

Why is RSU 9 asking the voters to approve the purchase of the Holman Mission House?

By Superintendent of Schools, Christian M. Elkington

The purchase of the Holman Mission House, using federal ESSER funds, allows Mt. Blue Regional School District (RSU 9) to free up space presently used by the RSU 9 District Office to expand critical student programming at Mt. Blue Campus (MBC). Over the last decade, Foster Career & Technical Center (FTC) has added important programs and needs to now increase its focus on outreach and programming (apprenticeships & pre-apprenticeships) to help increase student success after high school and to business and community sustainability. FTC space has been stretched to its limits and supporting increased programming requires more space. Mt. Blue High School has also added individual programs for students and is working to meet the needs of our expanding Alternative Education and Special Education programming, which require more space for individualized student needs. Lastly, if MBC goes into lock down, the District Office can be cut off from law enforcement and other outside agencies, as cell phone connectivity issues could leave the district vulnerable at a critical time. Meeting both ongoing MBC needs for student-centered space along with improving district safety makes moving the RSU 9 District Office imperative.

There has been a long-held goal for the District Office to be in a permanent location. RSU 9 is a 45 million dollar educational organization/business which is the 2nd largest employer in Franklin County (over 500 employees). As such, it requires a centralized space to function effectively and efficiently in support of our students, staff, families and community. The RSU 9 District Office, comprised of 18 staff, directs and manages RSU 9 responsibilities that range from Business/Finance, Curriculum/ Professional Development, Human Resources, School Nutrition, Special Education Services, State and Federal Reporting, District Operations, Communications, Strategic Planning, Policies & Procedures to Community Relations. The present location, on the 2nd floor of MBC, is in the middle of busy hallways and classrooms. It lacks adequate office, meeting and storage space. Carrying out Special Education organizational needs is particularly difficult because of the need for private, confidential space that respects the needs of our students and families receiving services.

While a permanent location was desirable, the history is that the RSU 9 District Office has been moved to various district buildings because of budget concerns and a lack of viable options to establish a separate and permanent space. Each time it had to move, it was because the space it occupied was required to support student programming. We find ourselves in the same position today. There are no viable options within RSU 9's current space for the District Office to move to in a financially sound way. The use of Federal ESSER funds gives us a "special" opportunity to fund the proposed purchase of the Holman Mission House, allowing RSU 9 to provide permanent office space for the District Office with no major impact on taxpayers.

Board members, community members, and administrative staff have spent two years considering alternative purchase and rental options to relocate the RSU 9 District Office to a

permanent location. After carefully considering all the options, we have reached the conclusion that purchasing the Holman Mission House, using Federal ESSER funds, is our best choice. Other options, all of which required renovations and upgrades, proved far more expensive to the taxpayers. By using available Federal ESSER funds, the purchase and upgrades of the Holman Mission House provide the needed permanent location with no mortgage and no foreseeable upgrade costs passed on to the taxpayers either in the short or long-term. This space meets varied district organizational needs, is centrally located, and provides easy access to students, staff, families and community members. An added benefit is that there is enough space to fulfill records and other storage demands, allowing us to free up even more school building space for individual student needs.

What does the use of Federal ESSER funds mean to you? At present we have \$550,000 of ESSER funds-available for the purchase and upgrades of the Holman Mission House. This is because some RSU 9 Projects originally scheduled to use those funds will not be able to be completed by the September 30, 2024 deadline. Of that amount, we will apply \$400,000 to the purchase price and \$150,000 for needed electrical, heating, roof, and technology upgrades as well as asbestos abatement requirements identified in the building inspection. (*Other ESSER related funds may still come available for other building needs over the next 10 months.*) This means that because of our use of ESSER funds there will be no large, long-term expense added to the RSU 9 annual budget. There will be ongoing expenses with the increase of our space footprint including utilities, heating, insurance, plowing costs etc. They are estimated to be, in year one, about \$20,000. With building upgrades being completed through the use of federal funds, future maintenance costs should be limited over the next decade. This purchase will also not remove tax revenue as it is currently owned by a church and taxes are not being paid on it now.

Please check the RSU 9 Website at www.mtbluersd.org/news for more detailed information regarding this purchase.

The public referendum to approve this purchase – Tuesday, November 7th – Please check your Town Hall for voting hours.