

# **RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT**

*A COMMUNITY'S VISION* >>

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## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Richland School District  
Capital Referendum - April 2021**

*This Document is updated as additional questions come in. Please check back to see these additional questions and answers.*

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## Section 1 - Questions about Our Needs

### **Q: How much is the bond referendum?**

A: The District is asking to borrow up to \$19,700,000 for building and site improvements at Doudna Elementary School, Richland Middle School, and Richland Center High School.

### **Q: What is the referendum for?**

A: The bond is for facility improvements, including roof updates at RMS, roof replacement at RCHS (25 years old), a grade 3-5 addition for the new Richland Intermediate School. In addition, other facility improvements and deferred maintenance such as parking lot resurfacing, window and door replacements, electrical upgrades, and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will be completed.

### **Q: Why does this have to be done through a referendum? Couldn't the District find money in its budget for these items?**

A: The District has gone through several facility projects over the last several years without going to referendum. The District has been conservative in its approach to help make the best use of tax dollars. However, the number of projects and costs exceeds the ability of the District to utilize dollars available in its annual budget.

### **Q: Why can't these items be paid for out of our Fund Balance?**

A: Due to the timing of when we receive revenue (primarily State aid and property taxes), the District must use its fund balance for general operations until these revenues are received. Therefore, if items are paid for from our fund balance, it may not allow us to function without the need for borrowing, which would incur additional costs.

### **Q: Doesn't the \$1.25M Operational Referendum passed in November cover our maintenance costs?**

A: The \$1,250,000 referendum in November was a projected amount to maintain the current programming in the District. However, this amount was based on being in a more efficient, three-campus model when combined with the \$27.0M facility question, which did not pass in November.

When planning for the November referendum, the annual amount needed to maintain our current, five-campus model was projected at approximately \$1,675,000. Had both referendum questions passed in November, the \$1,250,000 would have been enough to support the three-campus model.

The difference of \$425,000 is an annual cost the District will need to account for if the referendum fails. The District would have to pursue cost-savings from reduced programming, staff reductions, or other cost-saving measures.

## **Section 2 - Questions about Students and Staff**

**Q: What are some educational benefits of reducing to three (3) campuses instead of four (4) or five (5)?**

A: Studies show students' academic and personal growth is enhanced when there are fewer transitions from one building to another. Additionally, with fewer campuses, teachers and staff are able to more effectively collaborate to improve learning outcomes. Having all students in the same grade located in the same building will also create greater equity in learning for students.

**Q: What are some fiscal benefits of reducing to three (3) campuses instead of four (4) or five (5)?**

A: The operational cost of maintaining four or five buildings is more expensive than the operational costs of three buildings (given the relatively equal square footage).

**Q: Will this referendum have additional space for our student population?**

A: This renovation will allow us to maintain the current programming and curricular needs with greater efficiencies and opportunities. The overall number of classrooms available in the District reduces by one regular-education classroom, with expansion in the number of special-education classrooms.

**Q: What do future enrollment projections look like?**

A: The District hired Applied Population Lab at UW-Madison to conduct a thorough study of our enrollment projections. This study estimates a district reduction in enrollment of approximately 110 students over the next five years and approximately 250 students over the next ten years.

**Q: Do we have room to grow in this model?**

A: While all student enrollment projection models forecast us having fewer students in future years, we do still have room for growth in this model. District-wide, we are reducing one regular-education classroom and expanding special-education classrooms in this model. This leaves room for approximately 350 additional students in a three-campus model.

**Q: What do our Open-Enrollment trends look like?**

A: The District faced a substantial growth in the number of students who open-enrolled out of our district about eight years ago. However, the trend has started to reverse over the past three years and we are continuing to look at ways to promote our district. Having fewer transitions and enhanced curricular opportunities may help this goal.

**Q: Does reducing to three campuses mean we are cutting staff?**

A: We are adequately staffed for the number of students we currently have enrolled, but due to the inefficiencies of having five campuses, we are under-staffed in our current arrangement. We do not anticipate any reductions in staffing due to moving to a three-campus model. However, student enrollment changes can increase/decrease our staffing needs.

## **Section 3 - Questions about Property and Construction**

**Q: What will happen to Lincoln and Jefferson Schools?**

A: The plan would be to look at selling Lincoln Elementary School fairly quickly. Jefferson Elementary might be held on to for a few years to see if it can be used for alternative options. Eventually both buildings will be sold.

