



# NEW SCHOOLS

Get the who, what, where, why  
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# THE ELYRIA SCHOOLS **Pioneer** **Press**

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## Career teacher is 'true to school'

**Amy Higgins**  
Communications director

Thirty years in the teaching business was just enough to wet Steve Warden's whistle.

Because after he got done teaching for three decades, he came back for a second helping — another two decades worth.

Warden spent a whopping five decades pouring knowledge into the minds of Elyria students.

If you walked around the city today, you'd stand a pretty good chance of running into one of his thousands of former students, or at least one of their parents or grandparents.

In a word, Steve Warden is a man of commitment. The only thing more enduring than his devotion to teaching is his devotion to family.

He and his wife, Libby, have been married 59 years. They sent their children through Elyria Schools, where they excelled in academics, athletics and music. They've also enjoyed plenty of moments with two of their five grandchildren in Elyria Schools.

Here's a quick rundown on Warden: He's got an easy way about him, with a quick laugh, a quick wit and a curious tendency to elongate his vowels, in an Old West sort of way. He sounds like a guy straight out of a John Wayne movie, in fact, or even like John Wayne himself.

Heck, he even looks a little like The Duke. He's tall with a friendly smile, and he exudes a comfortable confidence.

These characteristics, along with his expertise in curriculum and his teaching prowess, have made him something of a favorite among peers and students.

Warden sums it all up in a word: rapport.

"I love teaching," he said. "It's my passion. When I teach, I'll walk up and down the aisles and 'move in,' so to speak.

"I hope the students know I care and sense it," he said. "I talk with them and help them understand. But it's all about trust."

### Before and after

Warden's 50-year career in Elyria can be chunked in two chapters: Before retirement, and after retirement.

He came to Elyria Schools in 1966, accepting



AMY HIGGINS / ELYRIA SCHOOLS

Steve Warden poses with son Mike Warden at the Elyria Schools Endowment Board Golf Outing this year. Steve has taught for 50 years in Elyria Schools.

an English position at Jefferson Junior High School after a five-year stint teaching and coaching in North Carolina and at Midview school district.

Soon thereafter, he transferred to Eastern Heights Junior High and became a senior member of the English Department. Eastern Heights became his home — he spent a satisfying 27 years there until retiring in 1993.

But he wasn't ready to call it a day.

"I then started my second career with the Elyria Schools, as a substitute teacher, averaging over 100 days per year for 23 consecutive years," he said.

Warden is certified in history, government and English studies, but grammar is his forte. As a sub, he's been around the district at the middle and high school levels, although Elyria High is where he spent most

of his time since the opening of the new building.

In his dealings with students, he has learned the value of mutual respect and appreciating each student's unique circumstances and abilities. This relationship building continues to pay off.

"In my 23 years of subbing, I've had very few behavioral issues necessitating office referrals or parent-teacher conferences," he said. "I'm proud of that. This is where my special training in classroom management has really paid off."

Such success has kept him coming back.

"At the end of the day, I usually walk out of school with a very positive attitude and a bounce in my step," he said. "It's a real joy, a sense of fulfillment, to be able to positively

See **CAREER**, 8

## Keeping residents informed

**Tom Jama**  
Elyria Schools superintendent

This issue of Pioneer Press has been carefully developed in response to questions and comments from Elyria residents. Many of these residents have sought information about Elyria Schools and its upcoming bond issue. If approved by voters on Nov. 8, the bond would fund the construction of five new school buildings for students in preschool through eighth grade.

There's a story by Elyria High School Associate Principal Shane Newark, who tells us what it's like to work in the new Elyria High School.

There is an article by Ely Elementary Principal Jack Dibee, who explains the challenges of working in one of the oldest school buildings in the district.

There is a story by Elyria Schools Information Technology Director Brian Kokai, who is uniquely positioned to discuss the implications of school buildings old and new.

And there's an article by former Elyria Schools Superintendent Paul Rigda, who has helped Elyria Schools develop a master plan for a bond issue that could fund the construction of five new buildings for students in pre-K through



**Tom Jama**

See **JAMA**, 8



# New schools: The who, what, where, when

**Paul Rigda**

Master plan consultant

Every time I'm asked to explain something and make it more understandable, I like to approach it from a point readers can relate to: something that's already happened, and then go forward from there.

In planning for the future of Elyria Schools, I'll start with something from the recent past.

Residents who lived in Elyria in 2007 will remember the excitement surrounding the bond issue to rebuild Elyria High School.

And it's been the talk of the town ever since.

It's a sight to behold, Elyria High School — inside and out.

Architects from the Cleveland-based Architectural Vision Group, who designed the sprawling campus, have an eye for beauty and a reverence for history.

At every angle, the building replicates the peaks, arches and aesthetic nuances of the beloved century-old Washington Building — chartered in 1894 as the first high school west of the Alleghenies and notable as a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. The Washington Building was renovated during construction to its turn-of-the-century glory.

