

“Don’t try this at home.” Those are the words of warning I remember when watching the Wide World of Sports as a youngster. The occasion was Evil Knievel attempting to jump another expanse of something on his motorcycle. We were warned but what did we do when we went outside with our bikes...yes that’s right. We immediately tried to simulate the daredevil’s act of bravery. Fortunately, none of my acts required a trip to the hospital and seldom was it worse than a skinned-up knee.

I can’t help but think of those daredevil acts and the obligatory warning that always came from the television announcers when I watch someone attempt to explain school finance. Since I’ve been the GPS Superintendent, I’ve watched as elected officials and now community members attempt to explain their version of how school finance works either in the opinion column or on social media. Each time I read an account of how schools are financed, I’m reminded that a 500 word column or a social media post can usually generate an opinion. Unfortunately, that opinion typically lacks necessary depth to truly consider it informed based on actual facts for such a complex subject.

Since the recent bond election that failed to achieve the required super-majority, many have taken to social media in a well-meaning effort to provide assistance and educate the community. I’ve watched healthy debate and actually heard a few interesting ideas. I’ve also watched as people in this community look for someone or something to blame. Ultimately, we all have history to blame as much as anything. I’ve said this many times and I’ll mention the phrase again, this school district didn’t get in this situation overnight and we won’t fix our facility problems overnight either. I heard the tax increase was too much at one time but to my knowledge, no citizens have expressed gratitude to the school district for the tax reductions that have occurred since the bond issue from 2005 was paid off or when the Logan County Assessor lowered our assessment ratio which has cost our district approximately \$400,000 annually.

We currently have a list of maintenance and technology needs for this district which total over \$10.1 million. These needs do not involve adding any classrooms or a complete renovation of any building. They do not address needs at Cotteral Elementary, Faver Alternative or the Administrative Building. The figure also doesn’t include any interior work at the Junior High or Fogarty Elementary. The recent failed bond issue as well as the six failed bond issues dating back to 2005 would have addressed some of these current needs. When you pair the facility needs of this district with current construction inflation costs of 8.5% annually you can see our purchasing power is diminishing quickly. Clearly, we cannot solve this overnight and the longer we wait, the more costly it will be for the taxpayers of this district.

The recent heating crisis at Fogarty Elementary should be a warning for our community. The majority of the heat/air conditioning units on our oldest buildings (Fogarty, Central, Junior High and Cotteral) were installed in 1996. Even with

appropriate maintenance the life expectancy of many of those units has been reached. Meanwhile we have yet to address the issues that constitute the envelope of our buildings (windows, roofs and below grade water intrusion).

The conclusion of this column reminds me of a quote from President Kennedy while addressing his military leaders during the Cuban Missile Crisis as they said, "You're in a fix here Mr. President."

Kennedy quickly reminded the military leaders they were a part of the same team with the statement, "You're in it with me."

Instead of pointing fingers or looking for someone to be mad at, we need real solutions. Returning to the topic of school finance, some aspects are highly complex. Other basic principles are fairly simple. We cannot spend money that we don't have; we cannot spend money twice; and we cannot fix these problems without money. Remember, don't try this at home AND you're in it with me!