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Poplar Bluff R-I Kicks Off Next Long Range Plan with no-tax Increase Ballot Measure

JANUARY 17TH 2025 BY DEE LOFLIN

Poplar Bluff R-I Kicks Off Next Long Range Plan with no-tax Increase Ballot Measure

Poplar Bluff Schools has an opportunity to expand its building capacity at Early Childhood, enhance safety district-wide and address deferred maintenance including the construction of a new bus garage, all at zero increased cost to taxpayers.

The R-I Board of Education voted to place a no-tax bond issue on the April 8 ballot, estimated to generate \$11.5 million. Board member Dr. Mike Price made the motion, which was seconded by Tim Gaebler and met with unanimous approval from Dr. Cynthia Brown, Ken Davis, Dave Elledge, Roger Hanner and Dr. Larry Kimbrow during a meeting Thursday, Jan. 16, in the Administrative Building.

“Due to the financial oversight and fiscal management of recent Boards of Education, the Poplar Bluff School District is able to offer this opportunity to our stakeholders,” stated Dr. Aaron Cornman, superintendent. “A no-tax levy measure, if passed, would allow us to service more preschool-aged students as well as improve the safety in all district facilities to continue to promote a secure learning environment, and focus on other priorities including ancillary services such as our Transportation Department.”

The 20-year general obligation bonds would be issued to extend the 18-cent debt service previously approved by voters in 2009 to construct the Kindergarten Center and perform extensive renovations at Junior High including electric, plumbing, and heating and air, recalled Maintenance Director Al Ursery. The district's operating levy is expected to remain unchanged at \$3.62 per \$100 of assessed valuation, which is lower than Cape Girardeau, Farmington, Jackson and Sikeston, and only 4 cents higher than Dexter, a neighboring district that serves less than half the student population, according to 2023 state reports.

"The last time you did this was in 2009, originally for almost \$5 million, and today you can net more than double, without raising your tax limit," Lorenzo Boyd, managing director for Stifel, Nicolaus & Company of St. Louis, informed the board last month. "I think this is a great opportunity."

With over 30 years of experience working with public schools, Boyd noted that Poplar Bluff has an A+ underlying credit rating and he typically does not see schools with a debt ceiling limit of \$83 million so far below their borrowing capacity, as dictated by the state. "Because of the fund structure, it's the best money for the least amount of cost to the taxpayers," added Charles Kinsey, R-I assistant superintendent of business.

Since the Kindergarten Center opened for the 2011/12 school year, over 300,000 square feet of academic space has been added across the district, significantly improving the learning environment for all students, grades preK-12. Phase two of Poplar Bluff's previous long-range plan was completed earlier than projected in 2020 – with the new state-of-the-art Early Childhood Center being paid out of district reserves, saving millions of dollars in interest, leaving space penciled in to expand on the Camp Road campus.

Currently, there are dozens of students on the waitlist at the Early Childhood Center, according to administrators. Considerations for safety enhancements across the district include a uniform electronic access system for doors, installation of bollards, vestibules, window security film, metal detectors and additional cameras. Lastly, the city deeded adjoining acreage to the district's bus garage over the summer, opening more options to develop the functionality of the Maud Street property.

While the April ballot issue focuses on the most pressing needs, the long-range plan will be designed to look ahead to the next decade, a process expected to wrap up in the fall. A larger citizens' advisory committee representing a diverse cross-section of patrons will meet next month to help guide the district in prioritizing future projects to focus on.

This past October, the BOE selected Dake Wells Architecture based in Springfield to produce R-I's next facilities master plan. A long-range planning committee comprised of community leaders and education officials began meeting in November after the professional planners completed walkthroughs of each school facility. "We can really improve some things by taking a few pieces away right now—or pruning—to make space for new construction," observed Matt Thornton of Dake Wells.

After soliciting needs from principals, the committee began its brainstorming process, identifying areas of congestion, campuses that could be made more cohesive, spaces that are not yet enclosed between buildings and other remaining projects not excluding finding the most cost-effective solution for the downtown property. Dille and Pollard are additionally designing a safe room for Eugene Field, pending final approval by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"You have to look at a 10-year plan as a living document that is not tied to any previous board or administration," said board representative Price, who served his first term on the BOE back when the previous bond issue was approved 16 years ago. "If you're not long-range planning, you're falling behind, and we have to keep the district moving forward alongside the community."###

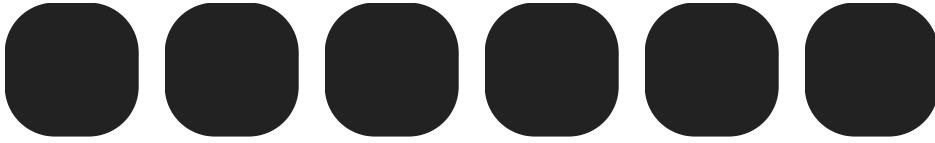
Pictured: The long-range planning committee brainstorms with Dake Wells Architecture during their third meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 8, in the Administrative Building.

