

School Matters: The ABC's of the VISD Facility Bond Propositions

Are you smarter than a 5th grader? This question and once-popular TV show are especially relevant for me as I attempt to help my own 5th grader with his homework this year. “YES”, maybe the required answer to this question for anyone trying to understand our State’s complicated public school funding system.

You likely know Victoria ISD has three facility bond propositions (Props A, B and C) on the November 2nd ballot. I’m going to share briefly about the “what” of the propositions (much more detail can be found at this link <https://www.visd.net/page/bond21>) and then share deeper into the “why”.

Proposition A would allow for the renovation of major infrastructure systems across 25 campuses and facilities. These significant system updates include HVAC, roofing, electrical, plumbing, and safety and security needs identified by external experts whose recommendations were reviewed by local community members and VISD staff serving for more than two years on the Community Bond Planning Task Force.

Proposition B would allow for VISD to build a new Stroman Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Middle School at the current Stroman site. The campus would be designed to support innovative STEM-based learning that is widely recognized as the dominant job market of the future for our students of today. The new Stroman STEM campus would be built with a larger capacity of 1200 to allow families across Victoria who want their child to have a STEM-focused experience to attend the new school.

Proposition C would allow for the building of a new Mission Valley Elementary at the current site. The core of this campus opened in 1937, 84 years ago. Another portion of the campus is made up of portable “temporary” classrooms that have degraded after more than 30 years of use. Mission Valley has experienced growth over the past decade and is projected to continue to experience further growth. For this reason, the campus would be built larger than the current campus with the capacity to serve 400 students.

That is a broad overview of the “what”. The confusion seems to come from why a bond is necessary. I often hear, “Aren’t districts already funded in a way that allows you to pay for major renovations and building new schools?” The short yet very important answer is “No, that is not how schools are annually funded.” The Texas public school funding system provides just “enough” to “almost” pay teachers and staff competitively to transport, feed and offer educational programs. It is easy to find research on teacher and support staff shortages across the nation, due at least partially to a lack of pay

competitiveness while virtually every school district is already utilizing more than 80% of their funding to try to attract and retain a diminishing talent pool.

In our State's system, when major facility needs are identified, and money from the annual budget doesn't provide the resources necessary to do the work, school bond elections are regularly considered by communities to fund the building repairs, renovations or new buildings. Over the past seven years, 1,009 bond propositions have been considered by voters state-wide. Remember, there are only 1,020 school districts in the state of Texas. 765 have been approved. 52 districts across Texas have called bond elections for this November alone. Like it or not, this is the system currently in place.

Of those 1020 total school districts in Texas, Victoria ISD has the 88th largest student enrollment. That puts us in the top 9%. VISD's facility bond investment level per student currently ranks 670th, or the bottom 35%. This is less than half the facility investment of school districts in our region and less than a third of the facility investment state-wide.

Aren't word problems the worst? Often, the best approach with word problems is to back away from the numbers, decimals, percentages and ask the bigger question "what does this mean" in order to get a deeper understanding of how to solve the problem. I look forward to sharing this one with my 5th grader tonight to understand how he comes to his answer and to learn more about our community's answer come November 2nd.

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