

RBR Referendum

Frequently Asked Questions

Please see the presentation on the website first. These are the most common follow-up questions received. More will be added here as they arise.

Last Updated: 10/2/2018

Common Acronyms

BOE – Board of Education

DSA – Debt Service Aid

FY – Fiscal Year

IT – Information Technology

LRSP – Long-Range Facilities Plan

NJDOE – New Jersey Department of Education

RBR – Red Bank Regional High School

SF (or s.f.) – Square Feet

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

SY – School Year

How does the voting work for this referendum?

This vote will be a simple majority vote of the total voters on December 11, 2018 within the three sending towns. It doesn't matter how any one individual town votes – if the overall vote passes it will pass. Voting will be open to all voters registered in Red Bank, Shrewsbury or Little Silver at their regular polling places. Polling times are 2pm-8pm.

Why is this vote not on a regular election day?

Every effort was made to get this on the regular November ballots. Due to the amount of lead time needed to get all of the financial information back from the State of NJ, this was the very first date that could be chosen. Some information was obtained just this fall and the BOE still needed to review and approve of it. The official wording of the questions had to be sent to the Clerk of Elections well in advance of the vote.

Why is the cost of the referendum different depending on what town you live in?

This is actually true for your regular school taxes as well. After the BOE determines what the annual school budget is (or in this case the referendum budget), it gets plugged into a formula to determine how much each town is responsible for. This allocation formula has numerous variables, is exceedingly complex, and is determined entirely by the State of NJ. While it may seem a bit unfair, in fact, for a regional school district it is relatively close to the enrollment percentages for each sending town. Cautious discussions to totally equalize this formula have been ongoing with no changes imminent. Hurried changes could easily make the problem much worse.

Why are there two different cost estimates for “through 2023” and “after 2023”?

In February 2022 the BOE will make the final payment on debt from a previous project from many years ago. The “through 2023” figures are estimated for FYs 2020 through 2023 (3 years). The lesser “after” figures are what is estimated for the remainder of the bond cycle (17 years). The BOE tried to get the new referendum debt to coincide with the expiration of the old debt to make it easier on everyone. Unfortunately, if they waited until 2023 to move the referendum forward the tax impact would have been much worse (see Tuition questions below).

Can I see what the new plans will look like?

These plans are still a work in progress and will be even after the referendum vote. Generic floorplans will be available at all of the in-person presentations but some specific details may be partially redacted. Unfortunately, for security reasons the interior school floorplans will not be posted on the web. We ask that interior floorplans please not be posted or shared on social media strictly for these same security reasons.

The exterior plans will not be completed prior to the referendum vote. The main reason is simple – the district doesn’t want to pay the architects to do them until they have to and have the budget in place for it. Also, after the referendum vote, the architects will be meeting with stakeholders to get input on design elements. Again, they don’t want to have to pay them to do this until after the vote.

Why do we need a turf field and bathrooms outside?

Turf is also the single most requested item the BOE receives from the community – that is reinforced by it being given its own individual section of the community-driven 5-year strategic plan. The NJSIAA recently announced that they “strongly recommend” that their sectional games for certain sports be played on turf fields in 2019. As of 2020, it will be required.

With a grass field all outdoor athletic events are completely restricted for several days before and after any significant weather. The condition of the existing grass field often results in loss of practice and game time as well as loss of home field advantage when the RBR grass field is unplayable but their opponents is not because they have turf. Physical education classes are rarely permitted to use the grass field because it is in a constant state of being prepped or preserved for games. Even with this strict usage limitation, we still have young athletes that get injuries from the uneven ground. Maintenance is not the issue; multi-use fields in cold-weather regions have been cited as nearly impossible to maintain to safe standards.

While there is some recurrent savings with turf over grass, the more important benefits are that a stadium turf field would greatly increase the safety of the young athletes, increase access to outdoor usage and provide a boost to the Buccaneer competitive advantage.

Red Bank Regional is constantly striving to bring more of its communities into Buc Nation in any way possible. One large obstacle has been accommodating guest’s needs at our outdoor athletic events. The port-o-potties currently used are a hindrance that many cannot manage so they stay away. A small ADA-compliant bathroom facility will provide an accommodating and welcoming environment to all. The small simple concessions area, while not appropriate for food preparation, will provide a place for pre-prepared snacks and/or merchandise for all in Buc Nation to wear proudly. The rest rooms and concessions combined will be less than 1,000 square feet, but their impact will be immeasurable. .

What is the RBR tuition program and why does it matter to me?