Articles submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Seventeen Poplar Bluff band students earn All-District honors

DECEMBER 20TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Seventeen Poplar Bluff band students earn All-District honors

The Southeast Missouri All-District Band featured a dozen students from Poplar Bluff Schools on Saturday, Nov. 16, at Cape Central High School.

PBHS students who successfully auditioned against districts across the region earlier in the month at Jackson High School included Preston Ethridge, Claire Funke, RJ Hester, Jackson Kennedy, Jazlynn LeGrand, Mylee McClintock, William Montgomery, Aubrea Morrow, Ma'Kayla Oses-Arviso and Bethany Winters. Junior High students selected were Addyson Henson and Kaitlyn Hillis.

“Each student is required to learn and perform a difficult set of musical excerpts in front of a judge and their overall score is pitted against all other students who audition,” explained Stephen Winters, band director. “...They are placed in order by their audition score and then meet at Cape High School to learn an entire concert’s worth of music during one day’s rehearsal.”

Also during the audition held on Tuesday, Nov. 5, the following High School students were chosen to perform in the Southeast Missouri District Jazz Band: Ian Gholson, Brayden Keeling, Wyatt Lindsey, Logan Simpson and Isaac Stork. These students will have the opportunity to showcase their talents during the Jazz Festival on Thursday, Feb. 6, at Three Rivers College.

Kaitlyn Hillis (left) and Addyson Henson, both flute players, recently performed as members of the Southeast Missouri All-District Junior High Band.

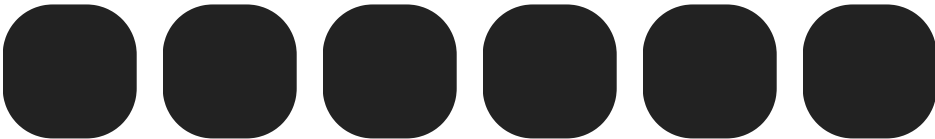
(From left) Ma'Kayla Oses-Arviso, William Montgomery, RJ Hester, Preston Ethridge, Mylee McClintock, Jackson Kennedy, Bethany Winters, Jazlynn LeGrand, Aubrea Morrow and Claire Funke performed as members of the All-District High School Band.

(Left to right) Logan Simpson, Ian Gholson, Brayden Keeling, Wyatt Lindsey and Isaac Stork are slated to perform with the All-District Jazz Band in February.

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First student in PBHS history to be Named to National FFA Band

SEPTEMBER 19TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

First student in PBHS history to be Named to National FFA Band

A student has been chosen to be a member of the National FFA Band for the first time in the history of Poplar Bluff High School since the local chapter of the leadership development organization was chartered in 2002, confirmed advisers of past and present.

PBHS sophomore Preston Ethridge has been selected to perform among 100 students across the United States, and six total in Missouri, to play trumpet Wednesday through Saturday, Oct. 23-26, during the 97th annual National FFA Convention & Expo in Indianapolis.

“There are over one million FFA members nationwide [representing] the largest youth organization in the world,” stated PBHS agriculture instructor Mike Melson, FFA adviser. “Out of a million members, they pick 100 of those who tryout to be chosen for the band. As a sophomore, that’s just crazy unheard of.”

Preston, a section leader for the Sho-Me Marching Band, will perform “and help bring full instrumental balance to the band” several times including at Lucas Oil Stadium, the Artsgarden and various special awards functions, according to a National FFA press release. To be considered, he submitted a video audition and application over the summer and was notified of his placement last month.

“He is a very hard worker and is a very reliable member of the band,” commented Junior and Senior High music teacher Stephen Winters, the band director, noting that Preston placed in the Southeast Missouri All-District Band last year as a freshman.

He will arrive in advance to rehearse and maintain a rigorous schedule while his fellow FFA chapter members attend breakout sessions and presentations at the convention with Melson and chaperone Branden Smith, who teaches another section of agriculture education. A total of eight PBHS students will attend the school-sponsored event out of 48 members, based on last year’s FFA involvement in activities and student fundraising.

“Anybody that can learn their music [sight unseen] with three days practice, that’s pretty intense,” Melson continued. “How many students do we have that are gonna get the opportunity to play in front of an audience of 70,000? It’s the best of the best.”

Above: Preston Ethridge receives multiple accolades during the annual FFA banquet held last school year at PBHS.

