

FAQ

HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON BOND – 2018/19

Initial set of questions

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1. Why is it so important to raise funds through a bond rather than through taxes? What are the advantages?

By raising the funds for a capital project through a bond, it allows for the District to budget the expense over a 15-year payback period. In addition, the district receives 42.4 cents on every dollar back from the State. The bond borrowing rate is currently at a historically low rate and makes doing work now less costly.

2. How often do we tend to do bonds in Hastings? Is this similar to other districts?

Prior to the last bond vote in March of 2014 we hadn't done a bond referendum since 2000. Schools typically will issue bonds every 5-7 years to address various capital needs. They range from general building repairs and upgrades to new facilities. Because of the downturn in the economy the District put off issuing a bond in 2007. In order to make sure our buildings are being properly maintained we feel it is important to a bond proposal this winter.

Hastings actually has one of the lowest bond debts in Westchester County. Most Districts of our size have done large scale projects in the last decade. In the Rivertowns our neighbors have all done a good amount of bond work within the last decade and like Hastings are considering doing additional work because of the favorable bond rates as well as need to keep up older facilities.

3. How much will this bond cost taxpayers?

The proposed bond amount of \$18,383,614 will result in an increase to individual tax payers who have a home valued at an average of \$825,200 of approximately \$453 per year. The increase percentage in tax rate is about 2.55%. We believe that doing the bond now will help keep the cost of maintenance and repairs lower in future budgets, resulting in some savings in our operational budget.

4. What were the last few bonds we did? What were their size and what did they cover?

The last bond we voted on was in 2014 for \$8.1 million dollars. That bond covered the renovation of Reynolds field track and tennis courts as well as the renovation and creation of new playing fields at Burke. We also renovated our High School Auditorium, fixed various roofs, upgraded electrical at both buildings as well as other building repairs. Prior to that we hadn't done work since 2001

5. Why is the vote scheduled for late February/ early March instead of later in the spring?

In order to be sure that we can commence work in the summer of 2020, it will be necessary to have the vote a few months prior to our annual budget vote. If we put it off three months we will not receive approval in time from the State that would allow to bid out the work under legally required timelines. Much of the work being considered has to be done when there aren't students in the building making it necessary to have the work performed in the summer.

6. Who decided that the Must Do items are actually Must Do?

The list of must do items are items that are identified by our architects and engineers working along with our Director of Facilities as they annually complete the required facilities report card. As items are identified they are prioritized based on useful life and condition.

7. If the bond doesn't pass and the roof needs to be fixed, doesn't the school district have a fund to tap into to cover those costs?

The only rainy day fund the district has to cover this type of emergency expense is the unreserved fund balance. The current balance in the fund is approximately 1.6 million. This type of emergency repair would likely wipe out the balance. This could also cause the District to have to cut back on programs in order to replenish the reserve fund.

8. Why is the District recommending an addition at Hillside?

The District is currently experiencing a lack of needed space at Hillside. With the growth of programs and additional support staff at Hillside we are maxed out on classroom space. As we project our enrollment for the next five years we see a trend of consistent growth. In order to keep class size at the community’s expectations we see a potential need to add classroom space at Hillside to ensure the ability to support small class sizes as well as grow special education programs as needed.

9. Why is District considering a renovation and repurpose of the MS Auditorium? Didn’t we just renovate our HS auditorium in the last bond?

The MS auditorium has fallen into great disrepair and has not been functional for more than 20 plus years. The reason the District is considering this work is twofold. The area needs to be abated of asbestos and is currently a huge wasted space in our buildings. The auditorium had also had a considerable amount of water damage over the years that needs to be addressed. By renovating this space we can repurpose it to meet the needs of our 21st century learners. It would allow us to create multiple flexible learning spaces, a new STEAM classroom as well as move the tv studio to allow MS students greater elective opportunities.

10. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT WE ADD SPACE AT HILLSIDE?

If additional space is not added to the Hillside Elementary School, we will either have to cut programs, put more programs “on carts,” or add trailers for the foreseeable future. [The bond overview document](#) goes into more detail on the reasons why the Board has moved forward on this bond project. Below are a few relevant data points.

Over the past decade, the five-year rolling average enrollment at Hillside has increased by approximately 50 students and it is currently at an enrollment level not seen in 20 years. A few illustrative data points over the past decade showing growth in enrollment:

- 2008-2009 school year = **528** students
- 2013-2014 school year = **588** students
- 2018-2019 school year = **643** students

For context, here is how sq ft/child compares to other local elementary schools:

Square foot numbers below represent spaces for elementary activities only. If a portion of an elementary building is being used for central office or other purposes it was not included.

