Stories from the Field:
Why Having a Simple Majority in Bond Elections is Important for Washington Students

This document provides a snapshot of the many stories from local school districts about their experiences and challenges presented by the current requirement for obtaining a 60% majority in school construction bond elections.
Districts included in this document are: Auburn, Moses Lake, White Pass, and Reardan-Edwall.

School District: Auburn School District
Legislative District: 31st and 47th
Submitted By: Alan Spicciati, Ed.D., Superintendent
Cindi Blansfield, Assistant Superintendent

The Critical Need for Additional Space and Replacement Schools

1. **Significant Past and Future Enrollment Growth Demands Additional Classrooms**
   - Auburn School District has grown by 1,575 students over the past decade.
   - Enrollment projections anticipate the growth trend to accelerate in the coming years.
   - Auburn School District's largest growth is at grades K-5, with elementary enrollment more than 1,000 elementary students higher than when the last elementary school was built (2007).
   - Growth in recent and coming years of over 300 students annually could fill half of an elementary school every year.
   - Long-term projections anticipate 4,339 additional students over the next ten years K-12.

	Actual ASD Headcount Enrollment								5/10 Yr. Proj.	
	05-06	/	**11-12**	**12-13**	**13-14**	**14-15**	**15-16**	/	**20-21**	**25-26**
K-5	5,887	/	6,230	6,489	6,805	7,061	7,340	/	8,248	9,376
6-8	3,169	/	3,141	3,144	3,264	3,238	3,351	/	4,035	4,401
9-12	5,032	/	4,992	4,963	4,902	4,978	4,972	/	5,355	6,225
Total	14,088	/	14,363	14,596	14,971	15,277	15,663	/	17,638	20,002

2. **Full-Day Kindergarten and Class Size Reduction Increases the ASD Elementary Classroom Shortage**
   - Classrooms required to implement these initiatives exacerbate ASD space challenges.
   - To meet these challenges, Auburn has purchased 40 portable classrooms just for elementary schools to address needs through the 2016-17 school year.
   - As of October 1, 2015, 58 classroom spaces are used for full-day kindergarten programs.
   - Over the past five years, Auburn has increased by 15 sections of 1st grade classes.

3. **Recommendations of the Citizens Ad Hoc Committee Define Current ASD Facilities Needs**
   - The Auburn School District has utilized Citizens Ad Hoc Committees for over 40 years. These committees, which emphasize widespread parent participation from across the district, study enrollment trends and facilities needs to make recommendations to the School Board.
   - A Citizens Ad Hoc Committee presented a report to the Auburn School Board in April 2015 that documents Auburn School District's current needs. Their recommendations include:

- **Construct two new 650 student elementary schools within the next four years.** Current elementary schools are operating beyond capacity and by this September ASD will have 101 portable classrooms K-12, nearly five per site on average. Common area facilities are taxed, with long lunch lines, music rooms repurposed as classrooms, etc. Adding 1,300 seats will partially address current overcrowding. Although the seats are needed *today*, the committee acknowledges that four years is the soonest schools could be approved by voters, designed, and constructed. Extending this timeline beyond four years if multiple bond elections are needed would adversely affect the instructional program for years.

- **Acquire land for a third new 650 student elementary school within the next ten years.** Based on our enrollment projections, we will need at least three elementary schools over the next ten years just to keep up with enrollment growth and class size reduction.

- **Replace five elementary schools and one middle school within the next ten years.** A capital facilities study conducted in 2008 recommended the replacement of six aging schools: Chinook Elementary (1945), Dick Scobee Elementary (1954), Lea Hill Elementary (1957), Pioneer Elementary (1959), Terminal Park Elementary (1961), and Olympic Middle School (1965). These schools are increasingly expensive to maintain and have limited ability to support modern technology. These six schools do not meet current ASD building standards and the cost of a remodel to bring these schools up to standard would exceed 70% of the cost of new construction.

  Additionally, by rebuilding smaller elementary schools to a standard capacity of 650 students, the district will gain approximately 1100 new seats, which in combination with building two new schools will address elementary school space needs.