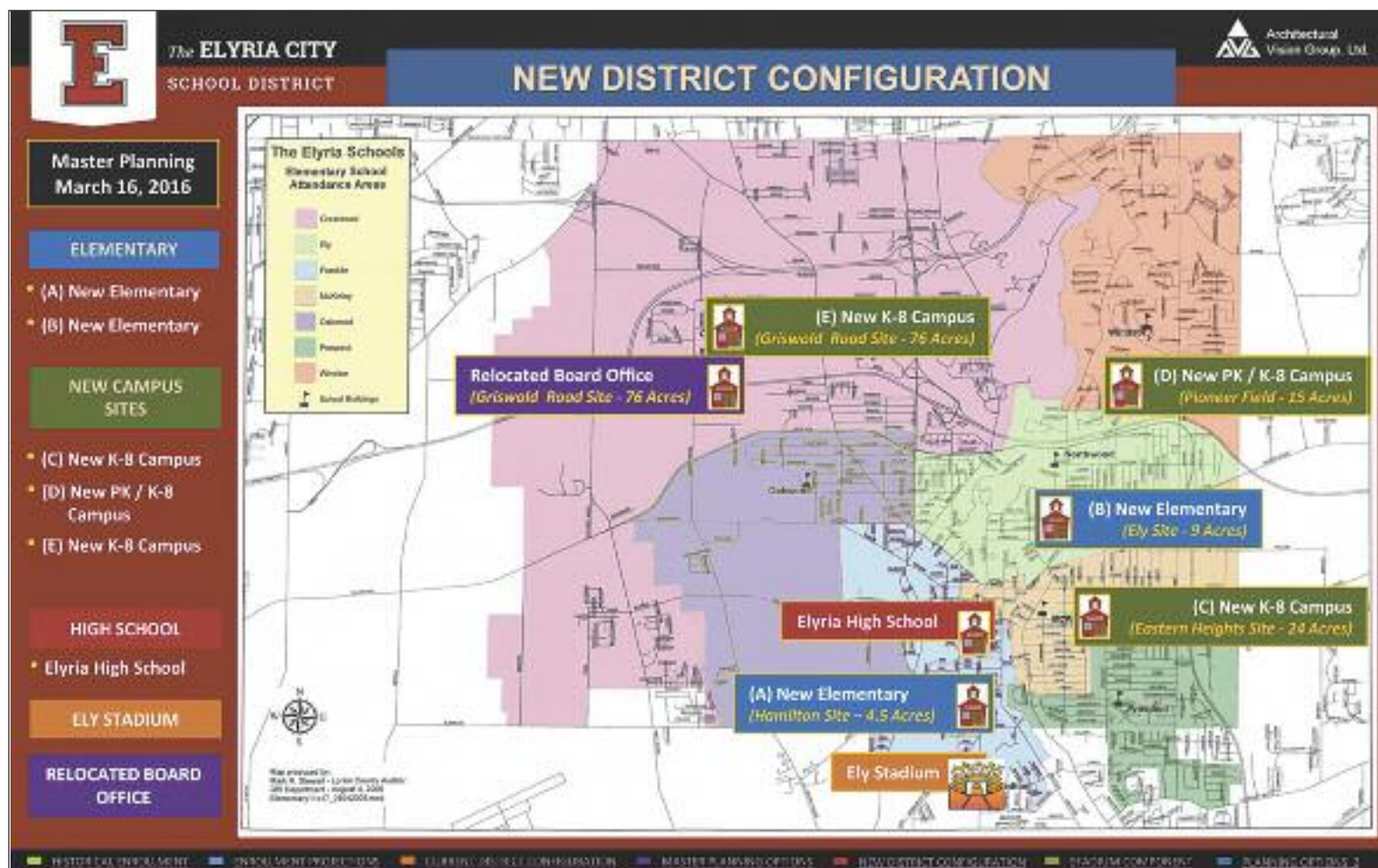
Inside the walls of Elyria High it's just as warm and welcoming, boasting of the modern necessities and conveniences of teaching and learning today.

With state-of-the-art technology for students, a climate-controlled environment, and plenty of space inside and out for learning, Elyria High School is an excellent model of a present-day educational environment.

It's a facility that speaks to the whole child — every child — offering space for core studies and advanced learning, research, therapy, and career and college preparation. And it's a place for exploration, expanding minds and talents in the arts, athletics and social and civic responsibility.

Just imagine: Students who were in preschool in 2007 are entering Elyria High this year as freshmen!

And now there's an opportunity to give new preschoolers and their schoolmates through eighth grade the same privilege high



ELYRIA SCHOOLS GRAPHIC



**Paul Rigda**

school students have enjoyed for nearly a decade. What compelled Elyria residents in 2007 to replace the existing high school? Age and condition of the facility, certainly, as well as an opportunity to rebuild it with a large discount.

