



A Capital Project Primer

Through

Frequently Asked Questions

Revised 2012

**Vote Tuesday, March 13, 7 a.m.-9 p.m.
Rye Middle School Gymnasium**

Q. How is this bond project different from the one that was proposed in the fall?

A. The Board of Education has reduced the size of the project and the cost of the bond. The project has been stripped down to its core elements: additional classrooms and needed science classroom updates. The new 12-classroom science addition and the renovation of seven outdated science classrooms into 9 general education classrooms will support the additional 242 students currently enrolled in the District and expected to attend RHS over the next ten years. The original bond was for \$19,996,000 and the one voters will consider on March 13 is for \$16,350,000, a \$3.6 million reduction.

Q. What will the average taxpayer pay in 2012-13 and for each year thereafter if the new bond proposal is approved?

A. If the bond is approved, it is estimated that the average household with an assessed value of \$26,800 will pay an additional \$1.76 in 2012-13 and \$250.50 for seven years thereafter until older debt is retired from the District's debt service and that account returns to the current debt service level.

Q. How are existing fund balance reserves being used?

A. The Board has decided to use \$2 million of fund balance to reduce taxes in the projected 2012-13 annual budget and \$500,000 for one-time facility upgrades. This provides more immediate tax relief of lowering taxes by an average of 538 for 2012-13. The Board did make a commitment to a tax levy cap of not more than 1.9% and to discuss further cuts in the administration's recommended budget for 2012-13. The Board will direct its attention to its requirement in the coming months before the budget adoption scheduled for April 3, 2012.

Q. There was talk of large tax increases in the budget over the next five years. Is this true?

A. No, it is not true. In the information shared with the community prior to the December 13 vote, the Board of Education discussed a report from the Board's Finance Committee looking out five years to the **worst case** scenario. The purpose of this report was to show, among other things, how the new tax cap would negatively impact future budgets without action by the Board to create efficiencies and streamline spending. However, the Board has always intended on taking measures to control budget growth and tax increases. In addition, annual budget proposals must be approved by a simple majority of the voters, and to go beyond the cap of 2%, a supermajority of 60% of the voters must approve the proposal. The Board of Education cannot impose tax increases on the community. Furthermore, the Board is committed to ongoing streamlining of expenditures to ensure that future tax increases are reasonable.

Q. What about the renovation of the High School and Middle School restrooms?

A. The renovation of four restrooms will be completed this summer out of 2011-12 operating budget funds.

Q. Why is the Board coming back with a bond proposal so quickly?

A. District consultants believe that the anticipated September 2014 project completion is still realistic if the bond is passed this spring. The students are already in our schools and they are coming into the middle school and high school in very large numbers: cohorts of 270 and 280 students. The Board delayed addressing the enrollment imperative since 2008 because of the recession, however additional space is required and science classrooms must be updated.

Q. With the construction of new science classrooms, will students and student learning be disrupted?

A. Our goal is always to minimize negative influences on the teaching and learning process. All of the new classroom construction will be adjacent to the current school building. The renovation of current science classrooms and the connecting hallway will take place during the summer. There will be some disruption to on-site parking. However, the administration will work with city officials and the Rye police department to control and minimize traffic and pedestrian safety problems.

Q. What due diligence did the Board use in defining this bond proposal?

A. In 2007, after many years of enrollment growth, the Board enlisted the professional consultation of Dr. Paul M. Seversky, a school planning consultant, to analyze data, observe conditions, identify the issues, and determine needs at the Middle School/High School building. After studying the enrollment projections, visiting the middle school and high school, and speaking with administrators and teachers, Dr. Seversky recommended that the administration re-capture instructional space within the building for classroom use. In 2008 and 2009 the Board approved plans to implement Dr. Seversky's recommendations, and building modifications were made, along with a plan to add four portable classrooms. In 2011, with enrollment continuing to grow, Dr. Seversky provided updated analysis. He concluded that the middle school and high school were at capacity and there was a need for 10 to 16 more classrooms to address increasing enrollment. The Board verified the need prior to recommending this project.

Q. You are projecting 12 new science classrooms at Rye High School. Why build science classrooms, and how are they different from general education classrooms? What else is included in these costs?