Red Bank Regional is in a position that most schools wish they had. Because of the programs offered at RBR, the district has been allowed to have out-of-district students attend RBR and pay tuition just like they would for a private school. They apply and have to be accepted into RBR through a vigorous admissions process. In most cases the student’s home school district pays the tuition for them, but in some cases the student’s tuition

is paid completely from their own family. The rate of tuition is set annually by the BOE and must be mindful of competition from other private schools, cost increases, State limitations and others. Tuition students contribute towards our revenue but do not contribute equally to our costs. Since we are also publicly funded, RBR does not offer any scholarships.

This is critical to the referendum decisions because with increasing enrollment from the sending districts, RBR has less space available to admit qualified tuition students. The fewer the tuition students, the less revenue generated for the budget. With less revenue from tuition, more of the total budget costs get passed on to the taxpayer. The tuition revenue in 2017-18 was already \$1.2M less than it was just 4 years ago and all of that cost is now picked up by the taxpayers. Moving forward, if the tuition revenue continues to decrease RBR will be forced to increase taxes, cut programs, or both.

Adding space through the referendum will allow for in-district and tuition students to continue to attend and contribute to the RBR community, the successes as well as the costs.

Can't you just stop taking in tuition students and that would make the additional space no longer needed?

Generally, tuition students fill in unused seats in existing classes so there would be a minimal decrease in space needed. Additionally, if the out-of-district students stopped coming to RBR so would their revenue. These students cost about \$10,000 per year to educate but pay \$14,900 annually into the district's budget, so the loss in revenue would outweigh the reduced space and costs. Every lost tuition student is an added burden to the in-district taxpayers. The students that come to RBR are a big part of the RBR community academically, socially and financially regardless of where they live. In all of those areas, without them our situation would be worse.

What happens if the referendum fails?

If the referendum is voted down there is no way that the BOE can finance the items included in it through the regular budget. The building will still need a new roof and the classroom space will get even more cramped. RBR will still have to educate an increasing number of our in-district students but will not have enough space to accommodate them all or accept any tuition students. With that loss of tuition revenue more of the operating costs of the district will get passed on to the taxpayers. The costs will continue to rise, the building will need repairs they won't be able to make and they will have to get even more money from the taxpayers than they are now. If the referendum fails RBR may be in a "perfect storm" where taxes may rise as much as, or possibly even more than, if it passes. Every academic, athletic and extra-curricular program will have to be prioritized based on budgeting.

What is "DSA"?

Debt Service Aid (DSA) is financial assistance from the State for certain school facilities projects. Debt Service Aid on the repayment of bonds is one of the few ways local taxpayers can be compensated for some of the state taxes they pay. Not all costs qualify. For example, due to the States inflated building capacity estimates \$9.3 million of this referendum are not eligible for Debt Service Aid. RBR wouldn't get a check from the State of NJ for the full amount. Instead, the aid is doled out year-by-year as if the state is helping the district make its bond payments.

Officially, the State indicates that the RBR school district is eligible for DSA to cover 40% of all approved project costs. In a review of all statewide projects, the State has not honored the 40% commitment and 34% is a more realistic expectation. In presentations and informational material, the district uses the lower, more

realistic 34% figure. Should the State decide to fully fund their portion, the monies needed from the taxpayer will be reduced.

An important factor in this equation is the retirement of current district debt from a previous renovation project many years ago. The district pays \$750,000 annually toward this debt. This debt will be paid off in February 2022 and the reduction in costs will be reflected in lower taxes after FY 2023.

Why do only some parts of this referendum qualify for DSA?

According to the State of New Jersey the capacity of our existing building is 1,462 students. They intentionally inflate that number because if RBR exceeded that number then they would have to contribute up to 40% aid toward additions to the building. Even though the true capacity is only 1,043 using generally accepted practices, the State will only give DSA for work done inside the existing footprint because RBR doesn't exceed their capacity number. For example: the renovations of existing spaces and the roof replacement are granted aid but the new additions are not. This is exactly why the BOE prioritized work that can be done inside the footprint whenever possible.

Why hasn't the BOE maintained the building so the roof replacement isn't necessary?

The roof for the main building is in need of replacement due to its age, not due to lack of care. RBR has spent thousands of dollars making repairs to the roof but these costs are escalating and a warranted replacement is the only long-term solution. The roof replacement qualifies for \$2,100,000 in State debt service aid but only if it is done through a referendum.

It is important to understand that a nearly 50 year old building has maintenance issue like electrical service repairs, security upgrades, lighting repairs and upgrades, flooring replacement, HVAC repairs and maintenance and burst water pipes. These types of things can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars each and all are all paid from the regular budget. RBR would never be allowed by State budget rules to save up an enough money to do the required work without a referendum.

As more questions are asked, we will add to this document.