## OSFC: Project partner

Knowing Elyria High School was in dire need of replacement, the school board petitioned state legislators in 2005 to review an old law that kept Elyria out of the pool of districts eligible for state funding based on the city's poverty value. Elyria wasn't within the "50th percentile" stated in the law, and so Elyria Schools didn't qualify to receive state funding to rebuild its schools.

We invited state legislators and officials from the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) to

visit Elyria High School and see the facility firsthand.

One cold, blustery winter day in 2005, they visited. And they left with an opinion of Elyria High School as "the building in the worst condition in Ohio."

They then changed a law that had kept Elyria and districts in similar straits out of contention for funding.

With the passage of the bond issue in 2007, the district and the OSFC became partners in school construction and rebuilt Elyria High School as the first step in Elyria's master plan project. Then, the state paid 39 percent of the project costs and residents paid 61 percent.

The OSFC has returned to replace the aging, deteriorating elementary and middle schools throughout the city with a funding deal that swings even more in residents' favor.

The state will pay 67 percent, or \$80 million, toward the cost of new preK-8 schools if voters approve their share at 33 percent. That's essentially a "buy

one building, get two free" scenario.

## Urban reality

Urban school districts across the state are much smaller than they used to be, and Elyria is no exception.

When I began my career with Elyria Schools in 1977, there were about 14,000 students. Today, enrollment is a little more than 6,000 students and heading for about 5,500 students in the next five years.

The Board of Education assigned the task of planning for a "right-sized rebuild" to a committee called the Master Plan Committee. The committee was comprised of a board member, superintendent, treasurer, several cabinet members, architects, and a building principal.

Further, a sub-committee of residents and district staff members took up the task of studying the prospects of replacing Ely Stadium as part of the master plan project.

Surveys conducted by a third-

party consultant found voters agreed the stadium was outdated, out of compliance and in need of replacement.

So the task of the master plan committee was to take information like this, along with data on student enrollment, geographical studies and historical information and decide: What does a right-sized school district in Elyria look like?

The planning committee worked diligently from October 2015 to March 2016, looking at where the school district already owned property where schools could be built.

They studied where students currently live, using GPS software, and plotted where the largest clusters of families resided. The committee had to determine where the district properties were located in relation to where families were living.

Initially, eight sites were targeted as ideal. Early in the process, the plan called for five elementary schools, down from





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Ely Elementary relies on three large, antiquated boilers to heat the three story building. The other elementary and middle schools in the district have outdated, inefficient heating and ventilation equipment, too.

the current eight schools, which includes preschool.

Elyria's size and lay of the land, with natural divisions like the river and manmade divisions like highways, necessitate three middle schools to serve children on all sides of town and the township.

### Campus living

In researching how other school districts have designed for growing or shrinking enrollments, the committee discovered great educational value and financial savings in building multi-grade campuses wherever possible.

While new to Elyria, campuses with a multi-grade configuration are relatively commonplace in school construction today. They serve a range of ages, yes, but in ways that keep students completely separated by age-appropriate divisions like wings.

There are separate entrances and drop-off points for the elementary students within the campus and instructional areas that are their own, completely

separated from the middle school students. There are separate main offices, too.

A campus configuration offers inherent savings through design. For example, only one heating, air conditioning, water and electrical plant is needed to power a whole building.

A single kitchen can service both wings of the building separately for day-to-day breakfasts and lunches, or open up to offer a large combined space or meeting area for evening programs.

With this model, the committee was able to recommend five sites instead of eight, presenting the community with a huge savings of operating costs yet still providing 21st century learning. The concept was presented to the Board of Education and the Ohio Schools Facilities Commission and was accepted by both.

The new master plan calls for:

1. A campus housing K-8 to be built on the current Eastern Heights property.
2. A campus housing K-8 to be built on the current Elyria West/Administration site.

3. A campus housing Pre-K-8 to be built on the current soccer field site located on Abbe Road just north of the fire station and Hilliard Road.

4. A K-4 elementary school to be built on the current Ely School site.

5. A K-4 elementary school to be built on the Hamilton School site, which is between 12th and 13th streets and between Middle Avenue and West Avenue.

The current Administration Building (former Elyria West High School) will be demolished, making way for the new K-8 campus, and the Administration Building staff will move to Westwood Middle School upon the completion of the K-8 campus.

Westwood was the most cost-effective building to house the Central Office for the Board of Education.

One might ask, "Why not just fix up the current buildings?"

A logical question, for sure, but there are several reasons for not renovating the current buildings.

The newest building is 45 years old and the oldest is nearly 100 years old. A separate study conducted by the state sought to determine if the current buildings should be renovated instead of rebuilt, but their findings said no.

In studying the ADA compliance, plumbing, floors, doors, security systems, roofing, electrical (all electric older than 35 years must be completely replaced, for example), ventilation, life safety and many other expensive areas, it's not only more cost efficient to replace the structures, but it gives us modern, safe, efficient buildings to operate for many years to come.

