

OURS

Trenton school bond

Buildings need renovations, added technology; vote 'yes' May 6

The year was 1968. The Vietnam War was in full bore, Lyndon Johnson was in the White House and the Detroit Tigers were the world champions of baseball for the first time since 1945. On June 10, 1968, voters in the Trenton Public Schools passed a bond issue — the last bond issue the system would pass for 40 years.

Over the past four years, officials in Trenton have tried and failed to pass two bond issues, first in 2004 and again in 2006. On May 6, Trenton officials will try again, with a \$37 million renovation proposal on the ballot that will amount to a 2.65 mill tax increase. Will three times be a charm for Trenton? We hope so, which is why we're endorsing this proposal.

Trenton's schools, quite simply, are old and tired, and they won't get younger or better in the future. The buildings in Trenton are very comparable to the buildings in Allen Park and Southgate, both of which passed large bond renovation proposals in the recent past.

After evaluating the bond failures of 2004 and 2006, Trenton officials changed their plans significantly. Instead of attempting to raze old schools and replace them with new buildings and a consolidation plan that would match declining enrollment, school leaders surveyed the residents of Trenton and created a plan that mimicked their preference for renovating existing structures. In that survey, school district residents indicated that they would support a plan that included a complete K-12 refurbishing project that would include technology, heating and ventilation, roofing and security upgrades.

School Supt. John Savel said the May 6 bond proposal is about healthy buildings, secure buildings and

technology.

Ironically, over the past half-century, Trenton schools have likely been their own worst enemy when it comes to tax increases. Trenton always has been known as one of Downriver's most attractive communities, in no small part because of its solid school system. Students, on average, score well on standardized testing and graduate to colleges and universities across the land.

Even the buildings today — on average 49 years old — look appealing to the casual observer. However, looks can be deceiving.

Many district schools have roof problems that have created a "bucket brigade" to catch the leaks. Things got so bad last winter that varsity basketball games had to be moved to the middle school at times. The upper walls of the high school pool area are failing.

Heating and cooling can be a nightmare in the classrooms. Many original windows were replaced with plexiglass, which has since yellowed. Many classrooms only have two power outlets, and those can be overpowered by new technology. High school students were off for three days last year because of a failure in the main underground power wire that runs the length of the school. Should that line fail again, it would be difficult to repair.

We could go on and on — about elementary school children wearing coats to class because the room is too cold, about door frames rotting at the base, about lockers that flood due to leaks.

The bottom line is that Trenton schools — like others in the area (remember Allen Park and Southgate) — need a massive renovation. Students need to attend

healthy, secure buildings that possess the technology needed to succeed in today's world.

We'd be the first to admit that spring 2008 isn't the greatest time to be requesting any type of tax increase. Michigan's economy has sagged and money is tight.

On the other hand, there isn't going to be a better time to pass this plan, either. We're convinced that the district's school buildings are failing, and they will not get any better in the future. Who knows what it's going to cost one year, two years or three years from now to refurbish what already will cost nearly \$40 million to bring up to speed now?

The May 6 bond increase will cost about \$200 annually to a homeowner with a house with a market value of \$150,000; \$232 annually to a homeowner whose house is worth \$175,000; \$265 annually to someone living in a house worth \$200,000; and about \$300 annually to a homeowner with a house valued at \$225,000. If you have a house worth \$250,000, it'll cost you about \$331 yearly.

Is this bond too expensive? It depends where you're sitting. But if history is any indication, it'll be worth the investment.

After all, the bond passed in 1968 was to be paid off over 26 years. By 1983, the Board of Education decided to stop levying the tax and pay the remainder out of its then-healthy general fund budget. Times were different then.

Now, Trenton schools need help. Old school buildings cannot get any younger without major renovations. It might not be the perfect time for expenditure, but it is a perfect investment. We endorse a "yes" vote on May 6.

Expansion

Meetings offer time to gather info

A 'SAAD' COMMENTARY

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