



Introduction

The West Deptford Township Public School District has authorized preparations for a Bond Referendum that is scheduled to go before registered voters on September 30, 2014. To provide facts about the “Building Excellence” Referendum, the District has developed this Q&A document. If there is a specific question that is not addressed, contact:

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Hyperlinked Index to Q&A

1. Introduction

Introduction, Index, and BOE note .

2. General Information

Purpose, voting dates and schedule for the Referendum; descriptions of the planning effort and the alternatives that were studied; and the probable results of a failed referendum.

3. Aging Infrastructure & Project Design

Description of the district-wide projects included in the proposed Referendum.

4. Construction: Cost and Safety

Dealing with safety and security during construction, and determining and controlling construction costs.

5. Financial: Bond & Tax Impact

The cost of the project, the “local share” that will be voted on, impact on local property tax, and tax relief for senior citizens.

6. Voting Information

Time and local voting places, along with Voter Registration and Vote by Mail information.

7. Getting More Information & Misinformation

How you can get more information about the proposed Referendum?

A few words to the community:

In July, the West Deptford Board of Education authorized an election to consider a Bond Referendum necessary to implement much needed facility improvements. It has been 16 years since the Board has asked the West Deptford community for support of a school referendum in 1998. The Board of Education has studied alternative facilities solutions for two years in light of the aging schools in the District. We have listened to the wisdom and counsel of the community in formulating this fiscally responsible approach to revitalize and replace systems and materials long past their useful life.

Specific needs include secure entry vestibules with additional security cameras, fire alarm replacements, new high-efficiency hot water heaters, new energy efficient windows, new exterior and interior doors and hardware including intruder locks, select roof repairs and replacements, ceiling replacements, and technology upgrades to support energy efficiency.

A new Chemistry Lab and Science Lab upgrades, and a renovated Media Center focused on technology at the High School, as well as a 5-classroom Pre-K and Kindergarten addition at Oakview School will improve education. Select rooftop HVAC replacement at the Middle School, bathroom upgrades at Oakview, exterior wall repairs at Red Bank and atrium remediation at Greenfields complete the school specific work.

District athletic improvements include home bleacher replacement, track recoating, resodding, regrading and new irrigation systems for all athletic fields on the high school campus, 2 multi-sport synthetic turf fields (one in the stadium, one behind the home bleachers), stadium bathroom upgrades and a new press box.

Because of early planning, the District is in a position to take advantage of recently announced State Aid programs. Under the Debt Service Aid and ROD Grant programs the District will get 28.5% aid reimbursement on the proposed projects.

The Board of Education is well aware of the difficult economy with which everyone is learning to live. And we are aware that it will have an impact on education. The positives in this difficult economic climate, in addition to the 28.5% aid, are that construction costs and interest rates are near historic lows. However, acceptance of state aid is contingent upon passing a successful referendum.

I urge each and every citizen of West Deptford to familiarize themselves with the Referendum and come out and vote on September 30. It's your only chance to decide where your tax dollars are going. Support your local schools, community, and the future of our most valuable asset, our children.

Thank you.

Board of Education
West Deptford Township Public Schools

2. General Information

What is the West Deptford Schools Bond Referendum about?

The Bond Referendum is an opportunity for voters to decide whether the school district will be authorized to raise funds through the sale of bonds to augment New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) ROD Grants and Debt Service Aid and make extensive age-related improvements to buildings and sites at all the District Schools.

When will the West Deptford School District's proposed Bond Referendum take place?

Voters will be asked to come to the polls for this special election on Tuesday, September 30, 2014.

Why is the proposed Referendum being held now?

The need to address current inadequacies in available educational space has been under study for several years. Construction costs and interest rates are near historic lows and will result in savings to the taxpayers. With an improving economy, interest rates will be inching upward and we want to take advantage of current low rates as soon as is possible. Most importantly, Debt Service Aid and ROD Grants are available now to reduce the local long-term costs to just under 72%.