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Registrar Office Established Alongside New Student Information System

SEPTEMBER 05TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

Registrar Office Established Alongside New Student Information System

“Easier,” “more convenient,” “less time consuming” and “long overdue” were sentiments shared by parents over social media concerning the Poplar Bluff School District’s launch of its online enrollment process this school year.

The streamlined registration system was coupled with the creation of a new district office to assist families, housed in the former Mules Café area of the Administrative Building, approved by the Board of Education in March.

“This new role will address the growing need for accurate record-keeping and streamlined enrollment processes district-wide,” described the memo presented by Aaron Badgley, R-I chief technology officer. “This strategic position will

improve data integrity and ensure reporting compliance within our student information systems.”

Later in the spring, Taylor Russom was hired as the district’s very first registrar. Russom, a Poplar Bluff native, transferred internally from the Kindergarten Center, where she had been employed as secretary for the past few years, before which she served in the front office of the Middle School since 2017/18.

“I think one of my favorite parts of my job previously was the enrollment process,” said Russom, who started her new role in June after assisting Kindergarten with early registration on the new system. “I love that you’re meeting brand new people—you are welcoming them into the district. Every registration is completely different, so you don’t know what your day is going to look like or what you’re gonna encounter.”

When Russom began at the Kindergarten Center in 2020, parents and guardians were filling out several pages of paperwork by hand. With some of the information being redundant, Russom said she was able to consolidate the packet to only a few pages. However, caregivers with multiple students at different sites had to visit each building annually in order to verify any changes in demographical data.

“All the buildings did things a little bit differently, but ultimately [the data] is going to the same place, so it’s nice to have a uniformed process,” Russom explained. “Parents are the ones entering the information, so we’re no longer having to scour over the info as closely, when you were second-hand entering it from a sheet of paper, deciphering handwriting.”

Now families can take care of their enrollment or verification from the district website, including uploading copies of documentation such as birth certificates, immunization records and proof of residency, according to Russom. If assistance is needed, appointments may be booked online or over the phone, and generally take less than 15 minutes. For those without access, a public computer station and scanner are available in her office.

School leaders have discussed the increasing need for the position since 2022, but the decision was expedited when the district's SIS vendor informed its clients it had reached the end of its life cycle and would discontinue offering support. The BOE approved Infinite Campus the following year after a committee of 15

stakeholders vetted three proposals. The new platform went live district-wide this school year, including the enrollment component, after the Instructional Technology Department hosted a series of trainings for employee groups.

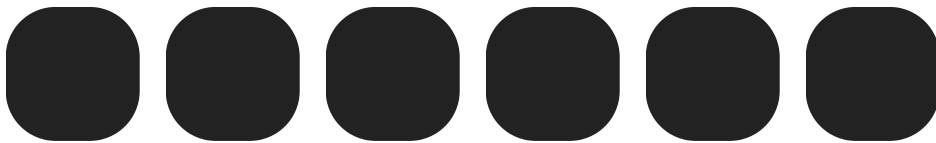
“Since we were also gonna be utilizing the online registration feature, it has become a lot easier for parents going to one location with one person to talk to,” Russom continued. “My communication with parents doesn’t just stop at new registration either. I’m happy to assist with Parent Portal as much as I can and troubleshoot any account issues they are having.”

To schedule an appointment with Russom at 1110 N. Westwood Blvd., click the enrollment icon at poplarbluffschoools.net or call 573-850-0850.

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2023 Puxico High School Retiring Homecoming

King and Queen Featuring Jera Backus and Cole Barnfield

FEBRUARY 12TH 2024 BY DEE LOFLIN

2023 Puxico High School Retiring Homecoming King and Queen Featuring Jera Backus and Cole Barnfield

The Puxico High School held their annual Homecoming Coronation.

The retiring 2023 Puxico High School Homecoming Queen is Jera Backus.

Jera is the daughter of Amy and Todd Backus.

Jera is currently aspiring for a career in Finance.

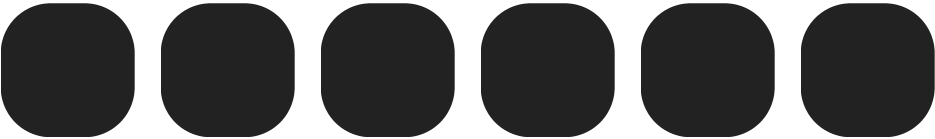
The 2023 Puxico High School retiring Homecoming King is Cole Barnfield. Cole is the son of Tracy and Chris Barnfield.

Cole is currently attending Southeast Missouri State University - Cape Girardeau and majoring in Cyber Security.

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