

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
Bismarck Public School Bond Election
Last updated: 8-30-2012

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1. ENROLLMENT & OVERCROWDING

How many new students attended BPS in 2011 vs. opening day in 2012?

On opening day 2011, BPS had record enrollment: 233 more students enrolled in Bismarck Public Schools compared to the previous year. About half of those new students were kindergarteners. On opening day 2012, we had 409 additional students with more registering. So over 2 years, that's 642 more students to find space for.

Are all of these new students coming to Bismarck because of the oil boom?

No. Burleigh County is also experiencing an increase in birth rate from residents who already live here; we expect an average of 35 additional kindergarten students each year; 31 more were enrolled this fall (2012). You can see the increase in birthrate looking at this chart:

<u>Born</u>	<u>Births</u>	<u>Enter K</u>
2004	948	fall 2009
2005	946	fall 2010
2006	1017	fall 2011
2007	1055	fall 2012
2008	1024	fall 2013
2009	1069	fall 2014
2010	1086	fall 2015
2011	1134	fall 2016

How did the District calculate a projected 250 new students per year over the next 5 years?

The District hired demographers to study birthrates and local demographic data. The demographers surveyed city planners, realtors, Chamber of Commerce representatives and other community leaders to determine approximately 1,287 additional students will attend BPS over the next five years. This is about the same number of students who currently attend Bismarck High School. By the year 2020, BPS is projected to have more than 1,000 students at each grade level compared to the current average of 850 per grade level.

Sunrise Elementary School will be 3 years old this fall. Why is it already over capacity?

The District's decision to build Sunrise to accommodate 500 students aligns with state guidelines. According to research done for the State, the most efficient size elementary school to operate is 400-500 students. Sunrise had 553 students on opening day 2012, so the district added a portable classroom there. It is possible to add a few classrooms to this school in the future.

Is the bond issue big enough? Will the schools be full when they are open, like Sunrise?

The proposed bond frees elementary space by moving 6th graders to middle schools and building two new elementary schools. Upon opening, the elementary schools will not be over capacity; however, continued student population growth may dictate the use of portable classrooms in the future. To accommodate the 6th grade move to middle schools, the District is moving freshmen to the high schools and building a 3rd high school. This realignment makes the best use of current District facilities. The School Board did eliminate plans for a new middle school or additional middle school space as part of this bond issue, hoping to address middle school space needs in a few years when bonds for existing projects like Horizon Middle School come off the tax rolls.

Does the District have plans to close any schools?

The District does not anticipate the need to close any schools in the near future.

2. PROPOSED PROJECTS

What projects are included in the bond request?

- K-5 elementary school for 488 students in Bismarck (E. of Washington & S. of 57th Ave)
- K-5 elementary school for 488 students in Lincoln (N. of Lincoln Rd. & W. of 66th St.)
- 9-12 high school for 1,300 students (site to be determined before the Sept. bond election)
- \$5 million for improvements to existing schools.

How did the District determine the locations for the schools?

District selected the elementary sites for two primary reasons: demographers have projected student population growth in these areas and the District already owns land for K-6 schools. A realtor has been hired to help the district purchase land for the new 9-12 high school. The School Board hopes to announce the new high school site before the Sept. 18th bond election.

Why is the District building a new high school?

The School Board chose to build 2 elementary schools and move all 6th graders to the middle schools as a way to open more elementary space instead of building 4 elementary schools. Freshmen would then be moved out of the middle schools into the high schools. Since a new high school will be needed in the future to handle our growing student population, the Board decided to take advantage of today's low interest rates and construction costs to build a high school now to save money vs. waiting until a later date. A high school takes 2-to-3 years to build. If we build 4 elementary schools now and a high school in 5 years, the additional cost is estimated at \$35 million.

Do other school districts in North Dakota have 3 high schools?

Yes. For example, Fargo has 3 high schools. They have fewer students overall and about 600,000 more square feet of school space. They spend about \$2,000 more per student than we do in BPS.

Why did the District choose to build an elementary school in Lincoln?

Lincoln has been part of the Bismarck Public School District for 39 years. During the 2011-12 school year, 435 students in the Lincoln catchment area attended 13 of Bismarck's 16 elementary schools. Many of those students are bussed. Building a school in Lincoln will provide classroom space at those 13 elementary schools and reduce District bussing costs.