2018-2019

Elementary School	Square Feet	Enrollment	Sq ft per child
Irvington	83,180	513	162
Dobbs Ferry	100,530	653	154
Ardsley	120,609	787	153
<i>Hastings on Hudson (after addition)</i>	<i>85,535</i>	<i>643</i>	<i>133</i>
Hastings on Hudson (currently)	73,000	643	114

11. WHY ADD A CAFETERIA/AUDITORIUM/MULTIUSE SPACE? COULD WE HAVE CHOSEN OTHER PROGRAMMATIC SPACE?

We thought about a variety of different options for the Hillside addition. After many months of discussion and deliberation our current proposal is to add four classrooms and a multiuse space. It was approved unanimously by the Board. Here are several reasons why we chose this option:

- **Creates an efficient use of space – This project was never about adding a “cafeteria”—framing it as such misses our broader space-planning objectives.** Our objective has always been to create an efficient use of space. Adding a multiuse space to the south end of the building: (1) Gives a crowded and noisy lunchroom more space and moves it away from K-2 classrooms, (2) Centralizes a bigger library/learning commons in the current café, making it a hub for the K-2 classrooms and (3) Opens up the current library for two classrooms.
- **Creates flexibility for the future** – One question that board members kept coming back to as we considered different plans was, what type of space will help “future-proof” us—i.e. put us in a position to flex and adapt as our needs change in the future. Right now the entire multiuse space will be used as a cafeteria and auditorium. In the future, with the addition of a wall, part of the space can be used as a classroom. An open space gives us options in an uncertain future.
- **Affords us a variety of additional benefits** – The multiuse space also affords us additional benefits, which further increase its value. It provides: (1) Flexibility in scheduling because more students could be accommodated at lunch at one time, reducing the need to stagger so many lunch periods. (2) Additional space for small group instruction, assemblies, afterschool programs, and music rehearsals. (3) An auditorium with a viewable stage. (4) A modern, air-conditioned, community-wide resource within which to host events, fairs, and other large group gatherings.

12. DO WE NEED A KITCHEN?

First, it’s helpful to put the kitchen at Hillside or “hot meals” portion of this bond into perspective. Of the \$8.1M proposed addition at Hillside, the kitchen is ~\$500K. That’s ~6% of the total addition at Hillside. The other ~94% of the money is a plan to create flexible and highly-usable space. To put the kitchen at Hillside further into perspective, it represents ~3% of the overall bond.

As it pertains to choosing to include the kitchen, here are some factors we considered:

- **No operating cost / revenue positive** – We will contract for services, which will not be an additional expense for the district. Lunch fees cover costs and generate positive revenue
- **Convenience** – Provides another option for working parents
- **Equity** - Easier to provide free and reduced lunch without stigmatization, which can increase the participation of eligible students
- **Use in afterschool programs** – A full kitchen for use in popular after school cooking classes
- **Low risk** – Plans entail turning an existing classroom into the kitchen. It can always be turned back if needed and the kitchen equipment used elsewhere in the district or sold
- **Ability to provide healthy choices** — We can control food choices ensuring healthy ones and limiting unhealthy ones

13. WHY DIDN'T THE BOARD BREAK UP THE BOND INTO A TWO-PART VOTE: REQUIRED MAINTENANCE AND ADDITIONS/RENOVATIONS?

Two-part votes are often useful to break up items that are perceived as essential vs. non-essential. The premise of the above question implies there was a way to break up this bond along those lines.

Several items that we could have broken into separate votes have already been cut from the bond. Early in the bond consideration process we had gotten the list of items to \$25M. Through community feedback we heard concerns about this size. The BOE took a closer look at all items to determine what could be cut or pushed off and we removed \$6.7M. For example, we removed parking lot renovations and full-replacement of energy inefficient windows at Hillside. For the latter, we agreed we'd replace them slowly over time in the years to come. At the High School we removed locker room renovations. We agreed we'd figure out how to get those done in other ways at a later date as it didn't directly impact learning or programs.

If we don't add space at Hillside we may have to cut programs or add trailers. Each of these decisions will have costs of their own.

14. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE VOTE DOESN'T PASS?

We will be conducting an exit poll on Feb 28. In the event the referendum does not pass, we will review the results of this poll to better understand possible next steps.

At a bare minimum, if the current referendum does not pass it will push work off by a full year, to the summer of 2021 (provided we're able to pass a different bond). The reason we chose the Feb 28, 2019 vote date was because it's the latest timeframe within which to get New York State approvals so that we could get into contractor bidding cycles so that work could start in the summer of 2020.