Going from 11 to five sites for preK-8 facilities, eliminates 200,000 square feet of space—space that doesn't have to be heated, treated or maintained.

Such changes would save the district on operational and maintenance costs.



AMY HIGGINS

## Community engagement events

In the weeks ahead, Elyria residents will have plenty of opportunities to dig deep into a topic that has been front and center for Elyria Schools.

Ever since Elyria High School was built, the school district's leaders have been discussing the needs of the elementary and middle schools — primarily as it relates to campuses and technology.

Throughout the month of August, Elyria Schools Superintendent Tom Jama is hosting community sessions where residents meet with him one-on-one to ask questions about a proposed master plan for new school buildings for students in preschool through eighth grade.

Jama starts each session with a presentation on the master plan, providing residents a comprehensive overview of the proposal.

After the start of the school year, district administrators will also offer residents opportunities to tour the buildings — elementary and middle schools and the high school.

These tour dates and locations will be announced on the Elyria city school district website, [www.elyriaschools.org](http://www.elyriaschools.org). (Look for the tab on the home page labeled "Facilities Master Plan.")

Here are the remaining community engagement dates and locations for August, where residents can meet with Superintendent Tom Jama, as well as other members of the master plan committee:

■ Thursday, Aug. 11, 6 to 7 p.m. at Community United Methodist Church, 680 N. Abbe Road.

■ Tuesday, Aug. 23, 6 to 7 p.m. at Eastern Heights Middle School, 528 Garford Ave.

*Amy Higgins is communications director at Elyria Schools.*



# Master plan for new pre-K-8 schools: FAQ

Q1

**What's included in the building plan?**

The building plan will have five new facilities for pre-K through eighth-grade learners: one building for pre-K through eighth-grade; two buildings for kindergarten through eighth grade; and two buildings for kindergarten through fourth grade. The plan also will include a new football stadium to replace the deteriorating Ely Stadium and funds to demolish older schools so that the land can be sold for other purposes.

Q2

**Will the state money still be there if we wait until some later date to approve this issue?**

The state will pay 67 percent of the cost of our new schools, but only if voters approve a bond issue to pay for the local share of the building project. Voters have a limited window to vote for the bond, only 13 months. That means the schools must place this issue on the November ballot for voter approval.

Q3

**Can't we just renovate the buildings we have now?**

We could, but the state of Ohio won't contribute any money if we do. They have reviewed our buildings and determined the cost to renovate them is more than two-thirds the cost to replace them with new buildings so they recommend replacement. Further, our current schools have classrooms that are too small by today's educational standards and they are ill-equipped to handle today's technology needs. It would be very difficult, if not impossible to make the renovations necessary to make them conducive to education.

Q4

**How will new buildings save the district money?**

We are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars every year trying to keep up with decades-old buildings. New buildings will mean new roofs, new electrical systems, new fire suppression systems and new security systems. The new buildings will contain new fixtures that won't cost residents so much money to maintain. Further, by reducing our number of schools from 11 to five, we will be able to significantly reduce operating costs.

Q5

**What will happen with the buildings and pieces of property where there will no longer be school buildings?**

Once the new buildings are complete, the old build-



Parts of Ely Elementary's basement are unusable because of water damage.

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ings will be demolished. The state will pay 67 percent of the cost to tear them down. We will work closely with the city and with community members to find the best, most desirable future use for the land.

Q6

**Why was my neighborhood school chosen to be eliminated?**

Just as education is changing, so are our enrollment patterns. It's no longer efficient and effective to operate 11 elementary and middle schools across the city. With this bond issue, we can have five brand-new, state-of-the-art schools that are the right size for the city.

Q7

**What does this construction project mean for our local economy?**

This bond issue and construction project is Elyria's best opportunity to improve education, revitalize our economy and help put people to work. We expect a number of Elyria residents will be involved in the construction of the new schools.

Q8

**Where will students be going to school while construction is being completed?**

The new schools will be constructed on existing sites alongside buildings that are in operation, and on some sites where

students currently do not attend school. This will allow us to keep our current schools open until the new sites are completed. We do not anticipate a need for "swing" or alternate sites while the new buildings are under construction.

Q9

**How much is this going to cost?**

The issue will cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$11 per month. It brings \$79.9 million back to Elyria from the state.

Q10

**The schools don't look that bad. Is this really needed?**

Our schools may look OK from the outside, but inside, they are not the secure, safe and inviting spaces our kids need to succeed. We face serious, expensive building problems every day, such as outdated electrical systems, old boilers and heating systems and leaking roofs. While clean and well-maintained, they are simply beyond simple repairs. These problems, and many more, cost millions and repairs are a series of ongoing patches rather than long-term solutions. Most importantly, they hurt education.

