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WEST LIFE

OUR VIEW

Keeping a strong foundation

We're fortunate in the Westshore to have several of Northern Ohio's most successful school districts academically, as witnessed by all of them doing well in the state report grades issued annually.

All of these districts have strong educational programs in place which help the educational instructors and students obtain the high rankings from the state and various other academic measures both locally and nationally. They also have strong support systems from the parents of their students plus interested people and institutions in their communities which are also vital to the success of their students and staff.

However, another area which plays a role in the success of a district is the actual physical facilities. The proper facilities help make any activity go easier. Whether it's academic, extracurricular or even work-related, having up-to-date physical facilities and equipment makes any environment more conducive to a better performance.

Four of the public school districts we cover — Bay Village, Fairview Park, Lakewood and Rocky River — have all made or are continuing further improvements to the academic buildings within their borders in the last few years. Each of those districts has made improvements to their physical facilities which provide strong additional resources in addition to the strong learning programs already in place. The school districts, their communities and city residents will benefit from these new facilities for many years to come.

Our other two districts, North Olmsted and Westlake, both will be facing facilities questions in the coming months which they will have to

try and answer with the help of their communities.

In North Olmsted's case, the major question for the district remains the middle school. With a primary building that is several decades old and several additions which have been made to it without a lot of planning or thought as to how they would fit, the school system was left with a structure that cannot meet the ever growing needs of educating students in the 21st century.

As recently as last year, we received unwelcome reminders about the middle school in the form of two incidents which required students to be evacuated and sent home. Although some of those problems originated within the utility company's realm, it still sent a very strong signal that something needs to be done to get the middle school students a proper facility before something else much more serious happens.

Many people can remember the fire at North Olmsted High School in the 1990s which made the I-X Center a temporary high school for several months. The district and its community need to find a way to get a new proper middle school in place.

In Westlake, the district and its community also are facing decisions about what to do about aging physical facilities. The 20/20 Vision Committee recently submitted its recommendations to the school board for consideration.

Both options outlined by the panel include building a new high school, a new intermediate school, new elementary schools and adding on to the middle school. The proposed plans differ in how they handle the elementary grades and how they configured within the district. The district now faces the task of communicating this need to the community's voters.

Officials and citizens in both cities will need to consider all of these questions closely to make sure that they help keep the foundation strong so that their educational excellence can continue for many years to come.