

Lackawanna City School District
Capital Project 2015
Questions and Answers

Q How will my school taxes be affected by this project?

- A. The total cost of the project and the amount of the referendum is \$27.3 million. The District currently receives state building aid of 98% and has EXCEL aid available. The local share of the project will be paid for with the District's EXCEL Funds. This is the right time to seek approval of the capital project, and monies from the available EXCEL funds will allow the District to present a project that will be TAX NEUTRAL.

Q What are EXCEL funds?

- A. "Expanding our Children's Education and Learning (EXCEL) aid is grant money that covers projects in five categories: education technology, health and safety, accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act compliance), physical capacity expansion/school construction or energy conservation. The aid is intended to offset the local share of a project to minimize or eliminate the cost to the local taxpayer.

Q Isn't this all taxpayer money? State aid is my tax dollars too. How can you say a capital project saves me money?

- A. Yes, it is all taxpayer money. However, by authorizing this project, voters can insure that the taxpayer money is spent in the Lackawanna schools to benefit our students.

The process for getting EXCEL funds from Albany works like a grant program. Designing a capital project and earning a positive vote from residents is the state's method for determining how to allocate this taxpayer "grant" money. It is a way for our community to get back some of our income taxes and apply them to local projects and purposes that are supported by our local residents. If we don't use this method, the tax dollars that we have already sent to Albany do not return to our community. Instead, another school district or community will be investing our dollars in their approved projects.

There are those who may feel that the system itself is imprudent or should be changed. However, it is the system that exists. Until it is changed, if we do not access it through a capital project vote, we may pay ten times as much for the same large-scale work. This Board of Education does not believe that spending four times more for anything makes fiscal sense.

Q. Why now?

- A. All Districts are required by the State Education Department to complete a building condition survey every five years. A survey was completed in the spring of 2015 and identified \$54 million in infrastructure needs that should be addressed in our buildings. This bond issue addresses the highest priority items from the study and also aims to improve the security/safety of all building entries, the educational programming at the Jr/Sr High, and enhance the Districts technology.

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Q. How was this project developed?

- A. The information collected in the 2015 Building Condition Survey was used to develop a five-year plan for facility improvements. The District facilities team met with the architect and construction manager to review the five-year plan and the information collected during the building condition survey.

The group reviewed the systems that require repair and/or replacement, as well as the academic program needs of the district, and developed items to address in a potential capital project. After reviewing a number of building and site improvement options, the Board of Education chose the options that are identified above as the most cost-effective solutions for the District's building needs at this time.

The committee and the BOE are recommending improvements based on a "Warm, Safe & Dry" criterion and the educational needs at the middle/high school building. These items are seen as needing attention now.

Warm

- Window replacement
- Door replacement
- Boiler replacement/heating system upgrades

Safe

- Security vestibules at the middle/high school
- Communications/technology improvements
- ADA compliance renovations
- Athletic renovations
- Site work renovations

Dry

- Roof replacement
- Masonry restoration

Educational Programming

- Creating distinct middle school and high school wings
- MS/HS science/home economics/ art rooms
- MS/HS classroom renovations
- MS/HS guidance offices
- MS/HS corridor addition

Q. Why are you proposing entry additions at the Jr/Sr High School?

- A. Protecting our schools and securing entryways has become a focus of renovation projects for school Districts throughout the country. The proposed entry additions will provide a secure entrance for the Middle and High school wings of the building and will ensure visitors enter through the main office and do not have direct access to corridors and classrooms.

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Q What is the District's plan for security elementary building entryways?

A. In November 2015, NYS voters approved the Smart School Bond Act (SSBA). These funds can be used to enhance existing school security. Our facilities team and BOE have decided to utilize SSBA funds to cover the installation of building control access systems and additional security cameras at the elementary buildings. The SSBA funds are a grant program and the District will be filing the appropriate paperwork to proceed.

The District will also be utilizing SSBA funds to enhance the technology infrastructure of the academic buildings.

Q. How are the improvements needed and how will this project improve our children's education?

A. A walk through the Middle/High School will reveal outdated technology and deteriorating infrastructure. The spaces that were constructed in 1957 and 1985 cannot accommodate the current educational programs. Renovations are needed to accommodate changing curriculums and meet current health and safety codes. Work will also include ADA compliant renovations. The infrastructure improvements will not only enhance the educational environment (air quality, lighting, etc) in the classrooms but the overall look of the building.

