

Galesburg-Augusta Community Schools
2021 Bond Proposal
Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Q: What is included in the bond proposal and how much will it cost?

Answers:

- **Additional classroom space at the Primary School**

Our Primary School in the district has shown the strongest enrollment increases in the past four years. Our kindergarten numbers can sometimes be as high as 90 five year olds! Additionally, families appreciate our preschool offerings. Attendance in preschool has been shown to impact the long term success of students. To improve student growth and achievement, G-A has also:

- reduced class sizes from 27/28 students in a classroom to 19/20 in all grades K-4
- added more specials (art, music, STEAM, PE)
- added special education classes as needs have grown; we added an Early Childhood Special Education classroom.

All of these needed additions for classrooms caused us to run out of room. In the fall of 2019, we temporarily moved our 8th graders to the High School allowing us to move 4th grade to the Middle School until we could get additional funding to add a wing of additional classrooms for four 4th grade classrooms so that they can rejoin their elementary peers. This would also allow us to return 8th grade to the Middle School. This will also give back much needed space at the high school.

- **Security Vestibule for entrance to the Learning Center on the back Primary School**

Currently all preschool and day care students have to enter the front of the building and walk all the way through to the back of the Primary School. Revamping the existing parking lot to make a loop in the back to a secure entry vestibule, will help reduce the volume of cars in the front of the building each morning and allow these families to drop off and pick up their children more quickly and more safely.

- **Building and refurbishing current spaces to add STEM/STEAM opportunities**

STEAM stands for: Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math.

Experience with STEAM classes is critical for today's students no matter what career path they follow. Every field now utilizes one or more of these five (5) areas of knowledge and skills to provide services and products for consumers. G-A has been building K-12 courses and experiences to ensure every one of our students gets STEAM experiences.

STEAM courses are group-oriented and problem solving experiences. Students examine real world problems and develop engineering process-focused solutions. We need a classroom at the Primary School to allow for this type of work.

Additionally, our High School Robotics program is currently located in a temporarily renovated maintenance barn because we have no adequate space. The new renovations and additions to the High School will provide both space for Robotics and other STEAM courses.

Did you know?

The growth in the number of STEM related jobs are projected to outpace all other occupations in the next decade. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that overall employment in the economy will grow about 7.4%, while STEM related fields will grow by 10.8%. STEM/STEAM

college job holders earn between 20% and 30% more per hour than non-STEM employees. Unfortunately, in 2018, 2.4 million STEM jobs were projected to go unfilled across the U.S. Kalamazoo County sees the same gap in graduates' training and open positions.

G-A has a partnership with Eaton-Cummins Joint Venture (ECJV) to help build our students' knowledge and experience with this growing field. Having the right facilities to grow more STEM/STEAM programming will help us ensure *all* students receive this education before graduation, keeping the world of possibilities open for each of them. We are also adding coding courses with the help of grants through Amazon.

- **Adding a multi-purpose instructional facility area at the High School**

Adding a multi-purpose facility will increase opportunities for our students both during the academic day, and for after school events and practices. The space will be flexible and available for several student activities:

- marching band, flag corp, cheerleading practices, large group presentations, career fairs, art exhibits, large group projects, robotics competitions, and P.E. classes
- after-school programming including various sports team practices such as wrestling and softball/baseball in early spring (allowing students to get home much earlier than currently), youth programs (4-H, boy/girl scouts, Girls on the Run, I Run Too, MYWAY)
- other community uses
- the space could afford us the opportunity to host more and/or larger sports tournaments (helping raise athletic revenue to go back into their programs)

Vital programs such as sports, music, speech, theatre, debate, band, where young people learn life skills, can be powerful and life-changing. Clubs and sports serve as a powerful academic motivator for students who would otherwise underperform in the classroom. Our goal is to increase the number of students participating and therefore, the number of students attending school on a regular basis and graduating. Our G-A graduates will know that effort and hardwork pay off; they will practice self-discipline, be able to manage their time wisely and successfully work with other team members. *The majority of local businesses in southwest Michigan cite these soft skills as more important in a new hire than specific knowledge or technical training.*

- **Multi-purpose athletic facility for PE classes, track and field, marching band, flag corp, soccer, football and a community walking track**

It has been approximately 20 years since G-A has had a competition track.

Currently our students must travel to other districts' tracks for *both* practice and for *all* meets. With a new track facility, our students will have the opportunity to practice their skills on a daily basis and perform in front of their own community. Additionally, we do not get to take advantage of the income earnings potential from hosting home events; funds that could be used in our athletic and after-school programs for such things as two-way bussing and participation fee relief, uniforms, equipment.

- **Project Costs**

| Project | Estimated Cost | % of total bond project |
|--|----------------|-------------------------|
| Primary School Classrooms | \$3.96 million | 26.5 % |
| High School Multi-Purpose Instructional Area, Remodeling & Buses | \$6.37 million | 42.5 % |
| Multipurpose Athletic Facilities | \$4.66 million | 31.0 % |
| Total Cost: | \$14,990,000 | |

Q: Why can't we renovate the current athletic facility at the Primary School?

A: Our research concluded that it would require approximately \$3.4 million to upgrade the existing Maskill Field, including a new track and quality field that supports soccer, football and marching band. Further improvements would have to include restroom facilities, irrigation, improved drainage, sound, electrical/lighting, and ADA (barrier free) compliance. Additionally, other key drawbacks are the lack of a locker room facility for teams and the off-campus location, requiring busing of teams and the band from the High School to the Primary School for game days and we would not have the facility for our High School PE classes and clubs during the day.

Q: Why does it cost so much to renovate and build these additions?

A: Commercial building costs have greatly increased over the years due to rising material and labor costs. According to RS Means (Reed Construction Data), the Historical Costs Index for Commercial Construction in the Grand Rapids, MI region has increased the following: 2003 - 2018 (15 years): Increase of 173.9%.

