

Building A Bond: Idahoans Support Local Schools

Surrounding Teton County, Idaho, residents are putting their vote to work. School districts are asking their communities, “What type of school do you want for their children/students?” Voters are answering with funding.

Last March, voters approved \$695 million for schools, according to the Idaho Education News. Nearly every bond or levy on the ballot passed. Boise passed a \$175 million bond for 22 capital projects, including six elementary schools. Coeur d’Alene passed a \$35.5 million bond to go toward a new elementary school and new classrooms.

In late August, East Idaho News reported that neighboring school districts, Madison School District 321 and Sugar-Salem Joint School District 322, voted to approve two general obligation school bonds totaling \$30 million.

These districts received not only a bond, but affirmation that providing funds to enhance education is a community-wide priority. When parents are shopping for schools, the type of educational experience they want for their children is based not only in a great teacher, but what type of school facility and learning environment they will experience each day.

Throughout the state, Idahoans have decided that education is the most issue. In fact, a research team at Boise State University compiled an Idaho Public Policy survey in 2017 to gauge what mattered to residents, and education topped the list. When asked “What is the most important issue facing Idaho today?”, 26.9 percent say, “Education.” Coming in second, with 17.9 percent, is the economy and better wages. Much farther down the list, with 2.3 percent, is taxes. More than one-fourth of the state recognizes the need for an emphasis on education.

This renewed energy on education will only continue to help improve Idaho’s public education system overall. Idaho is not satisfied with being ranked 48th in the nation. This number is one the state is committed to improving. And while we recognize that new facilities are not the only answer to a better education, it helps close the achievement gap and provide resources to our students.

In Prudence Carter and Kevin Welner’s solution-focused book on education, “Closing the Opportunity Gap,” they stated: “Inequity among districts means that children in lower-funded districts do not have access to the same resources – modern buildings, technology, highly effective teachers, supplemental supports, etc. – than do their peers in districts with higher levels of funding.”

Even though TSD has dedicated and passionate teachers, the facilities can provide difficult bumps in the road, hindering their day-to-day teaching abilities. In Victor and Driggs Elementary Schools, hallways are used for storage. Limited restroom access means multiple classes, teachers, and staff share just a few stalls.

So, how did so many bonds pass in Idaho? Some districts were able to restructure old debts, while others tapped into rising property values, causing far less of a taxable impact, Idaho Education News explained. Just like Teton County, rising property values allowed for a larger pool of taxable dollars, meaning less of an impact on each homeowner.

The \$30.05 million bond proposed for TSD 401 will have less of a per-month taxable impact than the previous \$19 million bond that failed even with 55 percent approval in 2014. (Idaho needs

66.67 percent approval to pass a bond.) Despite the higher amount, Eric Heringer, the managing director of Piper Jaffray & Co., explained that this is because of the county's larger tax base, lower interest rate, and the 20-year amortization versus 15 years in 2014. Three years ago, the county's taxable market value was \$1,333,647,574. Now, it is projected to be \$1,684,333,003 by 2019. The cumulative amount of property the bond is taxed toward is larger, decreasing the individual impact.

But beyond the numbers and taxable impact, the purpose for the bond is clear. In less than two months, Teton County voters will decide whether or not to pass our bond

Surrounding districts have made the choice to improve facilities, update technology, and modernize campuses. This bond will help Teton School District do the same. The community has supported previous bonds and a supplemental levy, providing funds for more teachers and staff that retain great staff, and the district is thankful for the support. But our schools cannot continue to be fixed with a Band-Aid.

As you continue to learn more about this bond, visit tsd401bond.org; set up a tour of our current facilities, and reach out to your board members.

Education is **the most** important topic in Idaho.