



Citizens for Accountable Government
www.c-a-g.org

CAG's mission is to promote & support local government that is fiscally responsible, that manages growth for the benefit of current residents instead of at their expense, and is willing to be held accountable by residents.

The May 24 School Board Referendum poses the single largest school tax increase that residents will likely face. Approval or disapproval has consequences.

A **YES** vote means you support the significant tax increase requested by the School Board.

A **NO** vote implies you want the Board to consider a more fiscally conservative approach, to reduce the tax impact.

This publication was prepared and paid for by Citizens for Accountable Government, in the interest of providing additional facts that otherwise might not be available.

Note – Data & facts in this brochure were obtained from records of School District 719, Scott County, and the MN State Dept. of Education. We have diligently attempted to be fair and accurate, but do not guarantee accuracy or assume liability for the contents of this brochure or the data sources used.

April, 2016

Attention Residents of School District 719

YOUR SCHOOL BOARD IS REQUESTING TAXPAYER APPROVAL TO SPEND

- O **\$129 million on buildings**, with principal plus interest to be paid for over 20 years.
- O **\$21.25 million for technology** to be spent and paid for over 10 years.

HOUSEHOLD IMPACT IF APPROVED

- O **\$413 will be the increase in school tax on a home worth \$300,000**, an increase of about 25 percent over this year.
- O **The school tax on a \$300,000 home will approach \$2,000 in 2017.**

Note: The average value home in the School District actually exceeds \$300,000.

- O **Your Tax dollars will be required to pay off the increased 20 year debt** (more than doubling from \$113 million to \$243 million).

YOU ALONE SHOULD DECIDE IF THE BOARD REQUEST IS FISCALLY REASONABLE.

To help you make a fact based decision, CAG is providing the data in this brochure, including websites where you can find additional useful information.

BE INFORMED BEFORE YOU VOTE, AND CAST YOUR VOTE ON MAY 24.

What does CAG recommend?

WE OFFER NO RECOMMENDATION ON HOW TO VOTE

BUT WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO DO THE FOLLOWING

Be responsible to your community.

Recognize the importance of having our children receive a good education.

Be responsible to yourself.

Review how your referendum tax dollars will be spent, before you cast your vote.

Make up your own mind.

The referendum vote will impact you.

Exercise your constitutional right.

Cast your vote on May 24.

Educate yourself on the facts by making use of the following resources.

The School District website www.priorlake-savage.k12.mn.us provides information prepared by the School Administration and its consultants.

The CAG website www.c-a-g.org provides information, **including** a listing of the projects and cost to be financed with referendum dollars. This listing was not made available on the school website at the time of the printing of this brochure).

WE URGE YOU TO VISIT THE CAG WEBSITE BEFORE YOU VOTE.

We agree with the School Board, that more classroom space is needed to address the growing student population.

We believe the top priority in our community should be the education of our children.

WE OWE THAT TO OUR KIDS

We believe the second priority should be getting it done in a most cost effective way.

WE OWE THAT TO THE TAXPAYERS

A review by CAG of referendum projects and costs has raised questions that are outlined below. We encourage voters to visit the CAG website www.c-a-c.org to review the project lists, and to make their own decision whether the referendum proposal is cost effective.

QUESTIONS WE WOULD LIKE ANSWERED.

1) Is \$129 million for facilities to accommodate an additional 1500 students (that's \$86,000 per additional student) a reasonable standard for cost effectivity?

2) Should it cost \$50 million to expand the current 12 year-old HS to increase capacity by 620 students?

3) Is \$36 million reasonable for a new 670 student grade school, when compared to costs for similar size schools noted below?

Redtail Ridge (with 670 student capacity also) was opened just 7 years ago at a reported cost of \$ 20 million.

Aspen Academy, a charter school of 600 student capacity within our School District boundaries, was reportedly built for \$5 million (building and land) just 4 years ago.

Regarding Aspen, we recognize that state requirements and other factors will make cost/student higher for a District operated school than for a Charter School. **But should the facility cost per student for a District school be 7 times as high as for a Charter?**

While some might claim Aspen students are being short changed, be aware that Aspen students rank high academically, and we believe that should be what counts.

4) Is the \$129 million referendum based on Needs or Wants?

A small sampling of items from the project list tends to raise questions.

○ **\$2.8 million** to remodel Redtail Ridge (no increase in student capacity)

○ **\$15 million** for a HS Activity Center

○ **\$3 million** for a Westwood Kitchen/cafeateria link to Edgewood

With over 70 individual projects listed to be funded by referendum dollars, the above 3 examples alone fail to tell the whole story. Voters are advised to visit the CAG website www.c-a-g.org to review the list of projects, and to make their own determination if the plan addresses the right priorities.

5) Are building designs being driven by architectural esthetics instead of by need and function, thus driving up building costs?

Many residents in our community including engineering and construction professionals have privately and publicly expressed this concern. Assuming this perspective may be valid, it would seem that a continuance of

the current architectural approach will simply continue to perpetuate high costs.

6) Is it wise to make a decision for this amount of spending based on an extended population forecast, or should smaller steps be taken as actually needed?

While we find no fault with the consultant's forecasting methodology, be reminded that forecasting is not pure science, and past forecasts have been significantly flawed.

In 2000 the School Board pronounced that \$67 million received in referendum dollars would "set up the District for the next 20 years". Five years later the Board asked for and received another \$67 million. Two years later they asked for another \$29 million.

If the student population forecast is too high, we will have overbuilt and overspent. If it's too low, expect the Board to be back again for more money in the not-so-distant future.

7) What's happening to our tax base?

School districts rely on commercial tax base for part of their funding, but our commercial tax base is almost non-existent. About 5 % is commercial as compared to more typically 20 to25 % for other cities. **The fact that most commercial development in our District is on tax-free tribal trust land is a major factor.**

We are disappointed that the School Board has remained silent about the increasing loss of tax base to a wealthy sovereign Tribe, while at the same time **asking for millions more from those who do pay taxes.**