

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT THE BOND ELECTION

Question 1:

Why do we need bond issues *and* mill levy elections?

ANSWER: The operating funds that the school district receives from the state legislature are intended for the day-to-day operations of the schools, including salaries for teachers and staff. In New Mexico, one way to pay for construction and major repairs, is through local school bond elections. This gives taxpayers the opportunity to decide whether to pay for new construction and major renovations to its local schools.

In addition to bond issues, the state allows for additional funding sources to maintenance and repairs: **a)** The Public School Building Act (known as HB-33); **b)** and the Capital Improvements Act (known as SB-9). Both of these mill levies are also paid by local property taxes and were established by the state to create a source of funds to maintain school buildings. Without these three funding sources, the school district would not have the monies to build or repair the schools.

The mill levies provide funds each year to make repairs to things such as restrooms, leaky roofs, heating & air conditioners, landscaping, lighting, and play equipment.

Question #2:

Is there going to be a tax increase if I vote yes?

ANSWER: The school tax rate will not increase if the election is passed. The bonds are structured so that as old bonds are paid off, new ones are sold – this keeps the tax rate level. The current school tax rate is \$9.92 for every \$1,000 of taxable value of a person's home. Taxable value is one-third of the assessed value of a person's home.

The only reason your school taxes would go up is if the County Assessor has increased the value of your home (the assessed value). If your home's value has not gone up, then your taxes for the schools will remain at the current level.

Question #3:

Are all schools going to benefit from this election?

ANSWER: All schools benefit from the bond issue. Each school may not have a construction project, such as new classrooms or a new multipurpose room. However, all schools benefit from the funding earmarked for: technology, data and network infrastructure; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and the physical plant operations facilities that support every school in Las Cruces.

Question #4:

Who decides which projects to put on this bond? And, which projects will be done first?

ANSWER: In early 2017, a bond advisory capital outlay committee was developed. The members were parents, teachers, principals, administrators and School Board members who reviewed hundreds of capital outlay requests from the schools. The committee toured the buildings and prioritized a list not to exceed \$50 million. The selected projects were based on safety, equity among schools, and overcrowded learning environment, among other factors. After many months, the list was recommended to the entire School Board.

If the election passes, the bonds will be sold over the course of four years. A bond issue oversight committee will work with the Superintendent to determine the order in which the projects will be scheduled. Certainly, safety matters will be a top priority.

Question #5:

Can County residents vote in this election?

Any registered voter who lives within the boundaries of the Las Cruces school district can vote in the election. The school district boundaries on the north are just north of Radium Springs; the southern boundary is just south of Brazito. So, both city *and* county residents live within the school district and they can vote in the election, if they are registered to vote.

Question #6:

Why is Columbia Elementary on the bond issue for remodeling?

ANSWER: Columbia Elementary on Elks Drive was built in 2003 (15 years ago). Over the years, there have been various problems with the construction of the building. There has also been flooding in that area, which contributed to the damages to the school. After several attempts to repair the walls and

structure, it was determined that the building had major structural deficiencies and will need major renovation to fix all the walls and interior damage. In addition, the roof also need repair and will be paid from the \$4 million in the bond election.

Question #7:

Why is there a need for new physical plant facilities? Does that benefit students?

ANSWER:

The physical plant operations for the district benefit every school, every staff member and every student in the district. The many employees who are part of the physical plant operate the cafeteria kitchens, mow the school grounds, fix the plumbing, fix broken windows, repair the vehicles, paint the schools, repair the heating & cooling, and make thousands of repairs throughout the entire school district.

The physical plant facilities were built in the 1970s or earlier, and were outgrown years ago. The facilities house the district warehouses where furniture and school equipment are stored, and the freezers and storage for all the food used in the cafeterias.

Although student enrollment has grown substantially over the decades, the maintenance facilities have not. There is not enough freezer space – in fact – when they need to get something out of the freezer or put new products in, the personnel have to bring things out of the freezer to get to the backside. Then, put everything back in.

