

West Deptford board of education talks \$15M bond referendum for school improvements

By [Jason Laday/South Jersey Times](#)

on July 06, 2014 at 6:00 AM, updated July 06, 2014 at 6:18 AM



WEST DEPTFORD TWP. — The township board of education (BOE) on Monday discussed possible election dates on a referendum asking residents to approve a \$15 million bond for a **series of expansions, renovations and improvements at all five of the district's schools.**

The referendum, which would also fund expansions at the district's athletic fields as well as the implementation of a full-time kindergarten program, could be placed on a ballot for special election in September.

Other options include a special election in December, or allow it to be included in the November General Election, where it will share a ballot with the West Deptford township committee and BOE races.

"Our architect thinks that December would be our best bet (for the referendum's approval), because she feels — and I'm not sure I agree — that people would be in more of a spirit of giving," said Superintendent Kevin Kitchenman Monday night, to the laughter of the board. "Another option is September."

Board member Lisa Eckley argued that December would most likely find parents preoccupied with the holiday season, and its effect on their personal budgets. She said September would be better, as school would be getting back in session, and parents would be more likely to have education foremost in their minds.

"In December, parents are going crazy with the holidays, and how much they're spending, and the shine of the new school year has kind of worn off a bit," she said. "In September, they're thinking about school and education."

A special election in either September or December would cost between \$8,000 and \$12,000. Placing the referendum on the November ballot would be free, but Kitchenman advised the BOE against putting the question alongside the political race for township committee.

"You run the risk of it becoming a campaign issue," he said. "Yes, there is also a board of education election, and it would make sense for someone running for the board of election to have an opinion on the referendum and run on that. However, there's also a committee election.

"You don't want to get sucked into municipal election issues."

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

The improvements were first discussed by the board 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 July 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, according to Kitchenman.