrooms; two full-size gyms, equating to four teaching stations; “wet” labs suitable for such activities as science and art education; and makerspaces designed for flexible, creative work.

The Board received input from parents and from the Program Design committee. Principals will be examining schedules and recommending programming that takes advantage of these spaces while accommodating budget restraints.

We post regular updates about the elementary schools on our website at isd318.org under the Facility Plan tab. You can also follow us on Facebook for the latest pictures and information.
Levy Approval

Following the annual Truth in Taxation meeting on December 2, the ISD 318 School Board set the annual levy on December 16. This year, taxpayers will see a 3.64% reduction in the school district portion of their taxes.

“The reduction is due to a number of factors,” said 318 Superintendent Sean Martinson. “School district finance is complicated, but a portion of people’s taxes are calculated based on the age of the buildings. The new schools are changing the average age of our buildings.” Long Term Maintenance Funding (LTFM) is a line item that is used to maintain school buildings, so with the construction of new buildings, this portion of the levy is reduced.

With an increase in iron ore production in 2018, the school district also received an increase in Taconite Aid. Cities and school districts in the Taconite Relief Area receive tax support from iron mining organizations. This money is paid as a tax by the mining organizations, which reduces the responsibility of taxpayers. “Because a portion of ISD 318 is in the Taconite Relief Area, all of our taxpayers will see that reduction in their taxes even if they do not live in the Taconite Relief District,” said Superintendent Martinson.

Finally, the district reduced their lease dollars by $74,000. And, as the new elementary schools open and the district is able to move programs for which space is currently leased, these numbers could continue to go down.

School District Taxing Process

While the district has reduced the annual levy by 3.64%, if the market value of a property has changed, residents may see a decrease that differs.

School district property taxes are determined by the following process.

1. The County Assessor determines the market value of each property in the county.
2. The Legislature sets formulas for tax capacity. These formulas determine how much of the tax burden falls on different types of property, for example residential or commercial properties.
3. The County Auditor calculates the tax capacity for each property.
4. The Legislature sets the formulas which determine how much a school district can levy.
5. The Minnesota Department of Education calculates the levy limits for each district based on the formulas set by the Legislature. This determines how much the district can levy in each category. Districts can chose to levy less, but never more than this number.
6. The district makes the decision of its levy in September so that the auditor can hold send out proposed tax statements to residents. Before the levy is approved, the district holds a Truth in Taxation meeting that allows residents to share their thoughts on the proposed taxes.

Tax Savings Opportunities

There are a number of programs offered by the Minnesota Department of Revenue to help offset property taxes.

**Minnesota Homestead Credit Refund**
If you meet annual income limits, you may be eligible for a maximum property tax refund of $2,770. Additional information, including income limits is available by completing state tax form M-1PR available at www.revenue.state.mn.us.

**Minnesota Special Property Tax Refund.**
You may be eligible for a property tax refund if you meet the following criteria:
- You owned and lived in the same home on January 2, 2018, and on January 2, 2019.
- Your homestead’s net property tax increased by more than 12 percent from 2018 to 2019.
- The net property tax increase was at least $100.
- The increase was not due to improvements you made to the property.

There are no income limits for the Special Homestead Credit Refund. The deadline for submitting your property tax refund is August 15. Learn more and apply today at www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/prop_tax_refund/Pages/Homeowners_Property_Tax_Refund.aspx

**Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral**
Seniors age 65 or older with a household income of $60,000 or less can defer a portion of property taxes on their property. However, this property tax plus accrued interest must be paid when the home is sold.
Superintendent Search Timeline

The Superintendent Search is currently underway. Earlier this year, School Exec Connect, a superintendent search firm, met with focus groups and assembled information to determine the challenges, strengths, goals of our district and characteristics and skills necessary in a superintendent. Using this information, School Exec Connect presented a profile of the skills and characteristics desired in the next superintendent to the School Board. This profile is used in recruiting and screening potential candidates and includes the following attributes:

- A visible, engaged and supportive leader
- An excellent communicator both internally and externally
- A leader who motivates and empowers others
- A student centered leader with a deep understanding of curriculum and instruction.

The full profile is available on the district website at isd318.org when you choose Discover Us > Superintendent Search.

The position will be open for application through January 17th, 2020. On January 21st, the Board and consultants will meet to review and select candidates to be initially interviewed using the community’s superintendent profile. The Board will interview five to seven recommended candidates on January 22nd and 24th and narrow the field to two or three finalists. The next round of individual interviews will occur on January 27th, 28th and 29th (if necessary). Each candidate will be invited for an all day interview process including open forums that will be available to staff, students and community members and a final formal Board interview. The Board will ask staff, students and community to provide input into the selection. The community interview is open to all and will take place in the evening.