Q: How will this bond help academic achievement at G-A?

A: Expanding and repurposing facilities, increasing the number of academic/athletic opportunities and after-school clubs has been shown to positively impact students' interest in learning, encouraging them to stay in school and graduate! By upgrading and improving the learning environment, our students will be better able to learn the skills needed to be successful adults in our communities.

Researchers have followed adults who participated in high school athletics and after-school programs. They found that those adults exhibit goal setting, perseverance, communication skills and far greater confidence in themselves and their futures. Our Board of Education's goal is for *more* students to participate in after-school activities by creating spaces to add programs and allow existing programs to have the flexible space to thrive.

Q: Our community passed a no-mill increase bond proposal in 2016. So why do we need another bond proposal in 2021?

A: As a result of community support, the district was able to completely renovate the middle school, install updated technology devices and infrastructure across the district, increase the safety of schools through changes to exterior doors and entryways, replace the gym roof at the high school and make other needed roof repairs. Success of the 2016 bond project addressed many significant needs of the district. However, the Board of Education knew that it would not address all of the district's future needs. Therefore, we have continued to engage our stakeholders. Multiple meetings and surveys were conducted to evaluate future needs and assist the Board in creating a 3-5 year plan. This \$14.9 million project is a direct result of that work and would allow G-A to continue to increase programming for students and the facilities needed to support their learning.

Q: I heard that the Board reduced the tax levy in 2019 to 5.5 mills. So how much of a millage increase will this be since the last bond proposal in 2016?

A: At their regular meeting in June of 2019, the Board passed a resolution reducing the number of mills levied against property owners from 6.0 to 5.5 mills. The Board was able to do that because the economy in Michigan and Kalamazoo County has improved after the recession. It has also done better during the pandemic than any of us thought would occur. We have seen lower interest rates and increases in property values. This has helped the district pay down its debt sooner. Homeowners' recent tax bills have reflected this decrease. *This proposal is a .72 mill increase above the 2016 millage request.*

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 2016 Ballot Proposal | 6.28 No Millage Increase |
| 2018 | 6.00 Debt Millage Reduction |
| 2019 | 5.5 Debt Millage Reduction |
| 2021 Ballot Proposal of 1.5 Mill Increase | 7.0 Debt Millage Increase |

Q: What is the millage increase that is on the ballot? How would our millage rate in G-A compare to other districts our size?

A: The district will be asking the community to support a 1.50 mill increase to property taxes in order to address facility needs, bringing our debt levy millage to a total of 7.0 mills. This will allow us to raise \$14,990,000 to increase programming and improve facilities for our students and community for many years to come. The comparison below of surrounding area districts illustrates that G-A currently is second to the bottom for debt leverage out of 15 districts.

| DISTRICT | 2015 DEBT MILLAGE | 2020 DEBT MILLAGE |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Lawton | 9.10 | 9.60 |
| Parchment* | 9.59 | 9.01 |
| Otsego* | 7.50 | 8.49 |
| Kalamazoo | 6.95 | 8.20 |
| Paw Paw | 8.20 | 8.20 |
| Portage* | 5.80 | 7.35 |
| Climax-Scotts | 7.20 | 7.30 |
| Plainwell | 7.46 | 7.28 |
| Mattawan | 7.24 | 7.00 |
| Schoolcraft | 7.50 | 7.00 |
| Vicksburg | 6.85 | 6.60 |
| Gull Lake* | 4.82 | 6.31 |
| Colon | 5.60 | 5.60 |
| Galesburg-Augusta | 6.28 | 5.50 |
| Comstock | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| | | |
| Median | 7.2 | 7.28 |
| Mean | 7.06 | 7.23 |

Q: What impact will this bond request have on the average property tax owner?

| Home Value | Millage Increase | Annual Increase | Monthly Increase |
|---|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| \$50,000 Taxable Value \$100,000 Market Value | 1.5 | \$75.00 | \$6.25 |
| \$75,000 Taxable Value \$150,000 Market Value | 1.5 | \$112.50 | \$9.38 |
| \$100,000 Taxable Value \$200,000 Market Value | 1.5 | \$150.00 | \$12.50 |

Q: Why do we need new buses?

A: School buses are expensive, approximately \$100,000 per bus. The district has purchased one new bus annually for the past few years. However, the fleet is aged (average age is over 11 years) and has high mileage (average is over 121,000 miles). From an operations standpoint, it costs significantly more to maintain older, high-mileage vehicles. Utilizing bond funds to purchase three buses eliminates a significant impact to our general fund, leaving those funds for instruction and the operations of the district. It is important to point out that state statute requires us to pay back enough principal on the bonds to more than cover the cost of buses within a standard useful-life period.

Q: What is the long-term facility plan for the District?

A: Following the completion of this project (May 2021 bond project), all our educational facilities will be in good shape and allow us space to grow programs for our current and future students. One facility that is not addressed in this project is our transportation depot, a building that does have significant needs. After analysis, the cost to replace the building and resurface the parking area would add significant cost to the bond issue. It was determined to defer this work to a later date. The Board will continue to work on its 3-5 year strategic plan for facilities. Priority will be given to quality maintenance of our current facilities and the increase in pride in attending G-A schools.

Q: Why did we not just put up portables at the Primary School?

A: In the spring of 2019, we did investigate the cost of adding portables to the Primary School. To purchase a used portable that would add three (3) additional classrooms would cost approximately \$400,000. The portables would be used and would lose value over time compared to brick and mortar. Three (3) would also be less than the true needs. The Board did not feel that was the best use of district funds in the long term. Thus, we moved 4th and 8th grades temporarily until a better solution could be found.