



HADDONFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ONE LINCOLN AVENUE ~ HADDONFIELD, NJ 08033-1866

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February 23, 2016

Dear Parents and Residents of Haddonfield,

Over the past two years, the Haddonfield Board of Education and its highly reputable team of professional architects and engineers conducted a comprehensive review of the status of the School District's buildings. This process involved not only hundreds of hours of Board and committee meetings, but also numerous additional meetings with concerned and knowledgeable citizens, both in public and in private. The referendum that will be presented to the voters on March 8th was developed after intense scrutiny by and consultation with a wide array of professionals, including Department of Education and other State officials. The proposal addresses what the District concluded are *Critical Needs* in order to maintain the safety and structural integrity of our school buildings for students, staff and the overall community.

As a result of the School District's investigation, we discovered many severe structural concerns. For example, this past summer, we found a large section of a back wall at Tatem Elementary School that was in critical condition, along with two main entranceways that were in need of emergency replacement. In addition, we discovered severe structural concerns at the High School's B-Wing, main gym, and cafeteria, and these areas were retrofitted with safety netting to prevent debris from falling on students, faculty, and visitors. Although the District was able to use capital reserves to address Tatem's back wall, the remaining structural issues throughout the School District, including the High School's B-Wing, have not yet been repaired due to the high costs.

These are challenging times for school districts throughout the State. Operating budgets are subject to a mandatory 2 percent levy cap, which is applied to increases in, for example, salaries, health benefits, energy, and insurance costs. Because many of these expenses have been increasing at or above 2 percent, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for school districts to earmark millions of dollars to address aging infrastructure without resorting to the referendum process. When buildings are as old as ours are (and some of our buildings are 80 to 100 years old) there really are only two choices: tear down and build new, or invest in substantial repairs to ensure the buildings' ongoing structural integrity. The School District had to close down the High School gymnasium, dance room, some adjacent offices, and the cafeteria this past summer, and safety concerns



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may force us to do so again if funding is not secured in a timely manner. The safety net solution for the High School's B-wing is only temporary, and the structural repairs to this area alone will cost approximately \$10 million.

We understand the tax burdens facing many of our residents and respect the views of those who have participated in discussions and chose to oppose the Bond Referendum. They recognize, as do we, that Haddonfield has some of the highest property taxes in the area because we receive very little state aid compared to other local districts. Despite this burden, our School District consistently has been among the lowest spenders on a cost-per-student basis, while maintaining the highest performance statistics according to local, state, and national rankings. In the current referendum, the School District submitted a request for state aid to offset the cost of these critical structural repairs, and the State approved 40 percent debt service aid (which we are more realistically projecting to be approximately 33 percent annual state aid, based on the State legislature's annual allocations for debt service in recent years).

Other key points include:

- The School District enlisted the help of reputable architects, engineers, financial advisors, state officials, and others who have vast experience with bond referenda and school building projects.
- During the evaluative process of our facilities, many cuts were made to the original Bond Referendum proposals, totaling millions of dollars, in order to get the costs down to those that were deemed to be most *Critical* in regard to maintaining the structural safety of our schools.
- Bond referenda are the principal means for school districts to maintain their buildings. Our aging buildings have now come to a point that there are major concerns. This has not, however, been through neglect. Buildings that are this old necessarily require large capital reinvestment from time to time to renew them and maintain their structural integrity.



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- The Bond Referendum is not a wish list; it does not include many desirable improvements that would address our educational concerns, including much needed additional classroom space. This proposal focuses almost entirely on building envelope needs, including roofs, masonry, and components that are considered by experts in the engineering field to be *Critical*.
- Many school districts across the State, due to school funding restrictions and lack of aid, are in the same situation. As time passes, the buildings will continue to deteriorate with costs likely escalating. Since 2003, school construction costs have almost doubled.
- We should show respect for everyone on both sides of this issue. Rising property taxes are a real concern, especially to residents who have been in our community for decades.

It is our sincere hope that everyone participates and votes on Tuesday, March 8th. The polls will be open from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm. Please take time to review information on the district's website or the district's Facebook page-

www.HaddonfieldBondReferendum.com www.facebook.com/HaddonfieldSchoolDistrict.

There will also be a "School Report" in What's On, Friday, February 26th and videos on YouTube- "Sixty Seconds with Dave Siedell." Search- "Haddonfield referendum." In addition, there will be an Open-Mic Community Discussion on all aspects of the Bond Referendum on Thursday, March 3rd at 7:00 pm in the High School B Gym. We very much appreciate all the community's support that has enabled Haddonfield School District to become and remain one of the best school districts in the state, region and nation.

Respectfully,

Richard P. Perry

Dr. Richard Perry
Superintendent