

**From:** [Cohn, Gary](#)  
**To:** [EPS.Maillist](#)  
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Good morning, and happy Friday! I suspect you've been reading some of the newspaper stories about school levies and bonds over the past several days. Some of them have been quite accurate, but some have not. Some articles have been downright scary, and some very uplifting, like the *Daily Herald's* [endorsement](#) of our bond. Well, here's some good news and some background about our ballot measures ...

**Good news** – as we near the Feb. 13 elections, more people are asking questions and seeking clarification about what's on the ballot, what that means to students, and what the [Capital Bond and Replacement Levy](#) mean for students.

**Good news also** – as the election date nears, so do opportunities to clarify misinformation or misperceptions about the Feb. 13 ballot measures. One of those opportunities was last Tuesday night at Penny Creek Elementary. Fifty residents came to learn more and to ask questions helping them better understand the “why” and the “how much” behind the bond and levy.

Although audience interest varied as did the topic of questions, three topics seemed top of mind for most who attended: (1) the cost of the proposed new high school; (2) what might happen if the bond fails; and (3) the tax implications if one or both ballot measures pass. I recommend you take a few moments to read the responses to these questions, so you'll be able to answer if someone asks you.

#### **How does the cost of high school no. 4 compare to other recently built high schools?**

***The per square foot cost is on par with regional high schools built between 2008 and 2017.***

This was explained by construction cost consultants from the [Robinson Company](#) and an architect from [Dykeman](#). Together, they helped unravel what it costs to build schools today and how that compares to schools neighboring districts have opened recently.

Sharon Kennedy oversees Cost Estimating Services at Robinson. She clarified how a good deal of the proposed school cost is caused by the region's construction boom. The strong construction market has created a shortage of contractors, a scarcity of subcontractors, and skyrocketing costs for public and private construction.

Last summer Robinson advised its school district clients, including Everett Public Schools, to add 18.5 percent to the cost of current and future school construction projects to reflect the full cost of building schools. The company's advice to add this recent inflation factor to school costs is in addition to this region's annual construction inflation of four to five percent.

The Robinson Company analyzed the per square foot costs of high schools opened between 2008 and 2017 and calculated what it would cost to build those schools today – with today's higher

inflation and construction costs. The comparison puts high school no. 4 square foot costs on par with the others.

### **What happens if voters say “no” to the Bond?**

***The board has made no decisions about how to manage our district growth if the bond fails.***

However, the board and district staff did meet in March last year at Jackson High School to explore what other overcrowded districts have done to manage enrollment growth and maintain quality educational programs. Most of those who attended the meeting a year ago were residents and staff in the Jackson High attendance area. However, our overcrowding extends across the district. Overcrowding, and decisions about how to manage it will impact all of us.

Last March and again at Penny Creek on Tuesday, Mike Gunn, our executive director of facilities and planning, shared what other districts have done and what might be considered to ease crowding across the district and at Jackson High – a school built for 1,500 students with well over 2,000 enrolled today. Those include:

- Adding more portables at Jackson High, which already has 17. By 2023, without a new high school, Jackson will have 30 portables on campus, possibly on tennis courts, parking lots and/or fields.
- Adding more portables to Cascade High, which has one portable now. Without a new high school, Cascade will have eight more portables in the next five years – by 2023.
- Balancing enrollment at the existing three comprehensive high schools by shifting boundaries so some students now attending Jackson move to Cascade; some from Cascade move to Everett High. Such boundary shifts would involve more student busing – a cost that comes from the same fund that pays for instruction.
- Double shifting – one group of students attends school early in the day; others go later in the afternoon.
- Staggering shifts – for example, nine periods a day with students starting and ending at different times to reduce the number who are in the school at one time.
- Enacting year round school, with a variety of schedule possibilities.

### **What will this cost?**

***The 2018 state school property tax rate spikes this year – the year BEFORE any tax collections would begin for the Feb. 13 ballot issues.***

You may remember how the Legislature extended its 2017 work three times! When legislators finally finished in July, they attempted to comply with the Supreme Court’s order to amply fund K-12 schools. Their mechanism to do this was a “levy swap” which increased state school tax starting in 2018 and lowered how much school districts can collect in 2019 and beyond.

That was a late summer surprise for us and other districts because of its immediate start and how it spikes state school taxes across Washington.

Jeff Moore, our executive director of finance and business services is quoted by the [\*Daily Herald\*](#) as

saying, “The Legislature tossed school districts a curve ball soaked in grease” by starting the state tax increase in 2018 and creating this spike.

We didn’t have any control of that summer decision by the Legislature. But we have made commitments over the years to keep the total **local** school tax rate stable. We have done that again for 2019 when **local** school tax collections begin for these two issues.

For 2019, the year collections begin for the Feb. 13 bond and levy, and through 2022, we have committed to a stable total local school tax rate of \$4.86. This is the lowest local school tax rate since 2013 (when the rate was \$6.50).

### **What does the Capital Bond do for kids?**

***Each of the Capital Bond projects makes a difference for students, staff, families and community.***

But parents at the Penny Creek meeting were visibly enthusiastic about the Career Pathways – hands-on, high tech vocational programs planned for each high school – programs giving students options for certifications and advantages for internships, careers, and further education.

Bond funds will renovate the vocational building at Everett High for medical and health career learning areas. Cascade High School’s science building will be modernized and expanded to include areas for aerospace and advanced manufacturing. Portions of Jackson High School will be retrofitted for information and communications technology. The new high school will include learning and training space for energy and sustainability careers.

Experiences in these career pathway programs will give students options to move directly into the world of work or to choose further education, making it possible for local graduates to live and work in area neighborhoods.

Other superintendents I know – and school board members also – find running school district bonds and levies to be among the most challenging and, yes, frustrating responsibilities. However, the information campaigns about bonds and levies are also great opportunities. Our stakeholders are focused on schools more during these times, and we have a more open window for telling our stories and sharing our successes.

District staff, your school board, and I have shared your stories and the bond and levy benefits to more than 100 groups large and small in the last few months. While some questions during those sessions have been harsh, even uncomfortably pointed, what is always warm and inspirational is the response the audiences have to the results you are getting with students – how you are changing lives.

Thank you for making those stories possible and for helping our communities’ children write their own strong, positive success stories.

The communications department consistently updates the [bond and levy webpages](#) with more bond and levy information and responses to questions as they come in. I encourage you to keep checking back as we learn more about the information people seek to make fully informed bond and levy

decisions by Feb. 13. Or email [communications@everettsd.org](mailto:communications@everettsd.org) or call 425-385-4040.

Best regards,

Gary



**Dr. Gary Cohn**

**Superintendent**

[gcohn@everettsd.org](mailto:gcohn@everettsd.org)

425-385-4009 | 425-385-4012 Fax