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On the Ballot

Historic schools modernization effort faces votes

BY ZACHARY SENN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Just a few days are left to cast ballots in a proposed school bond of historic proportions that would continue a schedule of major upgrades to Portland Public Schools.

Measure 26-193 would raise \$790 million dollars to pay for rebuilding and renovating three high schools and a middle school, and make health and safety repairs to nearly every school building in the district. Ballots must be received at county elections offices or at official ballot drop off sites by Tuesday, May 16 at 8 p.m..

The measure is the largest property tax bond proposed in Oregon's history and the second of a long range modernization effort for Portland's schools that follows the district's 2012 bond that paid for modernizing Roosevelt and Franklin High Schools and the rebuilding of Faubion Elementary in northeast Portland. If approved, the new levy would raise property taxes by \$1.40 per \$1,000 of assessed value for four years.

Jeremy Wright, campaign director for the "Portlanders for Safe Schools" yes campaign says that last year's lead drinking water crisis underscored the need to fix school infrastructure in old and failing buildings.

"If we don't pass this measure," Wright told the Portland Observer, "the district will continue to spend more money on health and safety emergencies."

The new bond would pay for remodeling of Benson and Madison High Schools in northeast Portland into modern school facilities, completely rebuild Lincoln High School, downtown, Kellogg Middle School in southeast Portland, and fix aging infrastructure in every school, including the removal of lead paint and lead in drinking water.

On a press tour of the nearly-completed Franklin last week, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler who has endorsed the district's new funding measure, spoke to the need to continue providing Portlanders with safe and state-of-the-art learning spaces.

Franklin High School Principal Juanita Valder accompanied the mayor with four of her 'bookend' students. These students attended their freshman year at the old, pre-renovated Franklin and will finish out their senior year

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A crewmember from Skanska USA, the construction firm contracted by Portland Public Schools to complete the renovation of Franklin High School, works to remodel and modernize the historic building's central atrium. Franklin High School was originally built in 1917.