

School board to discuss potential measures to accommodate increasing enrollment

By [James Ayello](#)

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COLUMBIA — Superintendent Chris Belcher will lead the Columbia School Board in a discussion at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday concerning projected student enrollment increases for the district's schools as well as the amount of space and money needed to educate those students.

The primary focus of Belcher's presentation will be a 10-year facility and bond plan created by the Long Range Facilities Planning Committee. During the next 10 years, the committee's plan calls for about \$220 million in voter-approved bond money to make up for state funding reductions. Any bond issue presented in the committee's plan must be approved by the board by the end of January in order for it to be put on the April 2012 ballot, said Michelle Baumstark, community relations coordinator for the district.

By April of 2012, the board anticipates having to ask residents of Columbia to approve \$50 million of the \$220 million, as well as a 52-cent property tax rate increase. The additional funds would give the district what it needs to financially sustain projected population growth.

If approved, the bond money would be used to pay for a new elementary school, an early childhood center and other facility improvements. The tax money would be used to pay for everyday operations in the district.

Belcher's presentation says the board is anticipating an increase of about 800 students by 2015-16. Baumstark said that with such a rise in enrollment, facility improvement and additions will need to be made to keep up.

"The school district has had a history of not keeping up with its growth," Baumstark said. "We have 150-plus trailers in this district that are really inefficient and ineffective. We need to catch up."

Comments made about boundary scenarios collected by the Secondary Enrollment Planning Committee will also be discussed. Committee chairman Don Ludwig will present the board with a summary of what comments the committee has looked at so far, as well some of the

adjustments the committee has already made to the two boundary scenarios it will present to the board in early January.