How does the school district plan to address traffic around the new school in Lincoln?

The school district will work with the City of Lincoln to add signals and crossing guards where/when necessary. Also the City says its response time is good to get to the school in an emergency situation even with the trains that pass through the Lincoln/Bismarck area.

What is included in the improvements to existing schools?

The District will use about \$5 million from the bond request to fund additional space for programs such as special education, music and school nurse at the elementary schools. Other school improvements include safety and security upgrades, technology enhancements, HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), indoor air quality improvements, and deferred maintenance.

What happens if the bond doesn't pass?

If the referendum doesn't pass there will be no tax increase for the time being and the District will consider about a dozen options, including but not limited to renting space, buying additional portables or implementing split schedules to accommodate the increased student population.

3. PORTABLE CLASSROOMS

Does the bond eliminate the use of portables?

The Board set a goal to bring as many students as possible into school buildings to reduce the amount of portables being used throughout the District. However, continued student population growth may dictate the need for portables in the future.

How many portables are currently being used in the District?

BPS currently has 25 portables located at 11 of the 16 elementary schools & Simle Middle School; 19 of them were acquired more than 34 years ago, creating educational challenges due to the age of those structures. Six of the 25 portables were acquired within the past 5 years. Grimsrud, Miller, and Sunrise each added another portable for the 2012-13 school year.

4. GRADE RECONFIGURATION

Why is the District reconfiguring grade levels to K-5, 6-8, 9-12?

In addition to providing more elementary school space when 6th graders are moved to the middle school level, having 6th graders in middle schools and freshmen in high schools increases academic course offerings and provides additional extra-curricular opportunities for these students. This proposed grade configuration also aligns with other state and national districts.

When will the reconfiguration take place?

Under the bond proposal, the plan is to move all BPS 6th graders and 9th graders once the new high school is open. That could take 2 to 3 years to construct, so by the 2015-2016 school year. The Superintendent will recommend to the School Board that high school seniors, for example, be able to finish out their schooling at their existing school vs. moving to the new school.

There is considerable traffic congestion at some middle schools. Will that improve?

Currently, 15 and 16 year olds can drive to school, which creates some traffic congestion at the middle schools. Reconfiguring our grade levels to grades K-8 and moving freshmen to the high schools will reduce the number of students driving to middle school, which should improve traffic flow around Horizon, Simle and Wachter.

5. BOUNDARY CHANGES

Why didn't the District redraw boundaries to alleviate overcrowding?

13 of our 16 elementary schools are at or beyond capacity; all three middle schools are beyond capacity and Bismarck High School and Century High school are nearing capacity. Redrawing boundaries would not eliminate overcrowding at the present time.

Will the District redraw boundaries if new schools are built?

After a bond passes and construction on the new schools begin, the District boundaries will be studied by a committee of school, parent and community members and the School Board will establish new boundaries district-wide. Boundary changes will be adopted before the new schools open, usually in the spring before a fall school opening.

6. COST & FINANCIAL INFO

What is the amount of the bond package and what will it cost me?

The tax impact will be \$9 per month on a \$150,000 property for the \$86.5 million package. The bonds will be paid off in 20 years, though the cost may decrease if BPS receives additional state funding or refinances at a lower interest rate.

Can the School Board separate the elementary schools and high school so we can vote on each one instead of all 3 in a package deal?

The proposed plan includes three components – 1 new high school, 2 new elementary schools and grade reconfiguration – and will only be successful if all three are accomplished. Funding only one piece of the pie does not complete the plan.

Example: We need more elementary space. This challenge will be resolved by moving 6th graders to middle schools and building 2 new elementary schools. We cannot move 6th graders to middle schools without freeing space in our middle schools. This is accomplished by moving freshmen to high schools. Our two high schools are currently at or nearing capacity so we cannot move freshmen to high schools without building a new high school.

There will be several bills introduced in the 2013 Legislative Assembly to provide relief to schools facing rapid student enrollment growth. How does that impact the bond issue?

Bismarck Public Schools will pursue any funding sources, grants or low interest loans made available by the State to assist with new school construction. Should BPS be successful in receiving State monies for school space after the September 18 bond issue is approved, the School Board plans to reduce the local tax impact on the previously approved bonds.

Why does it cost more to build a high school than an elementary school?