A. Laboratory exploration is an integral part of any quality science education program, and the current science classrooms are so badly outdated that, in many cases, they prevent a full teaching of the curriculum. Science classrooms must be larger than general education classrooms because of the student engagement required in the learning process. Each classroom has 14 sinks [for a total of 168 sinks], gas is provided at each work station, a fume hood must be included in each classroom and emergency shower stations are required for safety. The health and safety of our students is always a priority; however, in science laboratories there are many more necessary safeguards. Infrastructure to support the diverse technologies which are integral to science education in 2012 is also needed. The actual construction of the classrooms, halls and corridors is estimated to be \$302 a square foot and \$357 a square foot, with all other construction costs included. For a price comparison, real estate sales for the first three quarters of 2011 in Rye indicated some \$500 a sq. ft.

Q. In terms of percentages, how much of the total bond cost goes toward the classrooms? What will the remaining percentage cover?

A. The bond cost associated with increasing and enhancing classroom inventory is 97.5%. The remaining 2.5% will be used for other building-wide upgrades that are New York State Education Department requirements and new fire code requirements, such as the flashing strobe lights on the fire alarm units and added emergency lighting.

Q. What is the net gain of classrooms and how was this number reached?

A. This project will result in a net gain of 10 additional classrooms. The new science wing will contain 12 classrooms, and the conversion of the 7 current labs to 9 general education classrooms will provide a gain of 2 more rooms. The 4 portable classrooms will be removed, allowing the District to relocate current parking spaces, bringing the net gain to 10 classrooms.

Q. What will happen to the items that have been deleted from the December 13 bond?

A. The Board of Education will need to set some priorities for those remaining projects and provide for future funding.

Q. Is the enrollment growth a bubble?

A. No. Enrollment has historically exceeded projections. For example in September of 2011, enrollment exceeded the projected enrollment by 38 students. In September 2010, enrollment exceeded projections by 40. Our latest enrollment projections show enrollment leveling off at about 3500 students, a [50%] increase from the 2,202 enrolled in 1996. The success of our schools, and the attractiveness of our community, continues to attract new families.

Q. Is this a good time to build?

A. With borrowing costs for public school districts near all-time lows, and construction costs much more manageable, the Board believes the ultimate cost of this project is lower now than it will be in a year or two. The Board and the District are fully aware of today's challenging economic conditions, but with no more space to convert to classrooms, consider this a necessary and appropriate time.

Q. Prior to October 2010, there was a good deal of discussion about a field house and renovation of the upper field for athletics. What is happening with those facility projects?

A. The field house and the renovation of the upper field at the high school were removed from the project last fall, before the December vote. It is not included in this bond. However, a Rye donor has indicated that, upon approval of this bond, he will make a \$1.7 million gift to the District to fund one-half of the cost of a new field house and renovated upper field. The donor expects the community to raise the other half of the required funds for completion of these projects.

Q. With the increase in enrollment, how many teaching positions will the High School/Middle School need to maintain the current program?

A. The current educational program for the additional 242 students will likely require 10 additional full time teaching positions. Each student is required to complete Regents requirements and college preparation requirements of English, math science, social studies, foreign language and physical education. Additional electives are also provided as course options for students. On average students take 7.5 classes out of a 9 period day.

Q. How does the proposed bond affect the total debt to the District?

A. The total debt will increase by \$16.35 million. The Board's Finance Committee and the District's financial advisors will work to structure the bond issuances to minimize the impact on the tax rate. Borrowing rates for tax-free municipal bonds continue to be at very low rates.

Q. Can the hours that polls are open be extended to 6 a.m. to allow people heading into the City to vote before they leave?

A. Current law does not allow the polls to open before 7:00 a.m. Voters who will be out of the District and unable to return in time to vote can apply for and receive an absentee ballot.

Q. If this bond is not approved, what is the likely impact to instruction at the Middle School and High School?

A. If the bond is not approved, we can expect our class sizes to increase, with many well into the 30s and certain classes approaching 40 students in the next few years. The Middle School/High School building is already over its capacity, and enrollment continues to increase. Our current enrollment is 1681 students, and in 2020-21 is projected to be 1923. Based on this forecast, we have provided a detailed report on high school class size projections for the 2015-16 and 2020-21 school years, available in the Capital Project Central section of our website, www.ryeschools.org. Without additional classrooms and without three teams on each middle school grade level, middle school class sizes will be similar to those at the high school.