

SOUTHWEST SCHOOLS: DEFINING THE FUTURE

Monthly Update About Facilities Planning, Community Engagement & More

June 2017



School District Continues to Refine Facilities Master Plan

Working with the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission, the Southwest Local School District has continued to fine-tune the proposed bond issue that will be presented to voters to fund school construction and renovations.

In May, the Board approved a slight decrease in the size of the November bond issue. To minimize the cost to taxpayers, the proposed real estate tax millage dropped from 7.07 to 6.99 mills.

To cut the rate, the Board reduced the amount of renovations planned for Harrison High School. All essential renovations that affect instruction will remain part of the facilities master plan but some long-term structural improvements will be postponed.

At the same time, three other factors could have driven up the size of the bond issue had the Board not taken the corresponding action to reduce the scope of the high school renovations:

- The state's official enrollment projections came in higher than the district expected, necessitating that larger buildings be designed. The state predicts enrollment will increase by 6.8 percent – from 3,906 now to 4,172 in 2027.
- The state is requiring the district to include an inflation factor of 2.8 percent.
- Bond interest rates are likely to increase from 4 to 4.75 percent.

The entire project would cost about \$97.9 million. The state would contribute about \$26 million. Local property owners would invest about \$71.7 million. Homeowners would pay an extra \$244 per year for each \$100,000 in assessed value, about \$4 less than originally approved by the Board.

The master plan calls for construction of four schools in addition to the high school renovations. The new buildings would replace the district's existing junior school and four elementary schools, which are overcrowded and deteriorating.

The Board approved the master plan after input from more than 1,000 community representatives. The district engaged people from across the Harrison area this year to help decide the future of the district's buildings and how education should be delivered.

Superintendent John C. Hamstra said he didn't see much campaign support last August before a related bond issue failed for the second time in two years.

Now, after the successful community engagement, Hamstra feels differently. "This time, we have a cavalry," he said.

He urged even more people to get involved because the buildings are so overcrowded and in such bad condition. "The next five months will shape the next half-century of our school district. It is imperative that people in the community back this bond issue."



Harrison Junior School students crowd into the cafeteria.

School District Frugal With Tax Money For Modular Classrooms

When Southwest Local administrators saw the chance to save money on classroom furniture, they seized the opportunity. The school district bought several classrooms worth of used desks and other furniture for a fraction of what the items would have cost new. The school district bought the items from the Fairfield School District, which put the furniture up for auction. The furniture is from two schools that Fairfield is replacing.

The furniture will be used in some of the 10 modular classrooms at Crosby Elementary and Harrison Junior. Now that school is out for summer, the project is kicking into a higher gear. Installation is expected to start in June with the project finished before students arrive in August. The district decided to acquire the modulares as a temporary solution for overcrowding after enrollment at the two schools began soaring beyond projections.



**Southwest Local saved thousands of dollars
by buying used furniture.**

School Board Calls on State to Offer Tax Relief to Older Adults

The Board of Education has urged the Ohio General Assembly to reinstate at least some of the property tax relief it took away from senior citizens.

In a resolution, the Board strongly encouraged the General Assembly to enhance the Homestead Exemption Program. The program is set up for the state to pay some of the real estate taxes of qualified property owners, including people over 65. The state makes the payments to school districts, lightening the tax burden on property owners while maintaining school funding. The state put the tax rollback in place after the state income tax was enacted in 1971 to provide relief for those paying property taxes on their homes.

In 2013, the state eliminated the 12.5 percent tax rollback for new levies. The rollback remains in place for existing levies, meaning the tax relief would not be available for the 2017 Southwest Local facilities bond issue.

“We support any tax relief provided to our residents,” said school Board President Jeff Biddle, “and believe that restoration of the previous tax relief rules would be greatly beneficial to our community.”

Did You Know:

- Of the 223 Harrison High School graduates this year, more than 75 percent will head to college, 20 percent plan to enter the workforce and 5 percent will serve in the military.
- The high school more than doubled the number of students who took college classes this year without leaving the school. More than 180 students took at least one 3-credit hour course, taught by one of 22 Harrison teachers who have qualified as college instructors. Their families saved nearly \$1.3 million in college tuition.
- Harrison Junior students performed 1,000 acts of kindness as the school participated in Random Acts of Kindness Week.
- The Harrison High School Alumni Association is the longest continually meeting alumni association in the nation.
- Students in the high school Flag Club designed the City of Harrison’s flag last year. Residents voted for their favorite design.

In Case You Missed It:

More information about the facilities master planning process is available at:

www.southwestschools.org/facilities