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In Our View/Feb. 11 Everett school district vote

Strong 'yes' to Everett schools

School bonds and school boards are different animals. Everett families make the distinction, teasing out politics from mission.

A measure that preserves a stable tax rate and provides for the next generation of K-12 students defines the public interest. It's one of many reasons that the 2014 Everett school-district bond merits a strong yes vote in February.

The bond is the product of a protracted process that would delight a public administration professor, with discussions at 14 board meetings since 2011, comprehensive work sessions, long-range enrollment and facilities planning updates, and a long-term capital facilities review. Public and cross-sector participation underscored inclusion with students, board, staff and the community. The goal was to harmonize the bond with the district's strategic plan, capacity and enrollment projections, a facilities' inventory, and anticipation of additional future needs such as full-day Kindergarten and K-3 class-size reductions. It's a case study in complex planning that puts students and taxpayers first.

The district itself is a colossus, 15 miles long with shifting demographics. Beginning in the late 1960s, administrators began methodical planning to align bonds and levies with forecast needs. The 2014 bond may be the best scrubbed, most scrutinized proposal in district history.

The plan was fine-tuned and amended to include modernization of the Cascade High School science building with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs in mind. The stable-tax rate plan for \$259.4 million (\$6.55 per \$1,000 of assessed home value, the same rate as in 2013) involves new construction, modernizations and new technology. Phase 1 of a new high school (approximately 750 students), synthetic turf fields at two high schools, and building-system upgrades (think roofing and energy-management upgrades) are just some of the features.

School boards are lightning rods, and Everett has had an absurdly high profile with spats over transparency. Things have settled in what retiring school board member Ed Petersen calls "an evolving leadership culture," and he's right.

Make no mistake: The February bond vote has zilch to do with board personalities, resentment over the new administration building, or other perceived annoyances. And citizens can and should elbow the district on issues such as foreign language classes (now called "world language") prior to high school.

Political quibbles are unrelated to the bond, which is a must. As historian and retired Everett school Principal Larry O'Donnell, a bond booster, observes, "You can't steer the ship or solve any problems if you throw the fuel overboard."

The Everett bond is about students, not politics. Make your vote count. Vote yes.

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