

**Scarsdale Public Schools
Bond Proposal Referendum Frequently Asked Questions
Fall 2014**

Q: What is a bond referendum?

A. A bond referendum is an opportunity for a community's voters to decide if the school district may borrow money to renovate and upgrade its facilities.

In this case, the ballot measure will ask voters to borrow money to renovate and upgrade facilities and technology infrastructure.

Q: Why is the District going out for a bond vote?

A: The District's facilities, like people's homes, require consistent upkeep and occasional renovation. These may be in response to enrollment growth or cultural changes such as heightened community concerns about security. The District certainly has brick and mortar issues that need attention, but, in equal parts, our students need buildings that will support efforts to prepare students for 21st century learning,

An exhaustive process of review and deliberation by the Board of Education, District personnel, and community members identified a list of important capital projects. Now the District requests community approval to borrow money to pay for these improvements.

Q: What is the total amount to be borrowed?

A: The proposed borrowing is \$18.12 million. These funds will cover architectural and engineering fees, construction, and other related costs, and they will be repaid over a period of 15-18 years.

Q: Why borrow money for facilities improvements as opposed to paying for them through the annual budget?

A: When there is a need for major investment in facilities, several factors should be considered. What is the current interest rate environment? How long will the improvements reasonably last? Will new debt service add to taxpayer burden?

In this case, the work proposed will benefit students for many years to come. By paying back the money over an extended period, both current and future residents will assume their fair share of the cost. Interest rates are low, and maturing debt in 2015-16 means that taxpayer burden will not have to increase to absorb the repayment of the new debt.

Q: Why now?

A: The Board believes it is prudent to finance the current proposed renovations to the facilities at this time for the following reasons:

- Many projects will address building concerns that already impact students. Among these are overcrowding in the cafeteria and library and a lack of large group instructional space in the High School. Additionally, we have an aging technology infrastructure, and lunch and library spaces at Heathcote and Edgewood, respectively, that cannot accommodate the student population;
- Interest rates, and thus the cost of borrowing, remain at historically low levels;
- Because of maturing debt, repayment of the new debt can be absorbed into the budget without placing additional burden on taxpayers;
- New York State is currently providing financial assistance at 9.5% of eligible project costs, paid to the District over the life of the borrowing;
- Major donations from the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation and the Madoff family leverage District dollars to do more;
- Construction will address brick and mortar, programmatic and 21st century learning improvements; and
- Over the next 20-30 years, these current projects represent the first five years of a Master Facilities Plan. This preliminary work allows the District to have thoughtful conversations and planning sessions for future work.

Q: Why is the bond vote being held in December? Don't we vote on the school budget in May?

A: The school budget vote occurs every year in May. This is a separate vote to authorize borrowing to renovate the District's facilities. The vote must be held by December in order to take advantage of the retiring debt service in the 2015-16 budget. This timing ensures that new debt payments can be absorbed into the budget in a way that will be tax-neutral to residents.

The District is eager to begin work. Technology infrastructure replacement and auditorium renovations could begin as soon as this summer, when facilities are available for an extended period of time without disturbing instruction. If the vote didn't occur until the spring, the summer construction opportunity would be lost.

Q: What are the projects being proposed for funding?

The following projects are included in the proposal:

- District-wide Technology
 - Technology infrastructure in all buildings will be replaced.
 - New cabling will be installed to expand wireless internet access at the High School and Middle School.
- High School
 - Construction of a technology-rich, two-level Learning Commons in the High School that will include an Innovation Lab (I Lab), a Design Lab (which will be funded by the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation and will not be included in the bond), additional cafeteria and food preparation space, new bathroom facilities, and student workrooms.

- Relocation of the current Fitness Center, to free up space for the Learning Commons. It should be noted that this project will be funded by the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation and additional funds previously authorized for this purpose and currently in the District's Capital Projects fund.
- Auditorium renovations that include replacement of seats, new LED house lights and aisle lighting, and new sound equipment.
- Renovations to Gym A that include adding new ventilation and lighting.
- Middle School
 - Construction of new orchestra rehearsal room.
 - Renovation of additional music classrooms.
- Edgewood School
 - Renovation and reconstruction of the library.
 - Relocation of the school office to improve building security.
 - Construction of a new main entrance, also to improve building security.
- Heathcote School
 - Construction of a new multipurpose room to address overcrowding.
 - Construction of small group instructional space for special education services.
 - Construction of exterior canopy at bus pickup point in rear of school.
- Quaker Ridge School
 - Replacement of 34,000 sq. ft. flat roofs on the older section of the building.

