



COMMUNICATIONS & COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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Salt Lake City, Utah 84111
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Date: September 24, 2024

To: Ryan Cowley, Director of Elections, State of Utah

From: Yándary Chatwin, Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations

Subject: Arguments for and against the Salt Lake City School District Board of Education Bond Ballot Proposition for the 2024 General Election

Dear Mr. Cowley,

Below, please find the arguments FOR and AGAINST the Salt Lake City School District Board of Education (Board of Education) bond ballot proposition for the 2024 General Election.

The Board of Education will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, October 1, 2024, at 7:00 PM for the presentation of the arguments in favor and against the ballot proposition. This presentation of arguments will be part of the regular board meeting on Tuesday, October 1, which will begin at 5:30 PM. The board meeting and presentation of arguments will take place in the Board Room at the district office, located at 406 East 100 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111. Following the presentation of arguments for and against the ballot proposition, members of the public in attendance will have a reasonable opportunity to present oral testimony regarding either of these arguments.

If you have any questions or need me to provide this information in a different format, please reach out to me at yandary.chatwin@slcschools.org.

Sincerely,

Yándary Chatwin
Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations
Salt Lake City School District

Attachments:

- Salt Lake City School District Board of Education’s Argument in Favor of the Ballot Proposition
- Rebuttal to the Argument in Favor of the Bond Ballot Proposition
- Eligible Voter’s [Russell Askren’s] Argument Against the Ballot Proposition
- Rebuttal to the Argument Against the Bond Ballot Proposition

Argument in Favor of the Bond Ballot Proposition

This November, Salt Lake City School District is asking for your vote to pass a crucial \$730 million bond. The bond will fund infrastructure and building upgrades and pay for projects that improve energy efficiency and reduce our carbon footprint. This is the district's first bond request in 25 years (since 1999). Now is the ideal time to move forward with these necessary projects, as construction costs are only expected to increase.

Bond funds will be used to:

1. rebuild West High School (including on-site solar power generation and a modern athletic field house),
2. rebuild Highland High School (including on-site solar power generation, ground source heat pumps, and a modern athletic field house),
3. build a modern athletic field house at East High School, and
4. complete energy sustainability projects throughout the district.

West High School, dating back to 1922, and Highland High School, completed in 1956, are facing significant challenges, including outdated plumbing, electrical systems, and HVAC infrastructure.

Both schools have multiple entry and exit points, which presents a school safety concern.

Classrooms lack the infrastructure to support technology-based instruction. Additionally, many of these classrooms are too small, making flexible learning arrangements difficult. Rebuilding these schools is not just a matter of improving facilities; it is about making sure our students have a learning environment that provides the resources and experiences necessary to prepare them for post-high school success in the 21st century.

High schools across the Salt Lake Valley have upgraded their athletic amenities in recent years. If the bond passes, both Highland and West High Schools will have state-of-the-art facilities, including a modern athletic field house; East High School will also receive a modern athletic field house, thus offering our student-athletes the same caliber of athletic facilities as their peers across the Wasatch Front.

In 2020, the Board of Education made a commitment for the district to pursue carbon neutrality and to use clean, renewable energy. We have reached 22% of our sustainability targets, and we need additional funds to make further progress. If the bond passes, we will expand solar power at 14 schools and facilities and install hybrid electric heat pumps and controls at 13 locations. These improvements will reach almost 70% of our sustainability goals, reducing our carbon footprint by 10,755 tons per year (equal to the amount of energy needed to power 1,272 homes for one year), resulting in better academic and well-being outcomes for our students.

Your support for the bond will provide students districtwide with equal access to modern educational facilities and allow us to implement sustainable practices to benefit Salt Lake City students and residents for years to come.

Salt Lake City Board of Education-

Rebuttal to the Argument in Favor of the Bond Ballot Proposition

Rebuttal to the Argument in Favor of the Salt Lake City School District Bond Resolution - Russell Askren

Imagine you need a new house. It's old and you've patched it together as long as you can. What do you do?

You talk about what you need. You talk about the nice-to-haves. Maybe a luxury item or two. You find an architect, work back and forth on plans. We like this; this needs to change. You find a contractor that helps with the costs. A little more back and forth. Finally, you have plans to build. You get permits. Only at this point will a bank fully commit to your project and fund your construction.

The Salt Lake City School District wants to turn this process on its head. There is a need. They've added some nice-to-haves. Some luxury items. They have an architect. But this is where the process has stopped. There are no plans. They're not even close to knowing their cost. Permits are even farther away. But they want their money now.

Don't give it to them. Make the District finish the planning process first.

The District's rebuild of district offices, completed this year, finished nearly 50% over budget.

High school rebuilds in an adjoining district are around 30% over budget, leading to other projects being delayed and an increase in the district's base property tax.

Building schools is difficult in today's construction environment. And these projects may take as long as 10 years to complete. Imagine the overruns taxpayers will be asked to cover.

Vote NO on the Salt Lake City School District bond resolution.

Argument Against the Bond Ballot Proposition

If you live in Salt Lake City, the Government wants more of your money. Salt Lake City and the sports moguls want more of your money. Salt Lake County wants more of your money. And so do the Salt Lake City Schools. The schools want a lot more of your money - \$730 Million. Wow!

The need is real, but the timing is wrong. They want your money with incomplete plans and no transparency in decision-making.

Consider these unanswered questions:

Why are they asking for money when there are no building plans?

Why are the feasibility studies hidden from public view?

Why is their request based on estimates nearly two years old?

Why are they already talking about using the general capital fund for cost overruns?

Why are our high school rebuilds costing over \$100 million more than nearby high schools?

Why are we prioritizing college level athletic facilities when we aren't fulfilling our basic academic functions?

Why are they increasing high school student capacity with declining enrollments?

Make the Salt Lake City School Board answer these questions before you give them your money.

VOTE NO on the School Bond Resolution!

Russell Askren

Rebuttal to the Argument Against the Bond Ballot Proposition

The Salt Lake City School District Board of Education's Rebuttal

Architectural designs are expensive, and the board wants to ensure funding is in place before spending public dollars on designs. The bond amount covers construction, design, demolition, utility relocation, inflation, and furnishings. If voters approve the bond, the design phase will include opportunities for public input and a design committee for each school.

Before determining the bond amount, the board hired two architectural firms to conduct feasibility studies, which included public meetings and a community survey. Findings were presented at the board meeting on February 21, 2023. A summary is attached to that agenda, and full reports can be found on the district website.

In July 2024, the architects were asked to review and possibly update their 2023 cost estimates. This informed the final bond amount.

It's crucial to have a plan to complete the projects if initial cost estimates are too low.

Bonds for neighboring high schools were secured nearly a decade ago; since then, building costs have significantly increased. The district works with financial advisors to ensure the best outcomes for students at the lowest taxpayer cost. The architects provided detailed estimates that include all necessary costs, not just construction. Under professional advisement, \$730 million is an appropriate bond amount.

The athletic field houses at West, Highland, and East will support high school-level extracurricular and physical education needs, with potential uses for other classes and general school activities.

Final building capacity will be determined during the design phase and will be based on current and projected student counts.