

Staff Editorial: A demand for District transparency

The Blue Valley School District's approach to spending the recently approved \$271 million bond should concern the community, and likely would, if they actually knew about it. On April 2, the District purchased the former First Family Church land, a purchase that spends 11.6 percent of the bond, as well as money from other district funds.

Here are the basics: The District spent \$9 million to buy the land. They will spend an estimated \$22.7 million on construction costs, making the total cost of the building and land \$31.7 million. The bond will pay for \$28.2 million of the total cost, which leaves a difference of \$3.5 million. Now that the basic math is over, let's get to the point.

Even with the use of bond money, there's still \$3.5 million that needs to be paid for somehow. Reportedly, part of this will come from the District's general outlet fund, and another part will come from money in this bond issue that is currently unaccounted for.

While this decision to buy land may be in the best interest of the community long term, we're not

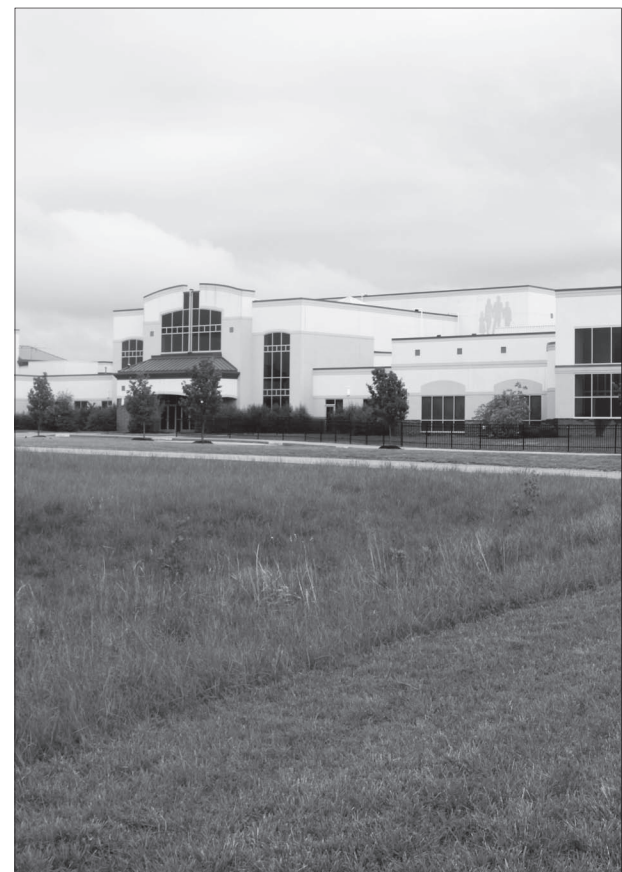
sure this is right—that the District took such a huge amount of money and spent it without explaining the magnitude of the project, the vision behind it or giving the community a chance to provide input. Yes, the plan to create an Early Childhood Center and Professional Development Center was mentioned in the Bond plan, but too few people knew how much it would end up costing.

To be fair, the District was waiting for the latest bond to pass before actually purchasing the land. By the District showing interest, deputy superintendent Al Hanna explained, the cost of the land could have risen. But, the taxpayers are the ones footing the bill, and they should know, completely, where their money is going to go. \$31.7 million is an incredible amount of money—the community's incredible amount of money. When we voted for the bond, we should have known exactly what we were getting into.

According to District spokesperson Danae Rus, the Early Childhood Center is the largest single project in the bond. Yet, when the bond

was presented, there were three key sections: technology, reinvestment in the District's already existing facilities and school safety. With a single project consuming over eleven percent of Bond money, you'd think it would be a highlight. According Hanna, the District began discussing the First Family Land purchase in September, which is long before the bond was sent to voters, giving the District plenty of opportunity to give the project a larger spotlight.

We encourage the Blue Valley School District to be more open about where the community's money is going. If these kinds of behind-closed-door decisions become the norm for the School Board, it is likely that we, the community, will begin voting "No" on future Bonds or tax hikes. In a country where democracy is celebrated, it is only natural that information about projects such as these be revealed to those paying for it. We want transparency in our government, and especially in a time when everyone is concerned about money, the District can, and should be, more open with the public.



Located off of 143rd Street and U.S. 69 is the First Family Church that Blue Valley purchased after the bond passed. Blue Valley will use the building as an early childhood education and teacher development center (photo by Kayla Heenan).

Editorial Cartoon By: Megan Murphy



To Submit

Letters to the editor and other forms of reader response are encouraged. Letters must be signed by the author to be considered for publication. The Express encourages letters to be no more than 500 words. Letters should be submitted to room 902 or mailed to:

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*The Express has the right to edit all submissions.