

To the editor,

A group of volunteers decided there are only two options for describing the referendum proposal for a new Kiel Middle School (KMS): 1) Absolute Lunacy or 2) Extravagant Boondoggle. Do you need more information?

The Kiel Area School District (KASD) paid BRAY Architects \$15,000 to prepare a Professional Facilities Assessment Report. The report estimated KASD's repair bills for our existing three schools will be around \$51 million dollars over the next few years. Why aren't any members of our School Board telling us these huge costs are not included in their "balanced" budget for some reason, so KASD will need a miracle or a \$51,000,000 referendum just to take care of the three buildings we already own?

Who thinks adding a \$67 million dollar brand new school burden to our existing \$51 million dollar facilities burden makes any sense? Way over \$100 million dollars, just for buildings! That's the same as over \$25,000 for every man, woman and child living in Kiel! KASD School Board, what family can take that hit in today's economy?

Remember, we are still paying off the Performing Arts Center, which is run by Dr. Ebert's wife's "non-stock" corporation. It was Brad, Dan and Stuart that recommended that frill as a priority instead of maintenance and upkeep, correct?

This time Dr. Ebert says he and the School Board aren't pushing the \$67,000,000 referendum that is mysteriously already scheduled for next November in BRAY Architect's PowerPoint presentation. He says right now leadership is only taking the taxpayer's temperature at the taxpayer's expense. That means the "Community Focus Group" alone is pitching the \$67 million dollar recommendation to us, correct?

While I appreciate all their time and effort, when an unelected and unaccountable group of volunteers tells us the most cost effective way to address common maintenance issues at one school, which the School Board was supposed to be handling, will cost us \$67 million dollars at the very least, I have a few questions.

First off, how many combined years of experience do these group members have supervising or managing multi-million dollar organizations, or budgets, or construction projects? Secondly, how much were the architects paid to develop all the conceptual plans with this focus group?

As a Wisconsin licensed architect with over thirty years of professional experience including successfully managing multi-million dollar construction projects for top-notch multi-million dollar firms, I have some serious concerns with the abundance of glaring discrepancies between what the survey claims are "Middle School Challenges" and what the BRAY Architect's Report actually documents. Some of the more egregious examples follow.

The survey says "Some roof sections...need to be replaced", but the Report shows 90% are just fine.

The survey says "The building's exterior is in poor condition", but the Report clearly rates the building's exterior in "fair condition".

The survey says concrete is cracking, which we know is obviously only cosmetic in this case and thus easily repairable because the Report lists no concerns of possible future structural failure anywhere.

The survey states "Areas of the building do not comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) codes." But the Report rates the overall ADA condition as "fair", and points out that round door knobs are the frequent violations.

There is much more, the list goes on and on. Why are there so many discrepancies in the survey? What narrative are all the disingenuous statements in the survey pitching?

But there is good news as well! Even though all three of our schools have been denied proper maintenance and upkeep over the years, the BRAY Architect Report rates the most important physical elements at the KMS as still in "good" or "fair" condition- roof, walls, windows, and foundation.

When I was practicing architecture in Chicago, we routinely transformed public schools originally built in the 1870's with cost effective renovations that set them up for another 50 years of productive use. I can assure you our KMS built in 1928 is in far better shape than those buildings were. Despite the survey's questionable conclusions, it's not mandatory that we abandon our KMS.

Why weren't taxpayers given even a single option to repair and reuse the sturdy KMS building that has been plenty good enough for generations of students throughout Kiel's history?

Who decided we can't live without \$13 million dollars' worth of additional square footage? Those schools with slightly larger average classroom sizes than us could be drowning in debt for it. And what about that hefty \$4.5 million dollar District Office addition earmarked for Dr. Ebert and his handful of District employees? Do we really need a Taj Mahal in Kiel?

Is it any surprise that architects and contractors who stand to rake in millions more if we splurge \$67,000,000 try to push us all in that direction instead of a much less profitable but more prudent and affordable renovation? BRAY Architect's facility assessment report confirms there are easily decades of life left in the KMS.

So who specifically is behind steering us to splurge on something we don't really need, and why?

I've requested the public records showing who hired the organization that produced the discrepancy infested public survey, and which specific School Board members reviewed and approved it for distribution to the public.

I've also requested all the public records declaring that our KMS "has been deemed uninsurable" by anyone. Really?!

Although KASD usually doesn't even respond lately, the elected officials we pay are required by law to answer our questions. As taxpayers, we can only make informed decisions if we have proper information.

In conclusion, I too wish we could give every lavish thing imaginable to each and every student. But that's just not realistic. What if we teach our students how to live within their means, and learn to reuse and recycle?

The KASD School Board has been caught red handed, again. The clock is ticking, the bills are rolling in. Will they ever present prudent options for our consideration?

Matt Piper
Kiel