Q11

**What is the district doing to make sure the buildings will be "green" or environmentally friendly?**

The Ohio School Facilities Commission requires any buildings that are funded by them to meet the "silver standard" for their Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system. This system includes standards on heating and cooling, recycled materials and green construction practices. We will need to meet these standards to acquire Ohio School Facilities Commission funding. In addition to these requirements, other energy-saving options may be explored during the planning stages.

Q12

**I don't have children in the district. How would new schools affect me?**

This will benefit every resident, whether they currently have children in our schools or not. Five new schools will immediately make homes more marketable and valuable to prospective residents. Moreover, this project will put Elyria residents to work and help local businesses. This will improve our economy and has the potential to help all of us.

Q13

**Can any of this money be used for salaries?**

No. By law, this money is only permitted for building new schools and removing the former elementary and middle school buildings.



# Modern schools are launchpads for technology innovation, savings

## Brian Kokai

Director of technology operations

As the head of technology for the Elyria schools, it's impossible not to be excited about how new building construction would launch technology innovation in the district.

It presents an opportunity to create a modern educational environment that lets us operate more efficiently and redirect resources directly into instruction.

The existing buildings that serve preschool through eighth grade have been renovated to the hilt to accommodate modern technology.

Computer techs have done an excellent job converting chalkboards into mounts for interactive whiteboards, draping cables from the ceilings for projectors, decorating walls with electrical conduit to power everything, and squeezing mission-critical network equipment into custodial washrooms.

They've made due, and found ways to equip classrooms with today's technology. But as it stands now, the infrastructure is not there if we want to take our classrooms and curriculum into the future.



Brian Kokai

Elyria High School is an excellent example of the opportunities a new building can provide: Dedicated spaces for technology equipment; necessary cooling systems to extend

equipment life; easy access to power and cabling; and flexible classroom design.

Technicians are able to do installations and repairs three to four times faster at EHS, helping us operate more efficiently and saving on the largest technology expense: labor.

New building construction would also help "right-size" the buildings and consolidate operations.

No matter the size of the building, there are systems and equipment that are necessary for operations like phones, security systems and network access. By consolidating from 11 to five facilities as planned, we can permanently cut down on the total number of devices that need to be purchased and maintained.

From a technology operations perspective, that's less money



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The district has seen demand for classroom technology explode in recent years and every student and classroom throughout the district enjoying access to computers, Smartboards and the latest education software. The need for technology in schools continues to climb.

needed for equipment replacements. It also means we could increase our focus and care on

critical items.

It's important for the IT department to operate as efficiently as possible, not only to remain good stewards of taxpayer money, but to meet the ever-growing support demands of teachers and students.

Educational technology is exploding.

More than a decade ago, Elyria Schools had about one computer for every four students, or what amounted to about 1,500 computers districtwide.

Today, the district supports one device (tablet/computer/projector/interactive whiteboard) per student — or 7,400, at last count.

Over the next decade, we can expect that demand to more than double. The existing pre-K-8 buildings can't handle that kind of workload, and students would be at a technological disadvantage compared to surrounding districts.

Technology in new school construction goes beyond computers, tablets, smart boards and the like.

Let's take desks as an example.

New desks can convert from a sitting to a standing position, giving students an option to physically position themselves in a way that's most conducive to their learning. Meanwhile, these desks can be outfitted with power adapters and outlets that meet the multifaceted needs of today's technological world.

Another example: Whiteboards.

These have taken the place of chalkboards. Whiteboards can incorporate interactive displays that can be raised and lowered to be at the perfect height for each user, while also accommodating those with disabilities.

These things may sound like frills, but they are what classroom technology designers and programmers are already building for new classrooms today and into the future.

This year, Elyria Schools is setting up a classroom of the future to give teachers, students, parents and residents a look at what's in store for students in the years ahead.



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District computer technicians find ways to convert old classrooms for modern needs but the solutions are not long-term.



# Elyria High: Source of pride, opportunity

**Shane Newark**  
Elyria High School  
associate principal

When school begins on Aug. 17 it will mark the seventh year that the “new” Elyria High School will be open to students. This beautiful gift from the community looks as marvelous today as it did on that first opening day in 2010. Our students take great pride in our building and everything it has to offer.

It is our duty as educators to prepare students for jobs in the future using 21st century skills so they can compete in a global job market.

Elyria High School is equipped with nine computer labs, updated with modern software to assist students and teachers. The school also offers mobile computer carts that take advantage of the school's Wi-Fi capabilities.

It's a common sight to walk the halls and see art teachers and computer-based instructors working collaboratively to help students to use technology in their work.

In Elyria High's science classrooms, students work in labs conducting real-life simulations using many of the same tools they would use on the job.

Experiences like these weren't possible in the old high school because the facility was outdated and classroom settings like science labs were in small, antiquated quarters that couldn't be updated for the modern needs of the science department.

