



BOND PROJECT UPDATE

NEW SCHOOL: PRE-K TO 2ND GRADE



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

Since the successful passage of the bond in November, our design and construction partners have been hard at work. Over the past five months, they've collaborated closely with staff, the School Board, and district leadership to further refine the design of the new Pre-K to 2nd grade school. This phase of the process has focused on finalizing the building footprint, classroom layout, and key design elements that prioritize flexible learning environments, energy efficiency, and thoughtful use of space.

We are also working in partnership with the Winneshiek Energy District to explore sustainable building strategies that align with our shared values. With the foundation put in place through the community's support last fall, we are now moving forward with purpose and momentum to create a school that will serve Decorah's youngest learners for generations to come—something the entire community can be proud of.

The Decorah Community School District Board of Education includes: **Cindy Goodner** (President), **Ron Fadness** (Vice President), **Brad Darling**, **Carole Sand**, and **Aaron Zander**. Board support is provided by **Darlene Woodhouse** (Board Secretary), and **Cathy Dietzenbach** (Board Treasurer).

TOGETHER, THEY ARE DEDICATED TO SUPPORTING THE DISTRICT'S MISSION AND ENSURING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR OUR STUDENTS.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

In early April, our design team sat down with the educators and staff who will work in the new school building to review the proposed classroom layouts and learning spaces. These sessions were a critical step in the design process, ensuring the voices of those who know our students best are helping shape the learning environment. Staff members were able to walk through the layout of classrooms, support spaces, and shared areas, offering feedback based on how students learn, how teams collaborate, and how instruction has evolved over time.

From storage needs and classroom flow to natural light and flexible furniture placement, all feedback was received. The design team will now use this input to refine the plans, making sure the spaces support both day-to-day learning and long-term adaptability. Our goal is to create a school that functions beautifully on day one—and remains flexible to meet the needs of students, staff, and the community for the next 50+ years. It's not just about building a school; it's about building a place that inspires learning, connection, and opportunity for generations to come.



Multiple rounds of staff engagement have helped shape a building design that reflects the needs of the people who will use it every day.

DESIGN INSPIRATION

As our architects collaborate closely with staff to finalize the building's footprint, the exterior design is beginning to take shape. Inspired by the surrounding natural beauty, the design incorporates organic elements and draws inspiration from regional features such as bluffs, trees, and the Upper Iowa River. These elements aim to create a building that feels rooted in its environment—reflecting the landscape, honoring the natural surroundings, and providing a warm, welcoming space for students, staff, and the community.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

In each update, we'll introduce a key member of the team helping bring this project to life.

Patty Spowart, AIA

Emergent | Project Architect



Q. How long have you been with Emergent?

Seven years.

Q. Favorite part about being involved in the new school design in Decorah?

I'm excited to be part of a much needed project for this community. I love collaborating with the educators and community members to make this school everything they dream it can be.

Q. Favorite Food? Pear pie – pure, flaky deliciousness with a little bit of nutmeg.

Q. Favorite place you've visited? Rome! I lived there for a semester in college and absolutely loved it!

What are your hobbies outside of work?

Working on our family farm – driving tractors, helping with harvest; and camping with my family – specifically staying at county or state parks to explore the hiking trails.

Personal goals for next year? I love cooking and want to expand on a few things I've made. I've recently tried making French Macarons and I am on a huge sourdough kick! Anything from bagels to cheddar bay biscuits to scones.

Tom Zahalka

Miron Construction | Preconstruction Manager



Q. How long have you been with Miron?

11 years.

Q. Favorite part about being involved in the new school design in Decorah?

The community's enthusiasm and the unique challenge of building in an ancient impact crater make this project a true joy.

Q. Favorite Food? Anything Mexican, the spicier the better! Filet Mignon.

Q. Favorite place you've visited? Great Sand Dunes National Park (Colorado), and Xel-Ha' (Yucatan Peninsula)

Q.R. Mexico for the ancient ruins and incredible snorkeling

What are your hobbies outside of work? Raising 4 boys (ages 8, 8, 7, 3), coaching kids' sports, snowboarding, boating, home improvement, and maintaining a golf- course-quality lawn.

Personal goals? Diaper-free household by end of April. My wife and I are taking the family on a week-long trip to Colorado summer of 2025. I'd love to participate in a 40-year-old+ track meet this summer.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What measures will be taken to keep our new school safe and secure?

A: Safety is a top priority and will be built into both the design and daily operations of the facility. Controlled access points, secure hallways, and well-planned egress routes—such as through classroom wings—will help ensure student and staff safety. Ancillary spaces like restrooms, concessions, and the lobby, will be easily accessible without compromising security. After school hours, classrooms, and small group areas will be locked to prevent unauthorized access. Designated entry points, staff supervision, and clear event protocols will help maintain a secure environment during events.

Q: What sustainable solutions are being considered?

A: The design incorporates sustainable features wherever possible, focusing on energy efficiency, durable materials, and long-term operational savings. The project team is exploring practical, cost-effective strategies to support a healthy and efficient learning environment. Although a geothermal mechanical system was thoroughly investigated, the site's compacted bedrock due to the impact crater and uncertain federal funding availability make it impractical and cost prohibitive. Instead, resources will be allocated to enhance other sustainable features, such as the building envelope, energy-efficient mechanical equipment, and solar energy collection.

Q: What is planned for the green space portion of the project?

A: The design includes intentional green space to support student wellness, outdoor learning, and recreation. While specific features are still being developed, the goal is to create flexible outdoor areas that can be used for instruction, play, and community activities. These areas will feature playgrounds, basketball hoops, and tennis courts (with lines for pickleball), providing diverse options for students and the community to engage in physical activities and outdoor learning.

Q: Is the District adding a competition gym to the school?

A: Yes. The School Board voted to support expanding the elementary gym to accommodate an additional competition gym within the District. This new gym space will serve both school and community activities. Importantly, the additional cost is not coming from the bond supported by the community; the District will use PPEL/SAVE funding to cover the difference.

Q: Are the classrooms going to be smaller to make room for the larger gym?

A: No. Classroom sizes were not reduced to accommodate the gym expansion. The design team prioritized maintaining appropriate learning environments while also meeting the space needs for the new gym. See classroom size changes below.

Current Average Classroom 919 Sq. ft.
New Average Classroom 997 Sq. ft.

Please visit the District website for more FAQ's.