**Q: Didn't we just put money into Lincoln and Jefferson in our 2016 referendum?**

A: Of the \$8,800,000 spent with the 2016 referenda, 82.2% of the total expenditures were on the buildings we intend to keep long-term (RCHS, RMS, and Doudna). 16.3% of the expenditures were on Lincoln and Jefferson schools, while the remaining 1.5% was spent on Rockbridge. One of the goals of that referendum was to address immediate needs, as well as school safety for our students in all our buildings. The 16.3% of expenditures at Lincoln and Jefferson addressed those needs and will have served our district for a minimum of six years, until a potential sale is realized. Any potential sale would also help offset any costs put into these buildings.

**Q: What has happened with the Rockbridge Property?**

A: Community survey results from 2020 supported the sale of the Rockbridge property. We had several interested parties approach the District about buying the property. We ended up selling that property for \$125,000.

**Q: Does the referendum include a budget for furnishings, equipment, and technology?**

A: Yes, an allowance for some furnishings, equipment, and technology is included within the project budget. The District will look for opportunities to use current items where appropriate.

**Q: Does the project budget include the cost of inspections, permits and professional fees?**

A: Yes, these fees were factored into the budget for the projects.

**Q: I've seen and heard about the term "ADA Improvements" to our properties. What does this mean?**

A: ADA stands for the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was passed in 1990 to provide access to buildings for people with disabilities. ADA is a federal law and therefore schools are legally obligated to comply with these regulations. While our buildings were originally built to code, ADA standards have changed over the years, requiring us to update our facilities.

Some examples of changes needed in our buildings include updating handrails on some stairs, ensuring there are the appropriate number of accessible toilet stalls in the restrooms, providing ADA compliant bleachers in the Middle School gym, providing access to the lower-level locker rooms at the Middle School via elevator, and other accessibility features.

**Q: Will construction interfere with student learning?**

A: No. The School Board has hired a construction manager to work alongside the architect to develop a construction schedule. Renovations and additions will happen in a multi-phased approach while maintaining safety standards that will limit any disruptions with student learning.

## **Section 4 - Questions about Referendum Outcome**

**Q: What is the proposed construction timeline if the bond referendum passes?**

A: Some work would begin in Summer 2021. The additions/renovations would start in Summer 2021 and be completed by the end of August 2022.

**Q: What happens if the construction bids for the project come back higher than \$19.7 million?**

A: The Board of Education has several options available if bids come back higher than expected. One option is to direct the architects and engineers to review and critically analyze the construction plans to try to discover ways to make more economical options without sacrificing quality or scope. A second option is to locate other funding sources such as grants and donations.

**Q: What happens if the referendum fails?**

A: If the referendum fails, some students will continue to have up to four building transitions throughout their education career. The District would not realize the full educational advantages of having fewer campuses. Additionally, we would remain in non-compliance with ADA regulations.

A plan will need to be developed to address the operational inefficiencies across five campuses, as well as the overdue maintenance expenses such as leaky roofs. This would result in the District having to pursue cost-savings measures in the form of reduced programming, staff reductions, or other cost-saving measures.

**Q: How is the Budget affected by a failed capital referendum?**

A: While the District did pass an operational referendum in November 2020, there will be an impact to the budget should this referendum fail. When deferred maintenance expenses are taken from existing funds, additional costs in short-term borrowing are incurred. In addition, the District will experience approximately \$250,000 in continued annual operating expenses towards Lincoln and Jefferson in the form of utilities, heat, etc.

**Q: If the referendum passes, how will property taxes change?**

A: The portion of property taxes related to the Richland School District will increase approximately \$110 per \$100,000 of property value annually. This is less than \$10 per month.

## **Section 5 - Questions about Voting**

**Q: Who can vote on the referendum?**

A: Anyone who lives in the Richland School District, is eighteen years of age, and is registered to vote can cast a ballot on April 6th, 2021. A person that is not registered to vote can register at their polling location the same day by providing proof of age and residence.

**Q: Where are the polling locations and when can a person vote?**

A: The polling locations can be found on [myvote.wi.gov](http://myvote.wi.gov) or on the District's website. If you have trouble finding this information, you can call the District Office at 608.647.6106, or email questions to [referendum@richland.k12.wi.us](mailto:referendum@richland.k12.wi.us). Polls are open from 7:00 AM to 8:00 PM on April 6, 2021 and are accessible for elderly and disabled voters.

**Q: Voting by mail?**

A: If you are unable to vote on April 6th, you can vote early by using an absentee ballot. You can request a ballot from the municipality where you vote by visiting [myvote.wi.gov](http://myvote.wi.gov) or calling your municipal clerk.

**Q: What is needed for the referendum to pass?**

A: General Obligation Bond referendums need 50% plus one of the votes cast to be “yes” in order to pass. In recent years, multiple school bond referendums have been decided by less than three votes. This demonstrates that everyone’s opinion and vote is important!