In the new high school, each classroom is equipped with a Smart board, which helps teachers enhance their lessons and engages students while learning through technology.

As society changes so do our students' needs. We always strive to structure classes that meet the needs of our students and prepare them for college and the workforce. It's much easier to do so in buildings like Elyria High School, which are designed for advancement.

Elyria High School has a rich history in arts and athletics and the new facility is designed to carry on that tradition.

The beautiful Performing Arts Center is a popular destination with a wide array of activities scheduled throughout the year. Its



**Newark**

Orchestra, for example.

While watching a performance, guests may notice the young folks controlling the curtains, directing cues and running the highly technical audio/visual systems. They are Elyria High School students and they are only crew with training and permission to operate the intricate theater controls in this state-of-the-art facility.

From the arts to athletics, Elyria High School's 2,000-seat gymnasium was designed to put fans close to the action. Guests and players are in awe when they attend a game and see all that Elyria High has to offer athletes and sports enthusiasts. With a second gymnasium, well-equipped weight room, sports therapy area, wrestling room, and modern, comfortable and secure locker facilities, athletes stay engaged and there's less need for late-night practices or traveling to other facilities.

Elyria High School was designed with a priority on safety. All doors on campus are electronically locked so people cannot walk in unnoticed. During the school day, all visitors must check in first at one of the campus offices. Cameras and intercoms allow the staff to see and question visitors at the door before they are permitted to enter. Once inside, the building has more than 180 cameras that monitor movement in the building.

One of the hidden amenities of Elyria High is the stable geothermal HVAC system that normalizes the temperature levels in the classroom throughout the changing seasons.

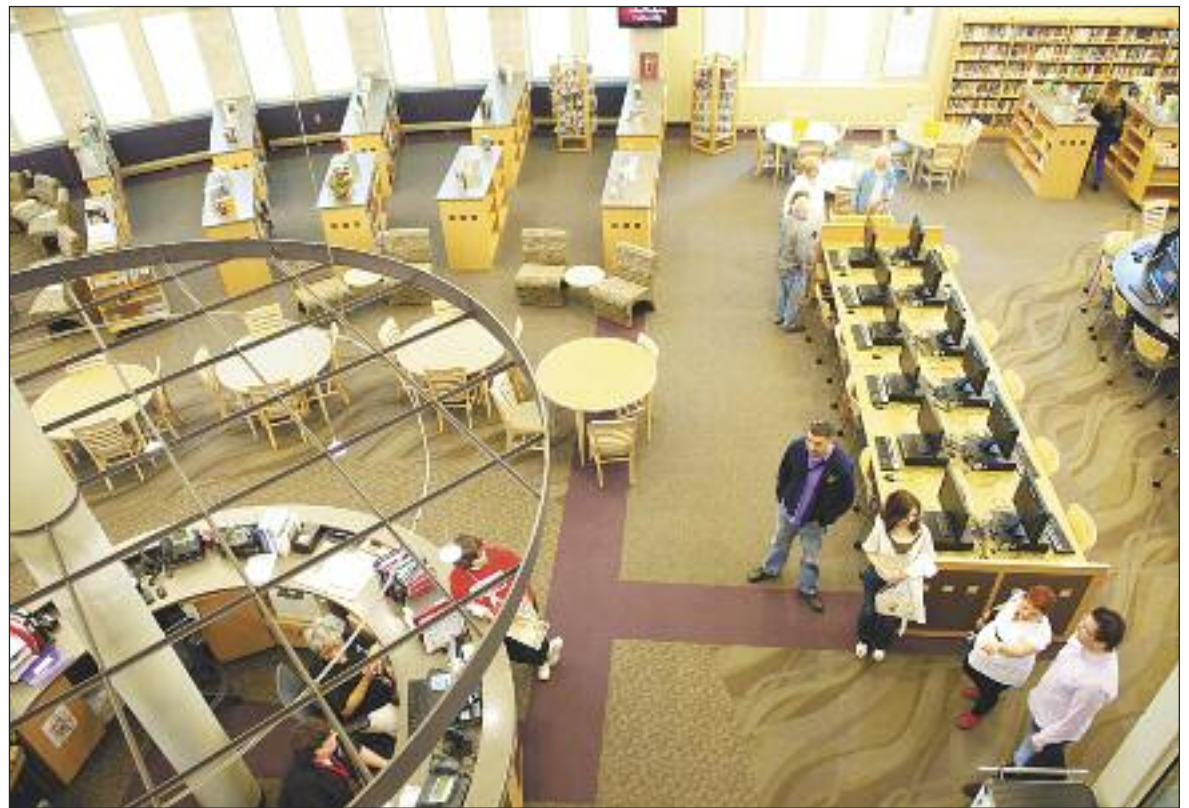
Gone are the days when students sat dripping of sweat in the classrooms, distracted by the heat and the whirling fans as teachers and custodial crews tried unsuccessfully to cool the stifling rooms. The winter months brought different temperature-control challenges as old radiators sputtered and struggled to keep the building

state-of-the-art design attracts even the most professional of performers: dance companies, theater groups, and world-renowned entertainers like The Glenn Miller



JASON MILLER / ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** The Elyria High School campus is a source of pride for students and community members. **BELOW:** New school facilities offer plenty of room for research and computer work. This is an example of a modern media center at Elyria High School.



warm. Not only does the current HVAC make the building more comfortable, it is more energy-efficient and cost-effective.

