



## Communications

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## **FAQS ON NOVEMBER 2016 COMBINED BOND/PI ISSUE**

### **What is Issue 121?**

The combined 1.3-mill bond and 0.8-mill permanent improvement levy will raise funds to build one new elementary school to replace the four current elementary schools. The bond will raise \$33.6 million and the permanent improvement levy will generate \$1.14 million that will be used in maintaining all of the district's facilities, to protect the public's investment in the facilities. It will not increase taxes-meaning residents will pay the same amount they already pay.

### **Why is this on the ballot? What's wrong with our current schools?**

After years of study, a committee led by members of the community representing parents, seniors, business leaders, elected officials, volunteers, teachers, staff, and students concluded that the current elementary facilities are not suited for today's educational standards. The four elementary schools have antiquated boilers, failing electrical systems that cannot handle modern technology needs, and inefficient and crumbling windows, doors and brick exteriors. The buildings also lack modern safety and security mechanisms – and they are too old to be retrofitted. Further, all of our schools currently use trailers to accommodate students and the classrooms are smaller than the state's MINIMUM class space standards.

### **Will this issue raise taxes?**

No. Because there are 2.43 mills that will be rolling off at the end of this year, this 2.1-mill combined issue will not raise taxes. Residents will continue to pay the same amount they already pay.

### **How will this save us funds?**

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By reducing the number of elementary schools from four to one, the district will save up to \$1.2 million every year. Most of these cost savings will be realized through attrition, as teachers and staff retire. Also, the permanent improvement levy funds can be used to maintain and upgrade existing facilities for all school buildings. Because the district will not have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on emergency, Band-Aid repairs, those funds can be focused in the classroom.

### **How many positions will be eliminated going from 4 buildings to 1?**

By consolidating four elementary schools into one building, we will save over \$1.2 million in staffing costs alone. At the elementary level, we will be reduced from 104 to 96 teaching positions, 74 to 58 classified/support positions, and down to 3 administrative positions. Almost all of these positions will be eliminated through retirements. By the time the project is complete, 72 classified employees and 47 certified employees will be eligible for retirement. We anticipate we can achieve these reductions with no or minimal layoffs.

### **Do other school districts have permanent improvement levies?**

About 80% of school districts in Cuyahoga County have PI levies to fund capital improvements, according to the Cuyahoga County Auditor's Office. The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission, which guides capital projects for Ohio's public K-12 schools, considers a permanent improvement levy and a maintenance plan as a best practice when schools seek a bond issue for new school construction. Our own 20/20 Vision Committee included a recommendation for a PI levy in its Phase I Master Facilities Plan recommendations to the Board of Education.

### **What measures are in place to ensure high quality construction of this new elementary school building?**

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The high school construction project provided learning opportunities for our facilities team. While the project was on time and on budget, the resolution of two incidents with contractors required legal intervention. The issues with the flooring and the rotunda are now resolved without spending additional funds. Since then, we have adopted a "Construction Manager At-Risk" process that protects us from any errors made by building contractors and guarantees a maximum price for the district. Should issues arise, it will be the responsibility of the vendors to absorb additional costs to fix any problems.

### **Where will the new elementary school be located?**

The school district and the City of Westlake are continuing negotiations on a land swap involving a 32-acre property west of Center Ridge Road. The deal has not yet come to fruition, however, we have two excellent options. If we cannot come to an agreement on the land swap with the city, we can rebuild on the Parkside site that is being used for district administrative offices. We will work with the city to ensure we do what is best for our students and community, including completing the appropriate traffic studies, to minimize the impact on the neighborhoods.

### **How many students will be housed in the new school?**

The entire building will house about 1,200 PK-4 students.

### **When will the new school be built?**

Once the combined issue passes this November, the funds will begin to be collected on January 1, 2017. The district is required to begin spending dollars within three years.

### **How will this impact education?**

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The decision to move from four elementary school buildings to one building will strengthen education by ensuring that all Westlake students receive the same curriculum. Teachers will be able to better coordinate and collaborate with their peers, and students will now have access to support services like counseling, therapy and technology/media every day, instead of only on the days where the traveling staff member was in their building.

### **What will happen to closed buildings?**

The school district is looking at creating green space at those sites. We are not seeking to liquidate our assets. Selling property means a one-time influx of dollars that cannot make up a looming \$8 million budget deficit in 2020.

### **Isn't this the same issue that was on the ballot before?**

No. There has **never** been a bond issue on the ballot to fund a new elementary school. Previous operating issues and a permanent improvement levy attempt were not successful, so the district made budget reductions and retooled operations. Now, we have an opportunity to seek a "no new millage" bond issue to build a new elementary school to replace our four aging, inefficient elementary school buildings.

### **I don't have any children attending Westlake Schools. Why does this matter to me?**

Westlake Schools are an integral part of the quality of life enjoyed in Westlake. Excellent schools are directly tied to maintaining property values and making Westlake a desirable place to live. Designating a separate funding source for capital needs and annual maintenance is the best way to ensure safe and reliable facilities, and to protect taxpayers' investment.

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### **What happens if this issue fails?**

The district will not be able to continue to financially sustain four elementary school buildings. An elementary consolidation plan will likely result in the closing of one or more schools.

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