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In our view / Everett School District

## Timing right for new facility

The Everett School District's plan to construct a \$23.3 million facility to house administrative offices and host community learning opportunities meets a true need, and does so in a fiscally responsible way.

The need is apparent. Current instructional and operations support is housed in two aging buildings -- the 47-year-old Educational Service Center on Colby Avenue and the 110-year-old Longfellow Building near Everett Memorial Stadium -- and in portables. Those buildings need to be updated if they're to stay in use. Modernizing them for an additional 40-year lifespan would cost nearly as much as building new, and they would still cost more to operate. It would be throwing good money after bad.

This is a need the district has been planning to meet for more than two decades, setting aside construction funds from a variety of sources -- including state construction assistance dollars. Such diligence will yield up to \$12 million in taxpayer savings because the district won't have to pay interest on borrowed money. And it already owns the land where the new facility will be built, just off I-5 and Broadway Avenue near the stadium.

Because the money to build is in hand, a public vote isn't required. The school board is expected to vote on the project at its meeting on Tuesday.

Some taxpayers, understandably, have questioned the wisdom of proceeding with such a project now, when cuts in state funding are forcing the district to slash spending by \$4 million for next school year. But state law separates construction dollars from operational dollars. Capital funds must be used for things like buildings, land acquisitions and technology, and can't be spent on needs like teacher salaries, classroom supplies or student transportation.

The main reason to move now is lower construction costs, a byproduct of the recession. The district can take care of a long-term need at an advantageous price -- almost \$5 million lower than estimates from just two years ago.

The new building, of course, will save on energy costs (money that *can* legally be put to use in classrooms) and add operational efficiencies, with staff meeting, training and office space consolidated into a single site.

The current office sites can be sold once the real estate market rebounds, injecting millions back into the capital account.

District officials say space for education-oriented community uses will be designed into the new, 62,000-square-foot building, which they're calling a community resource center. School board president Ed Petersen envisions innovative partnerships with nonprofit groups to enhance educational opportunities from early learning through evening adult classes. We look forward to seeing that vision realized.

Buildings don't last forever. The older they get, the more they cost to operate and maintain. A compelling case has been made for this new community facility, and the timing is right. The district should move ahead with construction.

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