

MEASURE 26-215 - Portland School District Bonds

Ballot Title: Bonds to Improve Health, Safety, Learning by Modernizing, Repairing Schools

Question: Shall Portland Public Schools repair, modernize schools; replace technology, curriculum; by issuing bonds estimated to maintain current tax rate? If the bonds are approved, they will be payable from taxes on property or property ownership that are not subject to the limits of sections 11 and 11b, Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

Financial Impact: The measure authorizes \$1.2 billion in general obligation bonds. Because of declining rates on existing bonds, it is not expected that the measure would exceed the Portland Public School District's current bond tax rate of \$2.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value (AV), or \$500 per year for property assessed at \$200,000, the approximate average AV for properties in Portland. Thus, property owners would likely not see any increase in their tax rates.

Bonds may be issued in one or more series, with each series maturing in 30 years or less.

Note: assessed value (AV) is the value used to calculate property tax. It is shown on the property tax statement. It is NOT the same as real market value (RMV), which is the market price of the home.

Probable Results of a Yes Vote: A "Yes" vote would allow the District to raise approximately \$1.2 billion to modernize Jefferson and Benson high schools; develop a Center for Black Excellence; provide educational improvements, including technology upgrades and culturally responsive, up-to-date curriculum; and enhance health and safety, including improved accessibility for people with disabilities.

Probable Results of a No Vote: The District would lack funding for school modernization and for improvements in curriculum, technology, and health and safety. The District's current bond tax rate would likely decrease.

Background: The Portland Public School District provides instruction and support for approximately 49,000 students in 81 schools, 38 of which were built before 1930. This bond measure would allow the District to continue modernization projects funded by previous measures passed by voters in 2012 and 2017. Thus far, the District has modernized four schools (Roosevelt, Franklin, and Grant high schools, and Faubion K-8) and has initiated modernization and rebuilding projects at Madison and Lincoln high schools and Kellogg Middle School; if this measure passes, the District estimates that 20% of its total square footage will be modernized. Previous bond measures have also supported numerous infrastructure improvements--such as plumbing to reduce lead exposure--at every District school.

This bond measure is supported by feedback from community members, as well as students and staff; additionally, in 2018 the District commissioned infrastructure consulting firm AECOM to perform a facilities assessment of its assets. According to the report on the District's website, "a significant portion of District infrastructure is well beyond its intended design life; assets installed in the 1920s or 1950s present a high risk for continued reliability and serviceability." Although the District had debated a more costly measure, including renovations for Cleveland and Wilson high schools, it determined that it had to provide for urgent needs--such as "roofs, mechanical systems, and technology systems that could fail before voters could consider another bond in 2028."

In addition to infrastructure improvements, the District also plans to update curriculum and technology. According to Board member Amy Kohnstamm, the "district is 20-plus years behind for curriculum adoption in every grade level." The Board expects that improved curriculum materials and technological upgrades will help to ensure rigorous, equitable learning opportunities for students, and promote inclusive teaching practices.

Summary of Measure:

If approved, most significantly the bond measure would allow the District to:

- Modernize Jefferson High School (\$311 million) and allow for development of a Center for Black Excellence, including investments in North and Northeast Portland schools (\$60 million).
- Finish modernization of Benson Polytechnic High School (\$152 million) and build an alternative school programs building on the Benson campus (\$64 million).
- Plan for modernization of Cleveland and Wilson high schools (\$40 million) and design for increased enrollment at Roosevelt (\$2 million).
- Replace outdated curriculum materials (\$53 million), update technology, and provide equitable access for students to laptops and tablets (\$128 million).
- Improve accessibility for people with disabilities (\$34 million).
- Replace or repair infrastructure, including roofs and mechanical systems; perform seismic retrofits; and improve safety features such as classroom door locks, security cameras and alarm systems (\$184 million).

If the measure is approved, a citizen oversight committee, independent audits, and the PPS audit committee would maintain accountability.

Supporters Say:

- The Center for Black Excellence, including a renovated Jefferson High School, represents the District's and Board's ongoing commitment to "authentically listen, learn, and partner" with the Black community.
- Improving access for people with disabilities is an important step forward in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and according to local activists Michael Bailey and Mike Rosen, sends "a strong message to our young people that the PPS community values and supports individuals with disabilities."

Opponents Say:

- Some funding for Benson High School included in the measure would cover cost overruns of approximately \$230 million from the previous bond, representing PPS's failure to plan adequately for contingencies.
- Funding the modernization of brick-and-mortar school buildings fails to take adequately into account new ways of educating students, including distance learning, highlighted by the pandemic.