Additional details will be provided after the initial interview has taken place. If you have questions about the candidates or process, please contact Julie Rasmussen at 218-327-5704.

ISD 318 Board of Directors

The members of the ISD 318 Board of Directors are comprised of six members who are charged with the care, management and control of the schools of the District. The members of the ISD 318 Board of Directors are:

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<tr>
<th>Member</th>
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<th>Email address</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Guest Staff Still Needed

ISD 318 has guest staff openings at all of our schools. We have opportunities inside and outside of the classroom. Guest teachers, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, food service employees, media center providers, and education support professionals (ESPs) all help keep a child’s school day running smoothly.

If you’re looking for flexibility in your schedule, consider one of the many opportunities available in our district. There are a lot of openings to explore. All you need is a desire to help make a positive impact on kids’ education. Contact Human Resources Director Kasie VanQuekelberg at 218-327-5708 for details.

Members of the public are also invited to address the School Board as a whole during Open Forum. Open Forums are held 30 minutes prior to regular School Board Meetings. Open Forum and Regular Meeting dates are listed on the district website at isd318.org.
Rapids Rising Shares Messages of Thankfulness in the Community

At GRHS there is a dedicated group of students working to share positive messages and modeling healthy choices in our community. Together with the Grand Rapids in Prevention (GRIP) coalition they are working to improve our area by empowering kids to make positive choices regarding substance use. These students are also working hard to show their thankfulness for the adults in the community that support them.

Last fall, they surprised shoppers throughout the community with roses as a random act of kindness. The gesture was meant to thank parents and adults for supporting kids making healthy decisions and to bring attention to the fact that that most teens and adults in our community believe that underage drinking is much more prevalent than it actually is. We know, through surveys administered to 7th through 12th graders in Grand Rapids, that most students have healthy attitudes and behaviors about not using alcohol at their age.* By working to close the perception gap, we can reduce and delay underage drinking in Grand Rapids. Studies show that kids who correctly perceive that most students don’t drink alcohol monthly or more often, are 11 times less likely to drink themselves.

The messages are being heard loud and clear. In 2017, survey results indicated that 79% of GRHS students believed that their peers were drinking monthly. Now, only 67% believe that other students drink alcohol monthly or more. This change in perception is the beginning of a lasting transformation, according to Dr. Jeff Linkenbach, founder of Positive Community Norms. Dr. Linkenbach teaches that changing perceptions and celebrating the norms of a community will lead to healthier and safer choices.

The message is spreading too. Parents and staff members at Bigfork School are working to implement Positive Community Norms in their area too.

Students also worked to thank members of local law enforcement for their support by delivering cards, donuts, and sodas to the Grand Rapids Police Department and Itasca County Sheriff’s Office. “Thank you for helping us with our events and keeping our community and schools safe. We appreciate it so much,” one student expressed.

Learn more about Rapids Rising, the survey data, and ways to talk to kids about substance use at www.rapidsrising.org.

*2019 PCN student survey, n=1,287 7-12 grade Grand Rapids students. Funded by MN DHS, BHD.

New Itasca Area Community Education Classes Available

Watch for the Itasca Area Community Education Catalog arriving in your postal mailboxes the week of January 22. The new catalog, featuring educational classes for all ages, has a class for you! Maybe you are looking for a chance to focus on yourself or to make new friends; an opportunity to master your current skill or tackle an entirely new one; a reason to exercise your body or exercise your brain. Whatever it is, we’ve got you covered! You’ll find a variety of classes, activities, and programs designed to keep you and your family engaged in learning. Every day is a day to learn, let’s learn together! For more information or to learn about future classes for children, teens, and adults of all ages call 218-327-5730, visit our website at getlearning.org, connect with us on Facebook, or text EDUCATE to 22828 to sign up for our monthly email notifications.
District 318 Contact Information

Administration
218-327-5704
Interim Superintendent:
Sean Martinson

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218-327-5860
450 Columbus Avenue
Cohasset, MN 55721

Forest Lake School
218-327-5870
715 NW 7th Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Murphy School
218-327-5880
822 NE 5th Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Southwest School
218-327-5890
601 SW 7th Street
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Bigfork School
218-743-3444
100 Huskie Boulevard
Bigfork, MN 56628

Robert J. Elkington Middle School
218-327-5800
1000 NE 8th Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Grand Rapids High School
218-327-5760
800 Conifer Drive
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Area Learning Center
218-327-5750
409 SE 13th Street
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Central Enrollment
218-327-5707

Community Education
218-327-5730

Early Childhood Invest Early
218-327-5850

Early Childhood Special Education
218-327-5572

Food and Nutrition
218-327-5771

Itaskin Education Center
218-322-4129

Special Services
218-327-5705

Transportation
218-327-5830