

‘All the money is for the kids’

By RACHEL COLEMAN

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A rumor that the USD No. 480 bond issue slated for an April 8 vote will include posh new Central Office facilities for administrators is completely false.

“I don’t know where that idea came from,” said USD 480 Auxiliary Services Director Robert Burkey. “There will be nothing in the bond for any administrative offices.”

No new Central Office for administrators and directors?



“No,” Burkey said. “The plan was designed by a group of citizens, and it focuses only on schools for students. Not offices.”

No fancy renovations to existing buildings?

“No,” Burkey said.

The plan proposed by the citizens’ “Focus” group does include vacating some of the district’s current buildings and assigning them new purposes, but no bond money will be used for the Central Office.

What, then, is the plan for administrative offices? Will the Central Office be moved?

Probably, Burkey explained.

“We talked about it earlier, at a school board meeting, and there was a story in the paper, but I guess some people didn’t catch what was suggested,” Burkey said. “What our realtors are telling us is that the current site of the Central Office, because it’s on Main Street (Kansas Avenue), has value. So does the Education Service Center (located at 624 N. Grant Ave.). Those buildings could be sold, because their location and design makes them attractive to buyers.”

If the district succeeded in selling those buildings, Burkey said, Central Office and ESC would be combined into one location, a move that makes sense in terms of everyday business, public access and overall cost. Money from the sale of those buildings would then be used to cover the cost of setting up the offices elsewhere.

Where would these combined offices for directors and superintendent of schools be located?

“Probably McKinley Elementary,” Burkey said. “It makes sense because McKinley is centrally located in terms of the whole district. It’s big enough as it is for all those offices. — we wouldn’t have to add on. And it already has fiber hardwired to all the buildings in the district.”

Burkey explained that the district's own computer network connects all schools and facilities. With that technological infrastructure already in place at McKinley, "it would save a lot of work and expense."

Constructed in 1934, McKinley Elementary is one of the oldest buildings in the district. Wouldn't even modest renovations be disproportionately costly?

"We've looked at it, and we wouldn't have to do that much," Burkey said. "It had some upgrades in 1953 and 1967, and we've done other work to maintain it. When you think about it, we'd be putting less strain on that building, because you'd actually have less people using it. Maybe 40 staff, as opposed to 200 kids. That's a lot less pressure on everything."

Some observers might wonder if McKinley, with its low-profile hallways and tiled floors, would be a step down for the administrators who currently occupy an official-looking brick building with an imposing front entrance facing Kansas Avenue. Burkey dismissed the question of ego-stroking office facilities.

"Come look at my office now," he said. "It's not fancy. None of them are."

Directors who work out of the Central Office are rarely at their desks anyway, Burkey said.

"We service the buildings. We're attached to various schools, and everyone here is out and about most of the time."

The benefit of moving the offices to McKinley would be twofold, he said. The district would find a legitimate use for a building no longer servicing as a school, "and we'd get all admin in one place. We don't care what the offices look like. We want to get everything under one roof."

That, he added, isn't even the most important consideration at stake.

“The priority for this issue, for the bond, is the students,” Burkey said. “All the money is going to the kids.”