

School Board Approves Schools Bond Measure for June Ballot

On February 22, the PAUSD School Board unanimously voted to put a comprehensive school bond measure on the June ballot.

If passed in June, the bond would make \$378 million available for PAUSD facilities, help accommodate the district's growing enrollment, and ensure that construction and maintenance are in line with economically and ecologically sustainable construction standards -- with no increase in tax rates.

New proposed facilities include a new pool and gym at Gunn High School, a new theater at Palo Alto High School, as well as new classrooms at all levels.

According to PAUSD School Board president Dana Tom, "This bond would move our facilities forward, supporting staff in accomplishing our primary goal of educating our students. It would bring significant upgrades to our existing facilities and more permanent structures rather than portables. We would build a new gym and aquatic center at Gunn, a performing arts center at Paly, and library expansions at some elementary schools."

PAUSD Superintendent Kevin Skelly concurs.

"We want to pass this bond in order to provide facilities and learning environments worthy of the promise of our students and to address our growing student enrollment," he said.

Increased enrollment coupled with reduced class size have led to growing pains for PAUSD. Since the Measure B bond passed in 1995, enrollment has risen from 8,807 to 11,172 students and is projected to swell by at least another 1,000 students over the next seven years. Prior to the district's elementary school class size reduction in the late nineties, two classrooms were required for nearly 60 students; now three classrooms are needed for the same number of students.

Using Measure B taxpayer funds, the district was able to pay for the construction of more than 24 permanent classrooms, four new libraries, and a new science building. Many existing structures were modernized and repaired, seismic upgrades were made, and electrical outlets were installed to accommodate the technology that did not exist when most of the classrooms were originally built. The proposed new bond would cover additional renovations, which would include energy-saving structural enhancements, and add classrooms to accommodate the growing student population. If the proposed bond passes in June, the district would be eligible for State matching funds to improve school facilities.

"The bond includes a fund for technology and for maintenance, which means not only that those needs are covered with a stable funding source, but that money in the operating budget that would have gone to those needs can go to classrooms," said Mandy Lowell, former PAUSD School Board president and a co-chair of the new school bond campaign, dubbed, "Strong Schools for a Strong Community."

Samir Tuma, a co-chair of Strong Schools for a Strong Community, said, "Families move to Palo Alto due to the high quality education our schools offer. As a result, enrollment is growing, and we need these funds to accommodate that growth. The funds will also give the district the ability to upgrade technology for the schools, and to renovate our facilities so as to reduce energy consumption. The great thing is that we can do all of this without raising the tax rates. It really is a win for the kids, the community and the school district."