

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Putnam voters to decide on school district's future

District needs to make repairs to old buildings, taxpayers must decide if they want to move to single campus

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Putnam County residents will decide in the Nov. 5 election whether the school district moves to a single campus in Granville joining the high school and elementary school there, after the district has found its facilities need more than \$60 million in updates.

Right now, the school district which has just less than 800 students has its high school and an elementary school in Granville, an elementary school in Hennepin and the junior high school in rural McNabb.

The question on the ballot specifically asks: Shall the Board of Education of Putnam County Community Unit School District Number 535, Putnam, La Salle and Marshall Counties, Illinois, alter, repair and equip school buildings, including constructing security and health/life safety improvements, increasing classroom, cafeteria and gymnasium space and replacing heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems, improve school sites and issue its bonds to the amount of \$34 million for the purpose of paying the costs thereof?

If the referendum passes, the schools in Hennepin and McNabb will be closed and renovations made to house all Putnam County district students at its existing Granville campus. The cost to make the move from the old buildings to a new facility will be about \$34 million, but does not include the cost of improvements identified for the high school.

### What prompted a referendum?

The Putnam County school district buildings are aging, require safety



Scott Anderson

Superintendent Clay Theisinger stands next to a handicapped accessible lift outside the Putnam Junior High School's library in McNabb. The school district is looking at closing the elementary school in Hennepin and the junior high school in McNabb and moving them to one campus in Granville.

**ON THE COVER:** A view of John Roemer's art classroom Thursday, Sept. 12, at the Putnam County Junior High School. The classroom was added on from an old garage.

improvements, need updated teaching and learning environments and are inefficient to operate.

Putnam County Superintendent Clay Theisinger said an architect recently toured the schools and estimated updating the existing buildings could cost the district \$60 million or more, not including some of the educational enhancements that would be sought for a more modern learning environment. The junior high school operates on its wastewater treatment plant that could be costly to fix if major repairs are needed, Theisinger said.

The district began strategic planning in spring 2022 with a consultant and a survey was issued to taxpayers in the district in fall 2022. A little more than 50% of

the community members said they would support the closing of schools and a bond issuance.

### What other factors were considered in moving to a single campus?

Theisinger said the average student's daily bus ride will be reduced by about 25 minutes with a single-campus concept. He said the district has nine buses running throughout the county with some pickup times as early as 6:20 a.m. with an 8 a.m. start to the school day. The district also would be able to provide junior high students with access to higher-level courses on the shared campus.

See **REFERENDUM**, page 6

## Putnam library to host 'Thanks to Her' photojournalist

**SHAW LOCAL NEWS NETWORK**  
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The Putnam County Public Library District will virtually host author and former photojournalist Kathleen Geraghty for a presentation at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 24, about her book, "Thanks to Her: Finding Power and Inspiration in Your Family Photos."

In her presentation, Geraghty will tell the story of her book and how it

began with a garage sale and morphed into a multifaceted research project. More than a recap of American history, "Thanks to Her" is a metaphorical snapshot of women's lives during that period.

Geraghty was raised in Chicago. She studied photojournalism at Northern Illinois University and at the University of Missouri - Columbia. After completing a four-month documentary photo project in a maximum-security women's

prison, she received the O.O. McIntyre Writing Fellowship. She has worked as a photojournalist for newspapers in New Jersey, Missouri, Michigan, North Dakota and Illinois and has spent the past four years researching women's history and vintage photography.

This program is free and open to the public. It will be presented via Zoom. Visit the Program Portal at [shorturl.at/7jchG](http://shorturl.at/7jchG) to register. For information, call the library at 815-339-2038.