4. **The Current Supermajority Requirement for Bonds Jeopardizes ASD's Ability to Build Schools for Students**
   - The story of Auburn Mountain View High School, known as "Five Try High," illustrates the impact of the supermajority requirement on a school district.
   - Based on the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation in 1995 and again in 2002, a bond measure to build a third district high school was placed on the ballot and run five times:
     - March 2000 with a result of **58.75% yes** votes
     - May 2000 with a result of **59.43% yes** votes
     - February 2002 with a result of **58.89% yes** votes
     - March 2002 with a result of **59.01% yes** votes
     - February 2003 with a result of **68.71% yes** votes
   - The multi-year delay in constructing a third high school resulted in prolonged overcrowding at Auburn's two comprehensive high schools. Auburn High School was at 2,218 students at the time of the first election and reached 2,490 before the new high school opened. Auburn Riverside High School, with 13 portable classrooms, was at 1,776 students at the time of the first election and 1,888 students when Auburn Mountain View High School opened.
   - In addition to the effects of overcrowding, financial impacts included election costs and project cost increases.

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School District: Moses Lake School District
Legislative District: 8th
Submitted By: Vicki Groff, School Director

I serve as a school director for the Moses Lake School District. Amazingly enough we are home to the 2nd largest high school in the state of Washington. We started planning in 2005 to meet future classroom space. We had previously modernized all of our school and added approx. 96,000 sq ft to the high school at that time. Currently, our high school is built to accommodate 1600-1700 students. Today we have 2300 students in grades 9-12. Our high school classes start at 7:00 A.M. and do not finish until 5:00 P.M. (THINK COLLEGE SCHEDULES). We offer an on-line academy,(rented space), five early childhood classrooms, all-day kindergarten, running start at our local community college, a technical skill center we share with 10 other sending districts, and over 70 portable classrooms in our district. We also have over 100 students who have chosen to attend neighboring Wilson Creek school district as they offer a much smaller school environment. **We have offered two bond initiatives,(2012, 2014). Both failed with over 50% yes votes.**

WSSDA's top priority for 2016 is support the campaign to allow a simple majority of voters to approve school construction bonds in November general elections. The requirement for a 60% super majority makes passing bond initiatives difficult in the best of circumstances, but difficulty alone isn't a sufficient reason to work toward a simple majority solution. Rather, as institutions constituted to teach civic responsibility, responsibility built on the bedrock of democratic principles, we must strive to show each person has an equal opportunity to be heard, for each person's vote to carry equal value. The super majority now in place gives undue weight to the negative vote. In recent bond elections in the state, for example, a district received 571 "yes" votes, a resounding majority, a majority that would be called a landslide or mandate were it for political office. But the same election saw 381 "no" votes, hence by tenths of a percentage the bond failed. The will of 190 fewer people overwhelms the will of 571 voters. Allowing minority rules over the majority certainly does not follow the democratic principles at the core of our districts, or our state, and of our nation.

The potential consequences to all districts are the same. The super majority (60%) is onerous for all and based on consistent bond results across the state, ensures less than 50% of proposals will be successful, no matter the need or the caliber of the planning. Schools must plan carefully to meet the needs of student populations that are often growing, changing and shifting. In addition, regulatory change can create needs for safe and adequate spaces or for changing technology. The implementation of all-day kindergarten and the reduction of class size in primary grades are just two significant examples of legislation that led to an increase for classroom space.

The implementation cost of this proposal would be borne locally, but could ultimately save districts money as they would not need to fund as many special elections or share in the cost of general elections. It would also necessitate fewer redesigns of initiatives in response to a desire to modify failed bonds to make them more attractive to the minority of non-supportive voters.

I encourage your support on legislation that would require a simple majority for passage of any school bond, replacing the 60% requirement. HB 1941, HJR 4210.

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School District: White Pass School District
Legislative District: 20th
Submitted By: Joe Fenbert, Superintendent

We have the oldest buildings in the state built in 1953, a boiler about to go, walls that moved, etc. etc. We have tried to pass a bond five times in the last 20 years...all failed; even when all our mills were running full in the late 1980s/early 90s. We just have a very conservative area.

Five years ago we passed our bond by only seven votes! It was an amazing process registering past students to vote, community events, meetings, tours of the facilities, signs...about anything a school and group of people could do, including door to door. We passed the bond just before the financial meltdown five years ago. If not for the 7 votes, we would still have 1953 buildings, probably some would have been condemned...community spirit would be down, less families would choose White Pass SD, we would be less attractive to teachers.

Since then, our enrollment has climbed each year. "If you build it, they will come!" This week I will share with our board the status of our K-12 enrollment at an all-time five –year high: 453 in February 2015 compared to 390 five years ago.

New buildings are not the only answer, but they go a long way in lifting a school...requiring a 60% majority in bond elections just seems unfair to me when not many other institution's or organizations or companies need to go on begging tours to make things happen for kids.