Who was involved in developing this plan?

This Referendum plan has been under study since 2012 by the Board of Education and their architectural, engineering and financial advisors. Needed projects were proposed and analyzed. The Board then brought the proposals for presentation at numerous Board meetings. The Board reviewed projects by school and type and established a recommended list of priority projects. The scope of the work and the final budget was complete when the Grants and Aid level were announced.

What alternatives were considered in developing this plan?

The Committee studied and evaluated multiple "projects" and groups of projects on a school by school basis and on a project type basis to develop a complex matrix of options. Project "groups" included; Life Safety, Security and Building Integrity; Educational Programs; Technology; Energy & Environment; and Critical Systems.

What happens if the Referendum doesn't pass?

The Board could call for an additional Referendum at a later date on this plan, however, the District has only a limited time to raise its share of the funds before the grant offer expires. The District may then lose the opportunity to have 28% of its projects supported by Debt Service Aid instead of a local tax increase.

3. Aging Infrastructure requires extensive improvements

What projects or spaces are included in the proposed Referendum?

Conservative local budgeting and an overall reduction in State Aid over many years meant there was little money for Capital Improvement projects. While the school buildings have been well maintained, they do suffer from deterioration brought about by aging. Many systems and finishes have simply lived out their useful life and need improvement or replacement. Much of the proposed work is akin to repairing the roof on your house when it is old and deteriorating and needs replacement,...a replacement roof will protect the overall investment in your home as well as the furnishings and systems found below the roof line.

The Board of Education reviewed the many projects in order to prioritize them to meet community aspirations and ability to fund the “Building Excellence” Improvement Program. Work is needed at all schools, but not in the same areas due to differing age of buildings and due to improvements made in schools in the now more-than-16-years-old Referenda from school year 1998.

What are some of the categorical projects included in the proposed Referendum?

Safety and Security: *To make our children and staff feel more secure so they can focus on education.*

The Board gave high priorities to safety and security projects including fire alarm systems, doors and door hardware and door controls.

Energy and Environment: *Goals were two-fold; to divert scarce budget resources back to the educational program by reducing maintenance and energy costs; and to continue the District’s ambitious energy savings program by investing in projects with larger paybacks.* The Board gave high priorities to energy and environment projects including HVAC upgrades to air-conditioning, ventilation and related electronic controls; to lighting, particularly fixture replacement and to high-efficiency hot water heating equipment and piping.

Educational Program Enhancements: *Goals were for improvements to high school science programs to benefit all students, and expansion of the Pre-K and Kindergarten classrooms at Oakview to support our earliest learners.* The Board gave high priorities to only a few specific projects including the conversion of an automotive shop to a science lab and renovations of existing science labs at the High School; and a 5-classroom Pre-K and Kindergarten addition at the Oakview School.

An important Note: *The 5-classroom addition for Early Education is preparatory to possible implementation of full-day Kindergarten, some unknown time in the future. There are no existing schedules or Board approval for putting this program into effect, and its’ fulfillment will hinge on availability of state funds or local appropriations that are currently not available.*

Critical Systems: *Upgrade or replace all existing critical building systems that are at or past their useful life.* The Board gave high priorities to toilet room renovations, flooring, lighting, ceilings, electrical systems and emergency power, domestic hot water systems, paving restoration and replacement, and new sidewalks and curbs. Finally, the sewage lift station at the High School will be refurbished and the atrium at Green-Fields will be remediated.

This “Building Excellence” program will protect our current investment in our schools. We are reminded of that often repeated opinion of Ben Franklin, that “An investment in education pays the best interest”. *The overarching goal was to make the program educationally sound and the most fiscally affordable, truly aligned with the core values of the West Deptford community.*

4. Construction Cost and Safety

How were Construction and Project costs determined?