The elementary schools are projected to cost about \$12 million each on district owned land. The high school is estimated at \$58 million, which will include the cost to purchase and develop a site. There are several reasons why high schools cost more than other school buildings. The square footage allocation for high school students is higher than it is for elementary students based on National and Regional Educational Planning Guidelines. High schools also have educational programs such as science classes with labs and Family and Consumer Science courses with kitchens that have more equipment and facility needs including additional plumbing, electrical, and HVAC requirements, so the square foot cost is higher. High schools are also on larger sites which cost more to develop with components like large student/staff/patron parking lots, driveways, athletic fields, tracks, etc.

What will it cost to operate and maintain these 3 schools?

Operational and maintenance costs for the high school will be similar to costs for BHS and CHS, for the elementary, similar to Sunrise. Funds for those costs will come largely from new aid generated by new pupils. Each student generates about \$4,000 in aid with 60% from the state, 10% from federal, and 30% is from local property taxes. It will cost about \$2.4 million to operate/maintain each new elementary school (similar to the cost of Sunrise) and \$5.2 million per year to operate/maintain the new high school (which is an average of the current cost to operate both Century and Bismarck High Schools).

I thought the District could just build schools as needed, so I didn't think I had to vote!

The District doesn't have enough funds to build 3 new schools at this time. BPS is currently paying off the Wachter remodeling project, for example, so the building fund is committed. Therefore, to raise taxes for new construction, the District must hold an election. It's on Sept. 18.

Why were you able to build Sunrise without a bond issue election?

The School Board saved money for about 3 years to build Sunrise without a bond. Using the same strategy now, it would take about 4 years to build the NW elementary school with building fund dollars, then another 4 years to save money to construct the Lincoln elementary school, and another 10 years or so after that to save for and build the new high school. During that time, the building fund would be committed to these projects, so there wouldn't be any money left for major improvements at other schools.

Does every resident in the District pay for the bond request?

Every patron who pays taxes to Bismarck Public Schools will be impacted by the bond request, regardless of where they live or where the new schools will be built. Residents in Bismarck, Lincoln, and rural areas around the city of Bismarck currently pay the same tax rate to the

District and will all share the cost of the new schools. Lincoln has been part of Bismarck Public Schools for 39 years.

Why should I have to pay for new schools? I don't have any children in the school district!

Children are our future citizens, workforce, volunteers and community leaders. Just as we pay for park trails, jails or other services we may not personally use, we pay for students to receive a public school education.

Why did the district close Richholt Elementary Schools and Hughes Middle School?

Previous school boards chose to re-use both of those facilities for different purposes, based on the needs in the District at the time. For example, there weren't enough children in the Richholt attendance area to justify the expense of operating it as a K-6th grade school, so the District moved the Bismarck Early Childhood Education Programs there and saved money by not renting space for BECEP. Some of the programs are mandated by state/federal law; and we provide in-kind space for the federally-funded Head Start for underprivileged preschool children.

Hughes Middle School needed to be remodeled, and after extensive study, it was determined that it would be more fiscally responsible to build a new school instead of doing a major remodel over the course of a couple of school years, which would impact student education. In addition, the district saved money on rental space by moving the district library media center, print shop, South Central High School, and Adult Learning Center to the Hughes building. Administrative, special education and technology offices were also moved into Hughes from Will-Moore, freeing up space at that elementary school for a growing Lincoln student population. Remodeling Hughes for these uses was less expensive than remodeling it as a middle school, due to ADA and other considerations.

7. OTHER IDEAS EXPLORED

Why did the Board include a new high school and two new elementary schools in the September 18 bond issue? Were other options considered?

In just the past 2 years an additional 642 students have enrolled in BPS, many at the elementary level. The Board considered multiple options to address this enrollment growth and ultimately decided to build 2 elementary schools, 1 new high school, and realign the District to K-5, 6-8, 9-12 to provide maximum efficiency of District assets.

One option the Board considered was to keep the current grade configuration of K-6, 7-9, 10-12, build 4 new elementary schools now, and wait 5 years to build a new high school. The cost of this solution over a five-year period would be approximately \$121.5 million or \$35 million more than the proposed 2012 bond amount.

Moving 6th graders from elementary to middle schools frees elementary classroom space at existing schools so the District only needs to build 2 new elementary schools in 2012. However, the District must move freshmen to high schools to free space to accommodate 6th graders attending middle schools. Moving freshmen to high schools aligns with other state and national districts and provides more academic and extracurricular opportunities for freshmen.

