

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
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Subject: Supremes, Levy & Bonds
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Dear Colleague:

Last week was a week of several milestones for our district! I want to touch on a few this morning, and hope you'll find these thoughts helpful.

On Wednesday our Washington State Supreme Court Justices visited with Everett students. They split up among Everett, Cascade, and Jackson high schools, visited students in class, lunched with students and staff, and were enthusiastic participants in thoughtful and compelling conversations about our justice system, civic responsibilities, and democracy. High school staff witnessed the intelligent, mature, and thoughtful questions students asked of the justices. Those students did us all proud; their demeanor and knowledge are a tribute to the experiences they have had in all their years in our public school system – and to every staff member who supported their learning along the way.

On Thursday, the Supreme Court heard three cases at Civic Auditorium with nearly 1,000 students from all four of our high schools and several community college students. Students clearly were enthralled by attorneys –including former Attorney General Rob McKenna – arguing actual cases on the stage before them. Again they asked probing and thoughtful questions during the unusual question and answer sessions moderated by Chief Justice Madsen following the oral arguments.

Although they may not have been aware of it, students demonstrated and strengthened 21st century skills during Wednesday and Thursday sessions with the justices. I wish you could have heard them exercise both inquiry and persuasive skills – and observe both justices and attorneys engage with them. You would have applauded the students' analytical skills, their “ah ha” moments of connecting experiences and knowledge, their creativity and eagerness in questioning and conversing with each other and with the justices. We may just have to do this again in the future! (The justices' eyes lit up at that idea; they were so impressed with our students and staff.)

We owe thanks to Everett Public Schools Foundation, Snohomish County Bar Association, and several attorney firms for helping fund the Traveling Court program. The justices' trip to Everett was the first Traveling Court held in many years, and I certainly hope it will not be the last.

Last Tuesday's election results were both affirming and disappointing ... but not discouraging. Voters approved the levy by more than the required 50 percent simple majority. In fact, Friday's results showed nearly 61 percent (60.78) approved the levy! Voters clearly understood the critical need for the levy as nearly one fourth of our operating budget. I am very, very grateful for this support of our schools – and

for voters' historical generosity and approval of school district levies – and I know you are, too.

As of Friday, more than a majority – 58.16 percent – had also said “yes” to the capital facilities bond. *However*, capital bonds still require a 60 percent super majority in Washington State. We were so very close to that super majority, but we all know close only counts in the game of horse shoes. If the final capital bond election result is less than 60 percent, the funding is not approved for the projects requested in the bond.

What is ahead for the district, if the bond's final results are less than 60 percent?

The school board held a [special meeting last night](#), and the preliminary election result was among discussion items. Frankly, it is unlikely the bond could reach super majority approval with the few remaining ballots to be counted. So last night the board began to consider options including whether to ask voters to approve the same bond request again, or to offer a changed version, or to put the issue on the ballot again at all this calendar year. The next available special election date this calendar year is April 22, followed by dates in August and November. The board will discuss the bond again during a work session on Tuesday evening, Feb. 25.

What was the Feb. 11, 2014 capital facilities bond designed to pay for?

The proposed bond would have modernized the **Cascade High School science wing** into a STEM facility. It would have rebuilt and modernized **North Middle School** and **Woodside Elementary** – plus expanded the number of classrooms for Woodside. Woodside Elementary is now the district's largest K-5 school with more than 700 students and more projected for the coming years. *(If you've not driven in the southern part of the district lately, take a drive down south on 35th – you will be amazed at the number of homes and apartments under construction.)*

Elementary school #18 was included in the bond for the southern portion of the district. Today, **Woodside, Cedar Wood, Silver Lake, Mill Creek and Emerson** elementary schools are all over capacity – with more students enrolled today and coming in the future than the schools were built to house. The bond would have included some portables and portable relocations for flexible and quick response to student enrollment fluctuation and dollars for construction of permanent classrooms for the long-term.

North and Woodside's construction work would have created entrance foyers with the same operational safety features that are now designed into our newly remodeled schools – for example, “air lock” entryways clearly visible to office staff – no more random entrances on sprawling, disconnected “California-style” campuses. Similar safety features would have been added to **Hawthorne, Lowell, Madison, and Jackson elementary schools**.

New roofing, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems and upgrades were planned across the district in this bond – as were ADA improvements for disabled students, staff, and visitors.

Nineteen new elementary classrooms across the district would have positioned us with space for full-day kindergarten (which the state says is coming in 2018) and for reduced class sizes in kindergarten through third grade – also promised by the state in 2018.

One of the most misunderstood parts of the bond was **Phase 1 of a new comprehensive high school** in the southern portion of the district. For an estimated \$89 million, the district would have added land to what it already owns in the southern portion of the district and built the first phase of a **fourth comprehensive high school**. Initially, the school would have opened with an estimated 750 students and then grown and been built out over time to our optimal size of 1,500.

Because it is costly to operate a school larger than is necessary, Phase 1 would have provided classroom space to **relieve overcrowding at Jackson High** quickly. There are now eight portables at Jackson. Housing the number of students likely to enroll at **Jackson High** between now and 2018 will require more portables on a campus already tightly packed with them. **Jackson High** today has more than 2,000 students – much bigger than we believe is an optimum learning environment for students.

Finally, \$20 million in educational technology funds from the bond would have paid for the next phase of our network replacement and expansion, and computer replacements, and maintained our ability to do that repair and replacement in phases to avoid spikes and dips in funding needs and keep our equipment as up-to-date as possible.

I do not know whether the board will present a bond package to our voters again this year. I do believe this “near miss” at the polls is a wakeup call to remember that **we each must be registered to vote**, and that we each must act responsibly to encourage others to do the same.

On Thursday, our high school students heard and saw the importance of their votes. The Supreme Court cases they witnessed showed how profoundly we are touched by court decisions and how important it is to carefully consider candidates running for a seat on the Supreme Court. The justices probably inspired some of our 18-year olds to register, and they certainly generated a sense of urgency about the importance of our civic systems, including elections.

I believe many of these students will be involved in future elections – including any that might involve school issues. I trust that this week’s election results will be a motivator for all the adults in our school community to act similarly – register to vote if not registered and cast informed votes at each election.

Frankly, it was distressing to hear and see misinformation spread about the levy and bond – misinformation that was a disservice to you, our public and certainly our future students. [Corrections to that misinformation](#) are published on our website. I encourage you to review that information and to ask questions. If you get questions you cannot answer, let us know. Our phones were busy with election-related calls in

the last few weeks – calls that give us a chance to showcase the work you do and the learning improvements of your students.

Welcome back from mid-winter break, and warm wishes and positive thoughts about elections, voter registration and voter participation,

Gary

p.s. Yes, I've discovered the difference in the Outlook picture which is included in the "gcohn" email address as compared with the "superintendent" email address we frequently use for these messages. Thanks for the teasing ... it was fun while it lasted ...



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