



LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

October 1, 2015

LRSD Team members, and CAC members,

Today I am going to make a couple of announcements that are important for the future of our school district and our city. Both of the announcements are in the spirit of resolutions passed by the Little Rock School District Board of Directors. I have discussed these matters with Commissioner Johnny Key, and he is supportive of the initiatives which I will describe.

On January 22, 2015, the school board unanimously approved resolutions which required the district to simultaneously authorize construction of a new southwest Little Rock high school and a west Little Rock middle school. These resolutions were premised on a successful millage campaign. I do not think there is support for a campaign at this time, but I also do not think LRSD can stand still in the face of our current needs.

It is now time to initiate a community engagement process, in concert with the Civic Advisory Committee, to plan, design and construct a new high school in southwest Little Rock. I am meeting with the co-chairs of the CAC tomorrow morning to discuss the role of the CAC in this planning and design process. We will seek to make the best decision for our students. The district acquired a large tract of land ostensibly for this purpose. It is important to note that the planning, design and construction of a new high school will take about four years. It is time to get started.

Yesterday I signed a conditional contract to acquire the former Leisure Arts property for \$11,500,000. The contract is conditional, and a number of major issues with respect to this property need to be explored. LRSD will have 180 days to satisfy itself with respect to these conditions. The execution of the contract is the first step to allow the due diligence to proceed. We need to determine the feasibility of using the facility as a school. We need to understand the costs associated with conversion to school use. There are zoning and land use issues that need to be handled, as well as a number of issues which also need to be discussed with the neighbors in the area. Issues dealing with access, traffic patterns, parking and the like will all need to be examined. The property is adjacent to land owned by LRSD, and there may be real opportunity with the acquisition. It is also quite possible that the land and facilities will not be feasible for use as an educational facility. We will begin the due diligence immediately. We will also engage the community in an effort to be a good neighbor to those who live, work or own property in the area.

We have a very good team of educators and support staff. We have financial challenges, but we are working on them every day. We know that the children and youth in our community deserve educational experiences which are equal to or better than the experiences afforded to students in surrounding communities. These first steps, although preliminary in nature, will put us on a path to achieving our goals. We must put our students first, and we must challenge ourselves. These projects will be a challenge, but I believe our LRSD team and our community are up to the task.

Baker