Q: How were the specific projects chosen?

A: The projects were initially identified by building-level committees and District staff. These committees included teachers, parents, principals, and Central Office staff with responsibility for the facilities. They met with the architect to discuss problems and develop appropriate responses. Their recommendations were then forwarded to a District Facilities Steering Committee, which included broad representation from the Scarsdale community, including several members with construction expertise. This group recommended that the Board of Education consider funding these items.

Q: A new library is proposed for Edgewood School. How will it be different from the existing library?

A: The library at Edgewood is by far the smallest in the District, based on square footage per student. The renovated library will be comparable in size and features to the other elementary libraries, and will be designed as a Media and Research Center. The expanded library will be laid out for a 21st century educational program. There will be room for technology, shelving that is properly sized for elementary grades, and better sight lines from the librarian's desk. Structural problems that cause freezing and flooding will be remedied.

Q: What work is proposed at Heathcote School?

A: Heathcote School has a meeting room that is used for lunch, but can only legally be occupied by 163 students. Two lunch periods cannot accommodate the school's enrollment of approximately 400 students, so the many children eat lunch in the gym. A new multipurpose room will provide lunch space

for all students. New small instructional spaces will house various special education services that are now delivered on the auditorium stage. A new canopy at the rear will shelter children as they wait to board school buses and alleviate overcrowding in the hallways, making exiting and student pick-up and drop-off safer.

Q: Why is new music space being added at the Middle School?

A: Enrollment in the Middle School's music program has expanded greatly in recent years. At present, there are 853 students enrolled in Performing Ensembles. The other approximately 274 other students are enrolled in Exploring Music. There is only one rehearsal space, which is occupied by the band, while the orchestra rehearses on the stage. When the auditorium is needed for another program, orchestra classes are cancelled.

In discussions leading up to the 2000 bond referendum, the need for orchestra space was identified, but ultimately not funded. The new room will provide consistent rehearsal space for the orchestra and storage for instruments, and will also serve as a large multipurpose room. Closet spaces will be combined to create a suitable classroom for the "Exploring Music" program.

Q: Why does the High School need a Learning Commons?

A: The proposed Learning Commons addresses many issues. First, the way students learn in the 21st century has changed. We no longer have to teach them facts in isolation. Rather, they must learn to collaborate, explore, and think critically. Sometimes this occurs in large groups, sometimes in groups of a few students. A flexible environment is key, and that is what the Learning Commons will provide. Second, there is a shortage of cafeteria space for the current student population. Third, the school lacks large instructional spaces that can hold two or more classes at once for interdisciplinary work. Examples include the "Civ Ed" program, the Freshman Seminar and the American Studies program. And last but not least, additional eating space and seating arrangements that support collaborative work will free up the library and allows it to return to its original purpose as a place of quiet study.

Q. What is a Design Lab and where will it be located?

A: A Design Lab (somewhat synonymous with a "Maker Space") is a lab where students will design and build things. It will be located in the old auto shop and will be a technology-rich space equipped with tools such as 3-D printers, laser cutters, and circuit boards. Such "hands on" learning had virtually disappeared from high-achieving area schools, but educators and students are now rediscovering the power of the "making" experience. In response to emerging trends and student demand, the High School faculty is developing an integrated STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) curriculum that will take advantage of this space.

The District strongly believes in the value of the Design Lab, and is very grateful to the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation for providing the \$1.8 million to construct the facility. Taxpayers are *not* being asked to fund this project.

Q: Are we voting to fund a new Fitness Center at the High School?

A: No. The funds needed to create a new Fitness Center are being donated by the Scarsdale Schools Education Foundation. This gift will supplement funds already approved by voters. An additional donation from the family of High School student Tyler Madoff will purchase all of the new equipment for the center in his memory. The District is very grateful for these extraordinarily generous gestures.

Q: Does the District need to perform an environmental review for the proposed projects?

A: All of the projects qualify as Type II actions under New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act. Type II actions are those which have been found categorically to have no significant adverse impact on the environment.

Q: Will the new facilities be handicapped accessible?

A: According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), all new school construction must be handicapped accessible. The law does not require that older buildings be modified to provide accessibility, but any major renovation requires a district to bring that facility into compliance with ADA.