

Measure would allocate \$116 million to schools

■ Ballot Measure 20-56, which is slated to appear in the May 21 primary, looks to rebuild and revamp four area schools

By Brad Schmidt
Oregon Daily Emerald

This primary election, the Eugene School Board will ask the \$100 million question: Are Eugene taxpayers willing to fund the construction of four new school buildings?

The passage of Ballot Measure 20-56 in the May 21 primary election would allocate \$116 million in property tax dollars to the Eugene School District to provide better instructional facilities and replace aging buildings.

Measure 20-56 would replace Patterson and Westmoreland elementary schools with a new elementary school on the Patterson site. The Washington and Willakenzie elementary schools would be replaced with a new elementary school, possibly on the Monroe Middle School site. Madison Middle School and Cal Young Middle School would be rebuilt at their current locations.

The funding would also allow for remodeling and additions at several schools, major repairs to teaching fa-

cilities and improvements to districtwide safety and security systems.

The combination of elementary schools would increase enrollment to about 500 students at each proposed location, Eugene School District Superintendent George Russell said.

That number coincides with the enrollment at Gilham Elementary School, one that Russell said functions well and has many programs, such as music and sports, that smaller schools go without.

"(People) automatically assume that bigger schools are bad," said Dana Siebert, co-chairwoman of the political action committee Yes for Schools. "I think that assumption is wrong."

Ideally, Siebert said, the best situation would allow for small schools with small classroom sizes and unlimited funding. But building large schools while maintaining classroom sizes is a more feasible goal, Siebert said.

The passage of the levy would increase taxes for a property assessed at \$143,000 by about \$124 per year. More than 73 percent of all residential properties within 4J boundaries have an assessed property value of \$143,000 or less. By law, bond money cannot go toward teacher salaries, textbooks or student activities.

The \$116 million-dollar bond has its opponents.

Where the money would go

Measure 20-56, which will be on the May 21 primary election ballot, would fund four new schools in the Eugene School District. The cost of the project is \$116 million in tax dollars to be paid from property taxes over the next 20 years.



\$52 million
Four new schools

\$35.3 million
Capital systems replacements

\$4.6 million
Technology

\$24.1 million
Remodels and Additions

Nick Olmstead Emerald

"I don't think money is the answer," former University graduate and 1972 Libertarian candidate for vice president Tonie Nathan said. "More money doesn't provide a better education."

The measure is also the most expensive on the primary ballot.

"I'm sure (voters) are going to be wary of any price tag in today's economy," Russell said. "I'm hopeful and confident it will go through." The decision to put the

levy on the May 21 primary ticket was a strategic one. According to the state's so-called "double majority" law, any proposed property tax hike in a primary election must be passed with a voter turnout greater than 50 percent.

Even with a majority vote in favor of the measure, the vote will be void without a voter turnout of at least 40,520 people.

And if the levy doesn't pass, the district will have time to evaluate its

opposition and perhaps revamp the proposal for the November general election, where the double majority rule doesn't apply.

If the measure fails in the primary election, the district will have an easier time grabbing voters' attention during the noisy general election. Eugene School District spokeswoman Barb Bellamy said.

E-mail reporter Brad Schmidt at bradschmidt@dailymerald.com.

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