

## Bond frequently asked questions

### **Q. Why would the Issaquah School District raise taxes for facilities when the state keeps cutting the operations budget—wouldn't those dollars be better used for classroom services like keeping class sizes low?**

A. State law sets an immovable cap on the amount of local tax dollars that can be raised to directly support the operations budget, which pays for all the day-to-day expenses of running a school such as class size, salaries, utilities, and curriculum. A judge established the cap in the 1970s because districts were over relying on local tax dollars to run schools, and schools began shutting down when the economy dipped and levies failed. In Issaquah, we have reached that cap—we cannot collect anymore local tax dollars for school operations (the most critical need, ironically, as the state continues to implement steep educational cuts each year). On the other hand, districts have no cap on the amount of bond dollars that can be raised locally; these funds, however, must only be used for purchasing land and building, renovating, or maintaining facilities. Although not directly tied to the operations budget, bonds are *critical* in preserving classroom dollars. Why? The state provides no funding for facilities, and so we would be forced to use operational dollars to pay for school repairs, maintenance, and building if not for bonds. For instance, replacing a broken boiler costs at least \$500,000, and that is equivalent to about six teaching positions. Also, new construction streamlines efficiencies meaning hundreds of thousands of dollars are recouped in the operations budget when energy bills are reduced and deteriorating conditions no longer need constant custodial upkeep.

### **Q. Do schools receive more bond money from me if my property value goes up or less if it goes down?**

A. School districts do not receive more money as property values increase or less money as they decrease. When voters approve a levy, they authorize the school district to collect a fixed dollar amount, not a percentage of assessed property value. If every taxpayer's home value increased or decreased proportionally each year, they would each pay the same amount in school taxes although their tax rate would change. [Learn more: Property Tax 101.](#)

### **Q. Wasn't Clark recommended for closure recently? Why is it being rebuilt?**

A. The administration proposed a consolidation of Clark Elementary School in 2007 to recoup the operational costs from one of the District's smallest schools; the school board decided that it would remain open. The subsequent boundary committee redrew the Clark lines so that the school has become an important factor in overall population management for all of our elementaries. Due to continued pockets of growth in the corridor and adjacent neighborhoods, Clark's boundaries have grown to take on some of these additional students. Because of its central location, it has also become an ideal spot to place District-wide programs such as special-needs classrooms, moving them out of schools that may be close to capacity.

### **Q. What is our overall debt?**

A. The Issaquah School District currently has \$313.85 million in outstanding general obligation bonds.

### **Q. Do newer schools use less energy?**

A. Definitely—new schools save on utility costs and directly preserve dollars in the operations fund for classroom use. Consider: Since 2001, the district has added 555,153 square feet of building space (a 30.6 percent increase); average energy use, however, has decreased 4 percent. As a specific example, Issaquah Middle School (1955 construction) costs 27.43% more to heat than Pacific Cascade Middle School (2005 construction).

**Q. Given the economic environment, how does the new bond compare to the last one?**

A. The community committee, superintendent, and school board were keenly aware of the economic environment's financial impact on individual families. For each project recommendation, they questioned the critical necessity versus the long-term cost on the operations and capital budgets of waiting to address the problem. [In the end, the 2012 package turned out to be \\$14 million \(\\$43 million adjusted for inflation\) less and 33 percent longer \(eight years as opposed to six years\) than the 2006 bond.](#)

**Q. Wood paneling? Palatial buildings? Is the District going overboard on spending to make new schools "too nice"?**

A. Issaquah's newest schools are certainly beautiful, and visitors often say so. But as the Capital Projects team frequently likes to say: It costs as much to build pretty as it does to build ugly. According to 2011 state records, Issaquah has just about the lowest construction cost compared to neighboring districts' similar projects built in the same timeframe: \$227 per square foot for elementary schools (compared to the average of \$265) and \$226 per square foot for high schools (compared to the \$309 average). Here are several aesthetically-pleasing-yet-cost-saving construction examples:

- Issaquah High's new multistory structure looks magnificent standing tall against the backdrop of the Issaquah Alps, yet the vertical structure actually saved significantly on materials and labor. The three three-story classroom wings allowed the foundation, structure, plumbing, wall framing, glazing, roofing, electrical service, and heating systems to be identical, requiring less customized replication and fewer parts. Construction workers could also complete the work efficiently, much like a factory assembly line, going wing by wing repeating the same process.
- New schools often feature wood paneling and decorative cut outs in the metal railings. In each case, the material is chosen because it's the most cost-effective and durable. In high-traffic areas such as lobbies and commons, protective materials are needed to shield the drywall (or there will be a high maintenance cost); wood paneling is the same price as one viable alternative (plastic laminate) and less expensive than the other (concrete block). As for the railings, the specially-ordered metal panels are the same price as typical metal railings and are specially cut heavier/stronger to withstand high use. Since the railing is laser-cut anyway, the added cutouts (animals and bugs at Grand Ridge and grass at Creekside, for example) add nothing to the cost.

It's true that the new schools could be built more *cheaply* in general. However, durability starts to become a critical factor. The Capital Projects team is always balancing the quality of materials versus the expected lifespan and upkeep cost. Ultimately, "cheaper" materials often always end up costing more than doing a high-quality job in the first place.

**Q. Is it true that stadiums and field turf are among the projects? How can these be "critical" repairs in this economic environment?**

A. Yes, each comprehensive high school has stadium improvements and each middle school receives artificial turf in the bond package. These areas are heavily used by classrooms, athletic teams, and community members. Because the District has no plans to stop physical/environmental education or disband football programs, we have an obligation to upkeep the field areas to appropriate safety and usability standards. That is currently draining a considerable amount of dollars from the operations budget each year as facility crews struggle with under-equipped and under-capacity field areas. For example, the artificial middle-school turf would save \$150,000 in annual upkeep costs and provide *five* times more class-time use (eliminating the downtime to drain soggy fields, reseed, etc.). Fee-generating community

rentals would also increase. As for the stadiums, two high schools just increased their student count by more than 500 students each. The added capacity in the stadiums has caused safety concerns for principals (one section of bleachers broke apart during a game, for instance). The cost to fix and maintain the stadiums through the growth (bringing in extra bleachers, welding after each game ...) comes straight of the operations budget. Overall, this period of historically low construction costs presents an opportunity to rehabilitate the stadiums and fields to a high quality and appropriate capacity using bond dollars; for decades into the future, this will significantly decrease maintenance/safety/repair costs out of the operations budget and return those dollars directly to classroom use.

**Q. What is included in the Tiger Mountain modernization?**

A. There are two main goals:

1. To maintain a high-quality learning environment for students who struggle in a comprehensive high school and/or prefer an alternative learning environment;
2. To expand career and technical training for all students. Included in the second goal are flexibility and expanded hours of operation to allow students to retrieve or advance their credits throughout the school year; opportunities to partner with STEM-related and other local business (possibly in the areas of healthcare, engineering, criminal justice, culinary arts, and childcare) and to offer job training; and to expand online learning courses by creating a home base for the program.