Q. What is the timeline if the proposed project is approved?

A. If the Bond Issue is approved in December, the district and our architects plan to complete the design of the building additions and renovations, and submit the plans to the State Education Department (SED) in phases. The first phase of work would be the submission of the roof replacement at the middle/high school. The work will then be submitted in additional phases over the next 12-18 months. SED will review the plans, contracts will bid and construction will take place over a few summers. Please note that all dates are estimated.

Q. What will happen if this proposition fails?

A. The school district must have a super majority (60% of the voters) approval to undertake this project.

Without super majority approval, no money can be borrowed for the project and there will be no state aid to offset the costs. The work would have to be paid for through the school district's general fund, with all of the associated costs passed on to local taxpayers. Payment would have to be made immediately instead of spreading the costs out over a number of years.

If emergency repairs are needed to address these issues, school officials may have no control over when and how the emergency repair work is done to minimize the impact on the students. This will ultimately create more work and additional costs. We will continue to put a band aid on the problems rather than correct them.

Q. Why does the Bond Issue need super majority for approval.

A. The school district must have a super majority (60% of the voters) approval to undertake this project because it will be exceeding its constitutional debt limit.

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Q. If this Bond Issue passes, do you anticipate another Bond Issue any time soon?

A. It is always difficult to predict the future over a long period of time. Whether they involve new buildings or just completing repairs and updates will be determined by how effectively we develop and implement projects like the one that is currently being proposed. This proposed capital project addresses needs based on a prioritized list determined in the Building Conditions Survey conducted in May 2015. Remaining work will likely be addressed in future projects.

Q. The voter authorization is for \$27.3 million for a bond issue. What guarantee is there that there won't be any cost overruns.

A. School Districts throughout New York are required by law not to exceed the amount approved by voters. The District's architect and construction manager will work closely with the School Board and District administrators during bidding and construction to keep costs in line with budget projections.

Q. How might this project benefit the community at large?

A. Children are not the only users of the Lackawanna School Facilities. Though children benefit directly from the schools, this also affects the general quality of life in our entire community. According to real estate experts, the positive reputation of a community's school system plays a major role in enhancing long-term real estate values. In addition, members of the community and various organizations often use the schools facilities.

Q. Why don't we handle these improvements in a regular budget, instead of putting them up for a vote in a capital project?

A. In New York State, project referendum is the most effective option financially for any school district. Lackawanna currently receives 98% in building aid for a project. Why is that? Because the state recognized several decades ago that school buildings and school infrastructures across the state had fallen below standard or were even in serious disrepair. Increased building aid was established as an incentive for school communities everywhere in the state to design and approve modernization projects.

Q. What's the biggest reason capital projects make sense?

A. They represent real value to the taxpayer. The more necessary expenditures we can put into a project to keep them away from our regular operating budget is just plain good financial planning. Every dime we save by having it in a project is a dime that we can apply to keeping a teacher in the classroom. If we pay these expenses in the regular budget, we place more of a financial burden on our public and we have less flexibility for addressing personnel or program challenges. Pre-planned projects help the District immensely as we face current challenges to our regular operating budget. Pre-planned projects maximize the financial leverage of a District's local dollars and allow the community to keep in mind the connection between our projects and our educational program's progress. Because they mitigate the high costs involved in building renovation and necessary infrastructure upgrades, they also help eliminate budgetary "peaks and valleys" that can produce wide swings in the tax impact to our community.

Q. Why is little work being proposed for Martin Road Elementary?

A. Martin Road Elementary opened in 2003 and has the least amount of infrastructure needs based on the age of the building. Technology needs at Martin Road Elementary will be addressed with Smart Schools Bond funds.

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Q. Why can't we put these items in our regular budget?

A. Each year over \$2 million is budgeted for the operations and maintenance of the school facilities. Included in that budget, along with salaries of staff and utilities expense, are costs associated with the general repair of pumps, boilers, motors, etc. Since this is in the regular budget, the costs of these items are borne by the local taxpayer.

Q. Is there a web-site where I can find additional information regarding the project?

A. You can find more information regarding the project on the District's web-site at www.lackawannaschools.org

Q. What happens if December 22nd is a District snow day.

A. If December 22nd is a District snow day, the vote will be held the next day school reopens.

Q. What are the requirements to be eligible to vote on this bond issue and where will the vote be held?

A. Voters must be a citizen of the U.S., at least 18 years of age, a registered voter, and a resident of the district at least 30 days prior to the day of the vote. The vote will be held on Tuesday, December 22, 2015 in the Senior Citizen Center at 230 Martin Road, Lackawanna. The polls will be open from noon- 9 pm. Absentee ballots will be available in the District office.