

MOORESTOWN TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Excellence, Equity, Engagement via Partnership

PRESS RELEASE

August 22, 2019

An Update on the Proposed 2019 Referendum

The MTPS Referendum Committee, consisting of four BOE members, school administrators and professionals from Edwards Engineering and Garrison Architects, worked throughout the summer to further refine and improve the proposed scope and cost of the referendum, based on feedback from the community, staff and BOE. Committee Chair David Weinstein and Superintendent Dr. Scott McCartney presented the Committee's recommendations at the August 19th BOE meeting. In summary:

- The Committee recommends splitting the referendum into two questions. In an effort to continue to provide an exceptional education to our growing student population in a healthy, safe and innovative learning environment, the first question incorporates the most urgent and impactful needs, while the second question includes items that would enhance the efficacy of the items in the first question but are not as critical.
- The total estimated cost of the first question is \$22.8M, with an estimated local share of \$16.3M. It is anticipated that the state will cover approximately \$6.5M of the total cost through debt relief aid. The total estimated cost of the second question is \$3.5M with just \$142,700 of state debt relief aid. The annual tax impact for the average home assessed at \$454,032 would be \$136.46 for the first question and \$27.02 for the second question.
- Due to the ongoing discussion and due diligence over the past few months, additional information is still needed from the County and State, including results of negotiations over extent of required Bridgeboro Road improvements and final determinations of which items are eligible for state debt relief aid of 40%. The Committee recommends the BOE consider a voting date of December 2019 or January 2020, as the November 2019 date is no longer feasible given the additional information needed and the deadlines required to submit all final information.

The Committee feels strongly that as we assess the current and future needs of the district the elements in this proposed plan provide all of our students the best opportunity for an excellent education in a safe environment. Furthermore, efforts have been taken to access state aid to offset as much of these costs as possible for our local taxpayers.

These improvements will support our instructional philosophy and goals by increasing space to best serve the educational needs of our growing and changing population. From increases in provision of Special Education to the expansion of curricular offerings such as STEAM and Innovation Spaces this plan is forward-thinking and takes into account current and future needs.

It will also provide an opportunity to reconfigure how we align our grades and improve focus at each of the levels. The William Allen Middle School expansion - a centerpiece of this project - will enable a Pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12 grade alignment in our buildings that will support a stronger foundational elementary focus, allow the UES to fully function as a true upper elementary environment, provide more opportunity for WAMS to serve as a Middle School and better prepare our students for the High School.

Our elementary populations are above totals from ten years ago and this year there are classes at capacity in grades K-3. In conversations with our architect and the Township, it is predicted that the Moorestown population will continue to grow. If no additional space is constructed, the district will not have appropriate facilities to adequately educate and serve its student population in the exemplary capacity that Moorestown has historically provided.

While we have comprehensive safety and security in our buildings this proposal seeks to enhance and build upon that strong foundation. To match what we are providing for the High School via a separate \$1.2 million grant this plan will bring parity in all of our instructional buildings in a more timely and cost-effective manner.

It is a primary responsibility of the board to ensure the proper maintenance and operational improvements for our physical plant and this plan seeks to do that. By making strategic and timely investments we can ensure that our facilities are safe and welcoming environments for our students, staff, and community. With the tighter budgets all schools are facing, due to the 2% tax cap and unfunded mandates, it is also incumbent upon us to maximize every dollar. By structuring this project to maximize eligibility for state aid, we are being fiscally responsible and upholding our stewardship responsibility as well.

In subsequent meetings, the board will consider and vote on these recommendations from the Referendum Committee. Should there be a vote to continue moving forward a referendum date will be set and the scope and wording of the questions will be finalized. The board has already authorized all of the work to lead up to these decisions.

The Referendum Committee is also working with the Communications Committee to best inform all stakeholders including the community, students, staff, elected officials, and others throughout the process. To that end, the following is being planned:

- More information will be available at Back-to-School nights
- A Community Engagement Forum focused on the Referendum is being planned for October.
- Groups interested in hosting a meeting to hear more details and ask questions are invited to make requests by emailing mtpsreferendum@mtps.com.
- The full updated 8/20/19 presentation is available at the Referendum 2019 website at <http://www.mtps.com/referendum>.

Please contact Superintendent Dr. Scott P. McCartney at (856) 778-6600 Ext. 18001 for additional information or with questions.