Costs for rehabilitation are estimated based upon the room type and scope of the specific project. Non-building costs for site improvements must then be added in. Finally, the other project costs including architect and engineer fees, legal fees, construction manager fee, and a contingency are factored in. The proportionate summary of projects by school are approximately as follows;

High School	\$6,215,825
Middle School	\$2,555,515
Green-Fields	\$1,230,163
Oakview	\$1,613,238
Red Bank	\$941,200
District-General	\$337,500
District-Early Ed	\$2,515,625
District-Atheletics	\$2,650,000

How will the Board of Education keep costs under control?

The Board of Education will be managing costs in several ways:

Our architects have extensive experience managing projects like ours in a multitude of NJ school districts.

Our architects produce highly detailed specifications enabling contractors to better understand the work on which they are bidding. Because of the quality of their plans, the District will receive a higher than normal number of construction bidders which leads to more competitive pricing.

Our architect/engineers, as required by law, use an open bidding process with full access to the bidders list. This way, the contractors can get the lowest prices from all interested manufacturers and suppliers.

The Board will be contracting with a construction manager to provide additional observation and management services during construction. The construction manager becomes the owner's representative, managing issues that arise on the site.

What happens if bids are not received within the budget?

The budget is established by law by the question put before the voters in the Referendum. That published Referendum budget *cannot be exceeded*. If construction bids are not under budget, the project will be redesigned by the architect and rebid at another date in the near future. The Architects will include multiple bidding alternates for each of the major construction divisions in the original bid requests that allow for adding to or subtracting from the scope of the work. Acceptance of any alternate or combination of alternates may be used to bring the project under budget.

What happens if there is a cost overrun during construction for the project?

A contingency figure has been built into the budgeted cost to deal with any unforeseen construction problems, as required by the New Jersey Department of Education.

How will the schools deal with safety and security issues?

The safety and welfare of our students is paramount. Before the onset of construction, we will hold meetings with our faculty, administrators, the Police Department, our architect and our project's construction manager. Together we will develop a safety action plan that will ensure the children's safety as it relates to non-school personnel having access to the building. We will have the benefit of working with a construction manager who specializes in school construction and understands the importance of protecting our children.

5. Financial: State Aid, Bond and Tax Impact

Is the District eligible for state funds for this proposed building project?

Yes. Both ROD Grants (Regular Operating Districts) and Debt Service Aid has recently been offered from the New Jersey Department of Education and we are taking full advantage of both programs. The District will receive **28%** of the total cost of the projects in either “up front” or annual installments from NJDOE.

What is the total dollar amount we will be asked to vote on for the proposed Bond Referendum?

The Referendum will be for \$15,082,374 in two questions. The estimated total cost of all projects is \$18,058,065. The ROD Grants total \$2,975,691 that is applied as an upfront grant and decreases the amount needed to be approved in the Referendum. The Referendum questions will be for \$15,082,374. Under the Debt Service Aid program, the District raises the balance of the Referendum through the sale of bonds and gets the aid in annual installments that reduce the “local Share” of debt service each year. By law, the Referendum amount includes all building and site construction costs, professional fees and contingencies, and cannot be exceeded by the Board in the execution of the project.

How will my property taxes be impacted if the proposed Referendum is approved?

Below is a breakdown of the estimated annual impact on taxes that the proposed Referendum will have for residents for a Question 1 Local Share of \$13,833,374 and a Question 2 Local Share of \$1,250,000, and a 20-year term.

	Assessed Value	Q1 Annual Tax Impact	Q2 Annual Tax Impact
Average	\$203,319	\$76.76	\$8.41
Per \$1,000 of Assessment		\$37.76	\$4.14

What is the difference between Assessed Value and Market Value?

Market Value is how much you or a realtor could sell your house for in today’s market. The Assessed Value is the value given to your land and improvements for property tax purposes by your municipality and appears on your tax bill.

Can you be *more* specific about the Tax Impact on my residential property?

Yes. On the Referendum page of our web site, you will find a **Tax Impact Calculator** for this Referendum. Simply enter the Assessed Value of your property in the appropriate space and click on the Calculate button, and you will obtain your specific *estimated* annual Tax Impact.