This extraordinary building has

helped shape the academic, artistic and athletic achievements of our students and will continue to do so for generations to come.

New facilities throughout the

district will give elementary and middle school students the same opportunities afforded to those in high school, further securing their education in Elyria.



# A witness to history

## Ely Elementary has stood for nearly a century

**Jack Dibee**

Ely Elementary principal

At the corner of Gulf Road and Ohio Street stands Ely Elementary School, a landmark structure built in 1921, when Warren G. Harding was still president.

It's an institution that has seen 17 presidents, in fact, and has stood tall as its students bore witness to the countless pivotal moments of 20th century history: The Great Depression. The Second World War. The Korean War. Vietnam. The automotive industry. Space exploration. The Information Age. And so on.

Tens of thousands of students have walked the halls of this three-story structure, but as the years passed, the world outside has become ever so complex.

Much has changed since 1921. Ely is still standing, of course, but it is no longer suitable for the demands of a 21st century education.

Just think about it: When engineers were drawing up plans for Ely Elementary, the conveniences of today had yet to be invented. There was no Internet, no cable TV, no computers, no microwaves, no cell phones.

Things are much different today. Schools are designed with technology, safety and efficiency top of mind. Planners are focused on creating school environments that are, above all else, conducive to learning.

### Accessibility

Ely School was built on three levels. To this day, there is no way into the building without going up at least half a flight of stairs. And it has a lot of stairs — 323 steps, to be exact!

In newer buildings, schools have handicap accessibility. Ely does not.

When a student has a broken leg, for example, we have to make special arrangements to get the student into the building and into a classroom.



**Jack Dibee** **Temperature**

Newer buildings have thermostats that can be set to adjust the heat or the air conditioning, with vents safely placed in rooms and hallways.

At Ely and other school buildings of the same age, large radiators in the classrooms and hallways are hot to the touch. The boilers go on and off.

We can't effectively regulate temperature in classrooms, other than turning the heat up or down when the adjustable parts work. There's no central air, nor any type of air conditioning in the classrooms.

Needless to say, the heat and the cold sometimes affect our students' ability to learn.

### Design space

When Ely School was built in 1921, it was built for the type of general education that students received back then.

There was no thought to certain programs because they didn't exist yet. Special education, Title 1 reading, speech instruction and counseling, for example, are services offered only in recent times.

Even now we still have to use closets, converted old locker rooms and other makeshift locations to provide some of these services.

### Meals

In the old days, kids walked home for lunch or brought a lunch to school. These days, we feed more than 400 kids a day at the school, but without a kitchen we have to have food trucked in each day from the high school.

And every day, we also provide students with a breakfast. But this meal, too, needs to be carried up the stairs and delivered to classrooms.

Our gym serves as a cafeteria, meanwhile, which means that for two hours a day we can't schedule gym classes.

Students with disabilities are sent to other schools in the district, where accessibility is not an issue.



ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS

**ABOVE:** Water has infiltrated Ely's basement, causing the concrete to crumble.

**BELOW:** Wood floors in Ely's classrooms are uneven and deteriorated from water leaks and age.



### Technology

Probably one of the biggest challenges has been technology.

Old school buildings were not wired for technology. (Again, computers didn't even exist when Ely was built).

We now have wires running all over the building and throughout classrooms as we provide Wi-Fi and Internet capabilities to all our students and teachers.

While we have been able to

provide these instructional necessities in today's day and age, it hasn't been easy. Each time a new technology is invented, we have to find new and creative ways to retrofit the building to make it work.

Make no mistake about it: Ely School has done a great job of educating the students of Elyria for the last 95 years.

And while I'm speaking for Ely in this column, I can confidently

tell you that the situation is identical at McKinley School, where the years also have taken their toll on the building.

All of Elyria's elementary and middle schools battle similar age-related problems. And while Elyria Schools has a top-notch staff that has risen to meet any challenges, year after year. Aging school buildings have proven to be one of the biggest challenges of all.



# Plan underway to rebuild aging stadium

**Heather Beck**  
Athletic director

For nearly a century, Ely Stadium has been a hub of activity for sports and community events in Elyria. But with age has come serious deterioration and limitations to the student athletic program.

The stadium seating home-side is more than 90 years old and in precarious condition. In our Northeast Ohio weather and with thousands of visitors every year, routine maintenance can only do so much.

