

## West Deptford voters to decide on school renovations in Sept. 30 special election

By Jason Laday | South Jersey Times on September 15, 2014



**WEST DEPTFORD TWP.** — Voters on Tuesday, Sept. 30, will decide whether to allow the township board of education to take out a **\$15 million bond for a series of expansions and repairs at all five of the district's schools.**

In a letter sent to West Deptford residents on Aug. 1, and **posted on the district website**, Superintendent Kevin Kitchenman made the case for the renovations, stating it's been 16 years since the district last went to the voters to approve building improvements.

"Many building systems are deteriorating simply due to age," wrote the superintendent. "Other areas suffer from delayed maintenance due to multi-year budget constraints. Much of the proposed work is to protect the multi-million dollar investments you have already made in our schools and to add many years of useable life to our buildings."

The BOE chose the September special election date **after also considering other dates in December as well as the general election in November.**

While a special election in either September or December would cost an estimated \$8,000 to \$12,000, including the referendum in the November election, where it would share a ballot with the township committee and BOE races would be free.

However, Kitchenman cautioned the BOE against placing pitching their referendum in November, stating in July, that it could run the risk of becoming a campaign issue.

"You don't want to get sucked into municipal election issues," Kitchenman said at the time.

The board first discussed the improvements last November. Then-BOE President Chris Strano at that time said the district's lack of any debt meant officials could finally address the long-standing needs at the schools.

Proposed improvements at the high school include, among other things, a new gymnasium floor, new science classrooms, a new chemistry lab, renovating the library, replacing student lockers and repairing a section of the roof.

At the middle school, needed upgrades include an upgraded HVAC control system, new hallway ceilings and new HVAC units on the roof.

At Green-Fields Elementary School, among the listed improvements is a proposal to replace the windows in the school atrium.

Previously, glare from the sun shining off the glass atrium had damaged a nearby residence. The owners of the home eventually took legal action against the school, resulting in the current situation in which the atrium is covered with a blue tarp for parts of the year.

Improvements at Oakview and Red Bank elementary schools include bathroom renovations, fire alarm upgrades, electric system upgrades and window replacements.

The list also includes \$2.5 million toward the addition of five classrooms for full-time kindergarten. **The BOE has been mulling the possibility of moving to a full-time program since 2013.**

There is also about \$2.7 million in improvements benefiting district athletics, such as a \$1 million project to replace the high school stadium field with synthetic turf and install a new drainage system. Also included are new home-side bleachers, bathroom upgrades and a new press box.

The total cost of all of the projects is approximately \$18 million. However, about \$3 million in grant funding brought the cost down to \$15 million.

If the referendum were approved, the district would receive approximately \$2.1 million in debt service aid from the state over the next 20 years. According to Kitchenman, the total cost to the taxpayer from all of the various projects included in the referendum would be approximately \$12.9 million.