How will the proposed Referendum affect taxes for senior citizens?

Senior citizens and disabled persons may be protected from tax increases. Since 1998 the Property Tax Reimbursement Program (Senior Freeze) has reimbursed eligible senior citizens for property tax increases. You must meet eligibility requirements regarding age, residency and income which can be found on the NJ Division of Taxation web site. *Upon application to the state, you may receive a rebate for any increase in your real estate taxes.* Eligible applicants must file the Property Tax Reimbursement Application on or before a specified due date.

For more information, or to confirm eligibility, call the NJ Division of Taxation at 1-800-882-6597 or consult the agency’s web site at, <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/ptr/index.shtml>

6. Voting Information

When and where do I vote?

The polling places will be open from 2:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., on the Special Election Day, Tuesday, September 30, 2014. Voting will take place as follows;

Districts 3,5,9,10,16	Oakview Elementary School
Districts 4, 6, 11, 12	Green-Fields Elementary School
Districts 2,7, 8, 15	Red Bank Elementary
Districts 1, 13, 14, 17, 19	West Deptford Middle School

How do I register to vote?

To register to vote you must contact the Gloucester County Board of Elections at 856-384-4531. You may also fill out a voter registration application online and print and mail it to the Board of Elections. A pre-addressed NJ Voter Registration form, addressed to the Gloucester County Clerk, can be found online on the NJ Dept. of State website at

http://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/form_pdf/voter-regis-forms/gloucester-voter-reg-form-062212.pdf

You can register to vote if

- You are a United States citizen
- You will be 18 years of age by the next election
- You will be a resident of the State and County 30 days before the election
- You are NOT currently serving a sentence probation or parole because of a felony conviction

***Registration Deadline is 21 days before an election,
... that is Tuesday, September 9, 2014 for the West Deptford Referendum election***

Can I vote by mail?

Yes, in New Jersey, any qualified and registered voter can now vote by Absentee Ballot for any election, for any reason. Don't feel like going to the polls? Simply vote by mail. Now there is "no excuse" not to vote! You do not have to be absent from the area on September 30 to vote by mail.

If you are a qualified and registered voter, then you may apply for a Vote By Mail ballot by completing the application and mailing it to the County Clerk. The deadline for such requests by mail is 7 days before any and all elections (Primary, General, School, etc). A Vote By Mail voter may also apply in person at the County Clerk's Office on any working day until 3:00 p.m. on the day before the election.

Vote By Mail Ballot Applications can be found by following the District web site link or online at:

http://www.state.nj.us/state/elections/form_pdf/vote-mail-ballot-012712-glo.pdf

7. Getting More Information & Misinformation

How can I get more information about the proposed Referendum?

Citizens who want more information about the upcoming proposed Referendum should:

- Attend **Board of Education meetings** and/or **Board of Education presentations** throughout the community.
- **Email** us at referendum@wdeptford.k12.nj.us with questions about the proposed Referendum. These questions will be answered as quickly as possible, and used to update this document.
- Request a **presentation** for your group, organization or neighborhood by calling the District offices.
- Visit the District's web site at www.WDeptford.k12.nj.us
- Check for local newspaper coverage.

Are we moving to Full-day Kindergarten if the Referendum is approved?

The 5-classroom addition for Early Education is preparatory to possible implementation of full-day Kindergarten at some unknown time in the future. There are no existing schedules or Board approval for putting this program into effect, and its' fulfillment will hinge on availability of state funds or local appropriations that are currently not available.

Did the original costs on page 4 of this Q&A change?

The original cost for the High School was incorrectly reported as a line item on page 4. Only the costs of the Grant portion of the High School costs had been mistakenly reported. The High School total costs of \$6.2 million is now corrected. The total costs of all building projects and the amount of the Referendum (the Local Share on which we vote) have all been reported correctly. This same High School line item was incorrectly reported in the Newsletter mailed to all residences.