The home locker rooms are musty and show years of water damage. The lockers are bent and can't be closed securely. Paint on the walls, lockers, ceiling and floors continually peels and chips because of condensation and pooling water. Water wreaks havoc on the infrastructure of the support beams, leaking to the old wood ceilings and cement floors below. It leaks into storage areas, too, so freshly laundered uniforms, for instance, and equipment must remain in protective bags and containers.



**Beck**

The restroom facilities for our athletes and for fans are deplorable and offer no privacy. Coaches' rooms and therapy areas for athletes are cramped, mildewed and difficult to maneuver, particularly for athletes who are hurt.

The facility is only ADA compliant on



**LEFT:** The infrastructure of the Ely Stadium home stand is more than 90 years old and is deteriorating.

**ABOVE RIGHT:** Home locker rooms are water damaged from deteriorating structure and offer unacceptable restroom facilities for athletes and coaches. **RIGHT:** Water seeps through the concrete in the training room.

the visitor's side, so if our supporters with disabilities want to attend an event, they must remain on the stadium's visitor's side.

The training room is such a confined space that the athletic trainer can't properly attend to the needs of players and must see them in waves. The space is cooled by a small window air-conditioning unit that offers little relief during summer conditioning in August and September, when our student athletes are work-

ing hard and doing two-a-days to prepare for the season.

Our fans and visitors from other school districts have expressed that our students and community ought to have better — proper locker room facilities, restrooms, and training and workout facilities. The opportunity to address the stadium needs, and most importantly, the needs of all of our elementary and middle school facilities is here.



ELYRIA SCHOOLS PHOTOS



## CAREER

From 1

impact young lives for so many years. I am a better person because of my years with the Elyria city schools.

"Often I can see the results right away," he said. "I see kids on the street and they'll say, 'Remember when, Mr. Warden?' And you know you were the inspiration or hope on a certain day when they were facing a (difficult) situation."

### Tempus fugit

A self-proclaimed "glass-is-half-full" kind of guy, Warden still scratches his head at how fast time flies.

"Fifty years is mindboggling to me," he said.

In that time, he learned what it takes to build a great educational environment, both on a personal level in the classroom and on a larger level, district wide.

First and foremost, it takes people.

"So many people — fellow teachers at EHS and in the middle schools," he said. "They've been wonderful to work with and they made me feel really good in

what I've been able to accomplish."

Elyria Schools is unique, of course, in that its student body is about as diverse as it comes. It has long been one of the greatest attributes of the district, something of a cultural and socioeconomic melting pot.

"It's mindboggling, the talents and skills that so many of the kids have at EHS," he said. "We have children of hard-working middle class, and many children of professional people."

In the end, Elyria and its teachers help provide wonderful opportunities to each and every student, he said.

But it takes resources. Nowhere is that clearer, perhaps, than at EHS.

"It's huge," Warden said of the new school. "With the tech explosion, we have the tools and hardware and software, endless possibilities, for instruction. It's very complex — it takes know-how and training."

Warden remembers what it was like to substitute teach at the old high school.

"I remember when the water was coming in, the windows wouldn't work, the lighting was atrocious," he said. "It was fine generations ago, but it wasn't good

enough."

These days, the kids are computer-savvy and resourceful, he said, and they need the right tools to get the job done.

"Old schools aren't good enough," Warden said. "You have to teach the skills necessary (and) you have to have the proper facility to do it.

A great example: computer labs.

"They're fabulous at Elyria High, and they're necessary," he said. "With everything — from the physical education facilities to the music facilities — there is nothing there at the high school that's frivolous.

"It's a top-notch facility," he said. "You walk into EHS and you get a welcoming feeling. You feel like it's first-class."

Technological advancements in the world — in education, at home, in the workplace — have brought facilities top of mind in districts throughout the country, at every grade level.

"The facilities offer new teaching aides and devices," Warden said. "Kids learn so much more efficiently and effectively. It's hard to learn an old facility.

"Who can learn or focus if you have an old, dilapidated environment?"

## JAMA

From 1

eighth grade.

The state of Ohio has agreed to give Elyria Schools about \$80 million to fund the construction of these school buildings, covering about 67 percent of the total project cost for the new schools.

The bond issue also includes a funding element for a new stadium, which would replace the deteriorating Ely Stadium. This issue of Pioneer Press also includes an article by Athletic Director Heather Beck on the current conditions at Ely Stadium.

All told, the bond issue would cost the owner of a \$100,000 home about \$11 a month. The median home value in Elyria is \$88,000, according to the Lorain County Auditor, which would put the bond cost at less than \$10 a month in this respect.

It's an important time for Elyria Schools and the residents of Elyria.

One of my biggest priorities as superintendent of Elyria Schools has been transparency and open communication with residents. This issue of Pioneer Press is another important component in this, as it aims to provide the information that residents are seeking.