Have the concepts of year round school and split shifts been explored by the Board?

In past School Board surveys/public forums, the ideas of year round school or split shifts have not been popular with parents. About 1/3 of BPS students in grades 1-12 are already enrolled in summer school for 6 weeks. A split shift and reduced credits for graduation at the high school level would reduce building space needs.

Why not build a 6th or 9th grade center on Hughes Field?

The field is Bismarck High's home practice field as BHS does not have a field. It is also used by South Central High School, public entities like Parks and Rec, private youth groups, and private schools like Martin Luther to provide athletic and physical education space for students.

Why not go back to half-day Kindergarten vs. all-day K to alleviate overcrowding?

Educationally, this solution is not best for students. If the District only offered half-day Kindergarten, our students would fall behind others in the state and across the nation. This option was initially explored as a space saving solution, but the District determined it wouldn't solve long-term space challenges. Even with half-day Kindergarten, space needs still exist. The following year that same group of Kindergartners will need classroom space as full-time students in first grade. This solution only works if the outgoing class (6th grade) is larger than incoming class (Kindergarten). Bismarck Public Schools continues to register more Kindergarten students each year, making our incoming classes larger than our outgoing classes.

8. VOTING INFORMATION

When is the Bismarck Public School bond election?

Tuesday, September 18, 2012, from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

60% voter approval is needed to pass the bond.

Who is eligible to vote in the September 18 bond election?

Anyone ages 18 and older who is a resident of the Bismarck Public School District, which includes the City of Lincoln. To determine if you are a BPS resident, go to www.infofinderi.com/tfi/address.aspx?cid=BPS05814438478 and type in your home address with the direction last (ex: 123 College Dr. N). If you are a resident, names of BPS will appear.

Where do I vote?

BPS residents may vote at ANY of these elementary/middle schools, BECEP or Lincoln:

1. BECEP@ Richholt 720 N. 14th St.
2. Centennial 2800 Ithica Dr.
3. Grimsrud 716 St. Benedict Dr.
4. Highland Acres 1200 Prairie Dr.
5. Miller 1989 N. 20th St.
6. Moses 1312 S. Columbia Dr.
7. Murphy 611 N. 31st St.
8. Myhre 919 S. 12th St.
9. Northridge 1727 N. 3rd St.

10. Pioneer	1400 E. Braman Ave.
11. Prairie Rose	2200 Oahe Bend
12. Riverside	406 S. Anderson St.
13. Roosevelt	613 Ave. B West
14. Saxvik	523 N. 21 st St.
15. Solheim	325 Munich Dr.
16. Sunrise	3800 Nickerson Ave.
17. Will-Moore	400 East Ave. E
18. Horizon Middle	500 Ash Coulee Dr.
19. Simle Middle	1215 N. 19 th St.
20. Wachter Middle	1107 S. 7 th St.
21. Lincoln City Hall	74 Santee Rd. in Lincoln

How do I vote absentee?

Absentee application forms and ballots are available through Friday, September 14. You don't need a reason to vote absentee. You must be 18 and have a valid driver license or ID.

To PRINT an absentee ballot application form from the District website, go to www.bismarckschools.org in the middle of the page under Events.

To REQUEST an absentee ballot application form to be mailed to you, call (701) 323-4056, e-mail karen_ohlhauser@bismarckschools.org, or send a note to Business Office, 806 N. Washington St., Bismarck, ND 58501.

To COMPLETE an absentee application and ballot in person, go to the Business Office at Hughes Educational Center, 806 N. Washington St., between 8 am and 5 pm, Monday-Friday. Park on the west side and walk up the ramp to Door 5. You must show a photo ID as proof of residence.

When was the District's last bond election?

It was 14 years ago in 1998 when residents approved a bond issue to build Horizon Middle School and renovate the Hughes Educational Center to house South Central High School, the Adult Learning Center, special education and administrative offices, the district print shop, etc.

9. CONTACT INFORMATION

Who do I contact for more information?

Contact Superintendent Tamara Uselman at tamara_uselman@bismarckschools.org or 701/323-4054. Visit us at www.bismarckschools.org or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/BismarckPublicSchools or on Twitter at www.twitter.com/bismarckschools