



Communications

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'No Tax Increase' Bond Issue for New Elementary on November Ballot

At a special meeting on July 25, the Westlake Board of Education passed a resolution placing a "no new millage" bond issue and permanent improvement (PI) levy on the Nov. 8 ballot. This issue will replace the district's four aging elementary schools with one new school and sets aside funds to maintain district facilities – and it will not raise taxes.

Over the past few years, a planning committee made up of parents, civic and business leaders, teachers and residents reviewed the school district's facilities and considered different options to replace or renovate Westlake's four aging and deteriorating elementary schools. The studies found inefficient HVAC and plumbing systems, inadequate electrical capacity for today's instructional technology, failing windows and roofs, classrooms that are too small for modern teaching, and too many facilities for our population.

Based on the community committee's recommendations, the Board of Education decided to move forward with a \$33.6 million 1.3-mill bond issue and a 1-mill PI levy that will fund replacing Westlake's four aging and deteriorating elementary schools with a new PK-4 centrally-located campus.

This combined issue will complete Phase II of the Master Facilities Plan and create a separate maintenance fund for capital expenses, including safety, security, technology updates, transportation needs and building maintenance -- a recommendation from the original 20/20 Vision Committee.

The district previously structured its debt payments to drop by more than 2 mills in 2017. The combined issue on the November ballot will complete Phase II of the Master Facilities Plan within that drop off amount, which equates to no tax increase for residents.

"Due to refinancing and sound financial practices, some of the district's current debt is expiring, creating a very unique scenario," says Board President Carol Winter. "We can place a 1.3-mill bond issue and 1-mill permanent improvement levy on the November ballot to complete Phase II of our facilities plan **without increasing residents' taxes.**"

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After carefully reviewing the elementary school buildings, the committee and Board of Education opted to replace the four schools with one campus to save \$4 million in building costs. Going from four buildings to one will also save more than \$1 million annually in operating costs. Further, the plan will provide additional opportunities for students by housing music, art, technology, therapies and counselors all in one building. Students will have more access to these services when they do not have to rotate among schools. Aligning curriculum for all students and minimizing the number of times a student has to change schools are also added benefits to the one building plan.

“New elementary school facilities will allow us to continue to uphold our vision statement of providing a dynamic, student-centered, 21st century learning environment for the youngest citizens in our community,” says incoming Superintendent Scott Goggin. “It will also allow us to free up operating dollars – instead of spending money on emergency Band-Aid repairs, funds can be directed toward education.”

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