

2018 West ISD Bond: Just the Facts

By David Truitt

With Early Voting for the 2018 Bond upon us, I just wanted to take a moment to say thank you to everyone across West who served on the Strategic Planning Team, filled out the Community Bond Awareness Survey, attended the Bond Community Hearing, provided feedback via the Bond Planning Meetings, and/or attended one of the Bond Community Forums. Now is the time to make the best decision for you and your family, and I have always said through this process that I just wanted everyone in our community to get involved, informed, and vote. Early Voting and voting on Election Day will both take place at the West ISD Administration Building at 406 West Shook Street. The dates and times for Early Voting are Monday, April 23, through Tuesday, May 1, 2018, from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. On Election Day, or Saturday, May 5, 2018, the times extend from 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM.

Over the recent weeks, many impassioned written, typed, or verbal observations have been made about this Bond Election. I truly appreciate the feedback, and I know everyone loves West ISD and West. When I discuss the Bond with folks, I continually hear that we need a new West Elementary School. The next sentence is usually about the estimated cost, design, location, or timing, so I thought I would do my best to answer these questions for everyone.

First, the decision to call a Bond for a new West Elementary School was part of a well-planned, thought-out process that involved many folks from across West. Over this past summer, I shared with the Board the need to form a Strategic Planning Team to review all facets of our work in West ISD. Over 90 staff, parents, community members, and business leaders were asked to serve on this new advisory team. Membership was even open on a volunteer basis for any interested stakeholders. The goal of this team was to help draft an action plan with recommendations to our Board of Trustees for consideration and approval in several areas across West ISD. One of the topics was a study of our district facilities; more specifically the current and future challenges at West Elementary School. The Strategic Planning Team met seven times throughout the Fall Semester and presented the need for a new West Elementary School during the Board Meeting on Wednesday, November 8, 2018. During a Special Called Board Meeting on Wednesday, November 15, 2018, the Board approved the Strategic Planning Team's Resolution action statements. The Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for Construction of a new West Elementary School occurred during the Wednesday, December 13, 2018, Board Meeting, and the Board held the Public Hearing for the Proposed Bond Election for the new West Elementary School Project, reviewed the Community Bond Awareness Survey data, and Called the Bond Election during the Wednesday, February 14, 2018, Board Meeting.

Next, the decision to wait to complete the design phase for the possible new West Elementary School was centered on our desire to not spend taxpayer money on this project until the actual Bond Election took place. From past history, we know how expensive construction documents cost. Between the costs for the design plans and the land for this project, we did not think it was prudent to spend an estimated \$400,000 to \$500,000 until we had voter approval to move forward on these two steps. We do have floor plans, design costs, construction estimates, and potential site recommendations. We have already traveled across Texas and reviewed eleven recently constructed campuses. If the Bond is approved by the community, we are ready to move on things the day after the election. Again, I felt it was important to allow our community the opportunity to vote before spending money on the design and construction process.

Third, the decision to call a Bond ballot figure of \$20 million was on target for a new Prekindergarten through Grade 5 campus (total of seven grade levels). With a construction cost estimate of \$213 per SF from PBK, our district architect, the construction costs of an 80,000 SF campus would be approximately \$17 million. Please note this figure does not include all of the fees, land costs, and some furniture, resource, and technology needs. We do have a plan to utilize many of our current furniture, technology, playground equipment, resources, PE equipment, kitchen equipment, cafeteria tables, and library collection in the new building. We reviewed several recently built campuses for the same approximate footage, and our estimates are in line. In nearby Clifton ISD, the new Prekindergarten through Grade 5 campus is 78,000 SF and cost \$18.2 million. The square footage of our three target campuses was between 78,000 and 80,000 SF and were all built for under \$20 million; one even at \$15.2 million.

Next, the decision to instruct PBK to build a construction estimate based on 700-750 students was sound for our current and future needs. Unless a state Maximum Class Size Exception Waiver is approved, the Texas Education Code §25.112 states Kindergarten through Grade 4 classrooms may not exceed twenty-two students. In West ISD, we strive to meet this requirement at all elementary grade levels. Currently at West Elementary, there are 28 Prekindergarten through Grade 5 classrooms. If one takes the 22 student figure and multiplies it by the 28 classrooms, the total is 614 students. For the new campus, we have reviewed plans for 4-6 additional classrooms. These classrooms could be used as flex space or not finished until needed. We felt we needed to add a few classrooms for growth over what we currently have at the existing campus. Just 4 new classrooms at the 22 student figure would add another 88 seats and would raise the campus capacity number to 704. This figure is why PBK has provided estimates for a 700-750 student campus.

Finally, the timing and reasons to call the Bond were right and just. We know we are asking the community for a huge commitment to our district, students, and staff. We know the county taxes are already going up without adding the burden of more school district taxes. We know the 1998 Bond is still a part of our debt until 2027. Over the past two years, we have been able to complete or begin the athletic projects promised to the community via the approved 2012 Bond and celebrate the openings of the West Middle/High School and 1923/1957 Building FEMA projects. With the renovation and safety needs of the current West Elementary School campus, we felt the community deserved the opportunity to vote on a new future for our youngest, most-in-need learners. PBK has shared a report that it would take approximately \$11 million to renovate and update the current West Elementary School campus and another approximate \$13 million to add on additional classroom, kitchen, and cafeteria space. PBK has also shared the rising costs of construction over the next year. They estimate a 1% increase in construction costs just between May and November 2018.

I hope my thoughts above have provided some insight into our work to educate our community on this most important election. Again, my goals have been to get everyone involved, informed, and to vote. If you were not able to attend a Community Forum, please consider calling my office at (254) 981-2000 or coming by to see me at 406 W. Shook Street. Over the past month, I have visited with dozens of community members about the Bond and will meet with you too. Anytime and anywhere! My family and I are so honored to be a part of this wonderful community. I hope to see you at the West ISD Administration Building for Early Voting or on Election Day. Go Trojans!