

February 23, 2022

Dear Ridgefield Families and Community Members,

We are writing to you to explain why we voted to run another school construction bond initiative on the April 26, 2022, Special Election Ballot. Simply put, passing a school construction bond in April is the last chance to open a new elementary school and add classrooms at the high school in time for the 2023-2024 school year. Without the extra classrooms provided by the bond, the School District will be forced to manage the overcrowding by making painful adjustments that will significantly impact students and families across the district. Passing a construction bond in April is the last chance to avoid those impacts.

Earlier this month, although a strong majority (57.48%) voted in favor of the construction bond, the ballot failed to achieve the 60% supermajority required to pass a school bond. In any other type of election, receiving more than 57% percent of the votes would be considered a landslide victory. Even with the high hurdle of a supermajority requirement, we were only 206 votes shy of passing. Hopefully, in April, we will get those few extra votes needed to timely address the significant overcrowding issues we are facing.

It is undisputed that the school district has grown in leaps and bounds and will continue to grow. We have no authority to stop or even slow that growth. Ridgefield has earned the annual fastest-growing city distinction more often than any other city in the past decade. In addition, there is massive growth outside of the city limits, in the unincorporated regions of our district. The last time our community passed a school bond in 2017, 2,823 students were enrolled in Ridgefield schools. Today, our enrollment exceeds 3,800 students, an all-time high. Think about that; approximately 1,000 additional students have enrolled in Ridgefield schools since voters authorized the construction of additional classroom space. Our existing two elementary schools have a combined capacity of 1,197 students. Currently, they serve 1,403 students. The simple math shows that our community desperately needs additional classroom space to support the students who already live here.

We know many more students will be enrolling in the next few years. We conservatively anticipate an additional 600 students joining our district by the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Adding so many students to the overcrowded buildings will negatively impact students and families.

To deal with the growth, if the bond should fail to pass in April, we will have no choice but to make some tough and painful decisions moving forward. While nothing has been determined yet, we would likely need to shift enrollments before the start of the new school year. New boundaries will have to be drawn, resulting in many students attending a different school next year. Another possibility includes moving fifth-grade students back to the elementary sites to accommodate the added student enrollment at the Sunset Ridge / View Ridge campus. We may also have to convert student performance and athletics spaces into classroom space.

To reiterate, these are not options that we favor implementing. It is simply the stark reality that we are facing as our enrollment swells and our classroom capacities remain unchanged. If we cannot build additional classrooms, other adjustments will be required to address the overcrowding.

As you might imagine, particularly over the last couple of years, the school board regularly receives emails from

individuals from both sides of the political spectrum concerned about various issues that have nothing to do with the overcrowding in the schools. Nearly all of the emails end with the comment that if the board doesn't do what the person wants them to do, they will not ever vote for a school construction bond again. Unfortunately, this is the very definition of what it means to "cut off your nose to spite your face."

Failing to pass a construction bond does not address the contentious social and political issues that are pervasive in our nation today. Students and families will be forced to deal with them in overcrowded schools with negative consequences that come with overcrowding. We understand and appreciate the frustration that many people are experiencing. We hope to address those issues without making things worse by failing to address overcrowding.

Fortunately, it is not too late for our community to avoid the most painful changes to our existing school structures. We have one more opportunity. While there are no simple or perfect solutions to the district's growing pains, we believe that building new schools is the best path forward for students, families, and the Ridgefield community as a whole.

Thank you for your continued support of the Ridgefield School District.

Sincerely,

Ridgefield School District's Board of Directors