



QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SCHOOL FACILITIES VOTE OCT. 22

What Will This Property Tax Do for the Public Schools?

- Replace 7 schools: Lafayette and Northside High Schools, Alleman Middle School, J.W. Faulk, Green T. Lindon, Katharine Drexel, and Carencro Heights Elementary Schools
- Upgrade former N. P. Moss Middle School building to meet the needs of the new Thibodeaux Career and Technical High School
- Build permanent additions at 5 schools: Alice Boucher, Broadmoor, Evangeline, and Ridge Elementary Schools, and Scott Middle School
- Provide the most urgent repairs to 36 sites/schools
- Add a performing arts auditorium at Comeaux High School
- Provide a stable source of funding for day-to-day maintenance

Why Does the League of Women Voters of Lafayette Support Passing This Tax?

The League has studied the public school facilities' need for four years through school tours, interviews with School System administrators, School Board members, principals, maintenance, teachers, and students, police and fire officials, review of budgets, attendance at budget hearings, School Board bonding workshops, the six Community Dialogues, review of the facilities master plan, as well as comparing school districts both out-of and in-state. The 1990 long-term facilities study of the Lafayette Parish schools by Stanton-Leggett, a New York school planning firm, showed the needs of Lafayette Parish schools as critical and costly 21 years ago. The League recognizes that there has been a long-standing need for a consistent source of funding for capital improvement and maintenance for local schools.

How Do I Know the School Board Will Use the Money for School Buildings?

- The tax is dedicated on the ballot only to the master facilities plan and ongoing maintenance.
- The money doesn't go into the School Board's general fund.
- Money from the bonds can only be used for school facilities.
- The debt millage for school facilities must be independently audited.
- The School Board is legally required to spend those funds only on debt.
- The 2 mills for maintenance must be held in its own special revenue fund and its own bank account. It is also limited to items discussed in the ballot.
- A Citizens' Oversight Committee is included within the tax proposition. This 21-member community committee is made up of nominees to the School Board by 20 different organizations and 1 community member at large. The process for a change in the Master Facility Plan will include a review and recommendation by the Oversight Committee before any board decision with regards to any changes in the master plan.

How Much Will It Cost?

It will cost 23 mills for building and repair to generate \$561 million and 2 additional mills for building upkeep and maintenance. The cost would be \$16 more per month in property tax for a home assessed at \$150,000 after figuring in the homestead exemption. That's \$192 a year.

Why Ask for More Money in a Bad Economy?

The economy has been bad for at least the last six years and there is no assurance that it will improve in the immediate future. Old buildings deteriorate rapidly and Lafayette Parish has 30 of 44 schools over forty years old. Some of them are over fifty years old and a few are approaching one hundred years old. Over half of the schools are overcrowded. If the voters of Lafayette Parish continue to neglect replacing, repairing, and maintaining these old schools, the cost for doing so will only increase and the parish may never be able to fix its schools.

Why Are School Facilities Important?

The Cowen Institute of Tulane University's Study released in April, 2011 gives the following reasons:

- Teacher Retention—poor school facilities increase the likelihood that teachers will leave their schools.
- Cognitive Abilities increase in better buildings—motivation, energy, attention, hearing, and seeing have effects on the learning process.
- Absenteeism—overcrowded schools increase absences for both students and teachers.
- Classroom environment—the amount of natural light, air quality, the temperature, and cleanliness all affect the quality of learning.

Why Doesn't the School Board Fix School Facilities with the Money It Has?

The School Board has addressed \$20 million of capital projects by issuing Qualified School Construction Bonds (QSCB) and has requested an additional \$30 million QCSB allocation from the Louisiana Department of Education. The total of these two amounts, \$50 million, represents the School System's current debt servicing capabilities given its current revenue stream. Lafayette Parish needs \$1.1 billion to fix and replace its facilities. The need to solve the problem is much greater than the current bonding capacity for current revenues.

Why a 75% Increase in Millage?

This question needs clarification. There will be a 75% increase in the millage rate for the School Board—from 33.56 mills to 58.56 mills. But there will be only a 25–29% increase in the total parish millage rate, depending on where you live. The increase for our schools is large because our need is great and school millage has historically been low in Lafayette Parish. St. Tammany Parish's school millage is currently 68.45 mills. The total revenue per pupil for our parish is \$10,764; St. Tammany's is \$12,166, and St. Charles's is \$15,666.

Why Ask for a Property Tax Rather than a Sales Tax?

- The interest charged by bonding companies on a sales tax is much higher because of the fluctuation of sales tax revenue from year to year. A large pool of money, about \$40 million for Lafayette parish, must be put aside to assure bonding companies that the bonds will be paid on a regular annual basis because of the volatility of sales tax revenue.
- There is a state-mandated limit in Louisiana of 5% sales tax rate for local governing bodies. Lafayette Parish governing bodies are near that limit.
- The remaining amount of sales tax that could be voted would not be sufficient revenue for the school facilities' immediate construction and repair needs.

When Will This New Millage End?

The projected payout of these bonds is twenty years. The millage will decrease, assuming property valuations increase, as the amount owed for the bonds decreases.

Why Increase Property Taxes for School Buildings?

Lafayette Parish ranks as one of the top 5 Louisiana parishes in average household income and is the 5th largest school system in the state. It is a thriving area that desires to lead. Yet Lafayette Parish ranks 49th out of 69 school districts in Louisiana in tax support to its schools. It receives less state support than other parishes, in accordance with the state formula, mainly because of its large property tax base.

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