This is one of the first elections when the district does not have to build a new school because the enrollment has leveled off. We are adding some classrooms and multipurpose rooms to ease the overcrowding, but a NEW school is not included in the election. So, this is the time voters will be asked for approval to improve our maintenance facilities. They are unsafe for our staff and equipment needs to be replaced.

The first phase of the long-term project to relocate and develop modern physical plant buildings is \$11 million. The construction would be at the district's operations annex on the west side of Las Cruces.

Question #8:

How much is the Las Cruces High School remodeling project going to cost?

ANSWER: The total estimated cost *at this time* is \$91.5 million. It is paid from two local bond elections – in 2010 and 2014. The total project is also being funded from monies through the Public Schools Capital Outlay Council. In addition to the local portion of the total (\$44.5 million), the state provided an estimated \$47 million toward the cost.

Phase II of the project is currently underway. Completion of the school's renovation is expected in March 2018.

Question #9:

Why are there no new schools in this election?

ANSWER: For the past several years, the enrollment for LCPS has leveled off. There has been a very small increase in the number of new students each year. That finding has been verified by experts from Architectural Research Consultants (ARC), which determined that another new school won't be needed for several years. In the meantime, ARC recommends building a few additional classrooms at existing schools, which are included in the 2018 bond election. Each year, the district's enrollment will be reviewed, and ARC will continue to monitor the number of classrooms available for LCPS students.

Question #10

My school requested items that were not included on the bond issue. Why? And, what happens to those projects that were not included?

ANSWER:

Unfortunately, the number of school requests exceeds the amount of money available. It's estimated that all needs exceed \$200 million and there is only \$50 million available. (Asking for more than \$50 million would necessitate a tax rate increase. Therefore, \$50 million is the cap.)

The Bond Advisory Committee had to look at all requests and determine which ones will make the bond list based on factors such as equity, safety, and overcrowding. Even though many of the schools' requests are not on the bond election, it is possible the item could be paid through mill levy funds. In prior elections, voters have approved two mill levies that also help with repairs and maintenance. Some of the projects may be eligible for this funding or could be undertaken through the district's physical plant department. In the long run, all requests are put onto a list to be considered when additional elections are held or when other funding is available.

***DESERT HILLS:** The school has requested a reconfigured parent drop-off and pick-up lane. Congestion is a problem. The Desert Hills building is possibly eligible for a state match to build a new multipurpose room and add some additional instruction space; that's why it's included in the bond election. But, a new parent drop-off may not be eligible for the match. This project would need a different source of funding. The district is in discussions with the City of Las Cruces to see if other solutions are possible for this busy school. The project remains on a need-to-do list.*

***MAYFIELD HIGH:** Multiple projects have been undertaken over the years to improve Mayfield High School: a new black-box theatre center; an additional gymnasium; new tennis courts; a new roof and parking lot; and currently underway is an expanded kitchen. Unfortunately, Mayfield has not received a rank by the state Public Schools Facilities Authority (PSFA) that would provide the school district with any state matching dollars to do a major remodeling project. Due to the size of the campus, state matching funds are critical for a project that could cost **tens of millions** of dollars. This doesn't mean future improvements won't be made. Major campus improvements such as enhanced fine arts facilities and remodeled classrooms, will be considered again for inclusion in a future bond election.*

Question #11:

Did local bonds help pay for charter schools?

ANSWER: In the 2014 bond issue, LCPS provided \$4 million to construct a new charter school for students Kindergarten-through-8th grade (J. Paul Taylor Academy). The new school is located on LCPS property at the old Court Youth Center. The Academy currently makes lease payments to LCPS.

Also on the 2014 bond, funds were provided to remodel a portion of Alma d'arte charter high school, which is also located at the Court Youth Center complex. The building is owned by LCPS but is leased to the high school's governing authority. Remember that charter schools *are* public schools.