

Hamilton County USD 494 (Syracuse Schools)

School Improvement Bond Issue Election - May 6, 2014

Quality education always has been and must continue to be a priority in Syracuse Schools. In a rural community and area like ours, schools are the lifeblood of positive activity. We have the opportunity and the responsibility to provide educational opportunities for approximately 500 students in our District. Unlike many school districts in western Kansas, USD 494 has experienced enrollment growth in the last 3 years. The Board of Education has made facilities a priority, carefully studying existing buildings, current and future needs, options and available resources to give all its children what they need to achieve their potential. When facilities are outdated or inadequate, effective teaching and learning become more difficult, and children and eventually the community are affected.

In recent months, the Board of Education formed a Facilities Steering Committee to evaluate education and school facilities in USD 494. The Steering Committee, consisting of both educators and patrons, toured existing buildings, evaluated educational needs for today and the future, and prioritized needs in Syracuse USD 494. After input from many sources, the Committee identified three areas for improvement: (1) Agricultural and Career Technical education facilities and programs; (2) An upgraded and improved gymnasium facility for mandated Physical Education as well as team sports; and (3) Improvements and upgrades at the District Stadium for both track and football facilities. There was considerable support to encourage the Board of Education to consider a bond issue to address these challenges.

Syracuse USD 494 has challenges in its facilities due to age and much use as well as growing emphasis on educational programs for career and technical learning. Extracurricular activities are also vital parts of a well-rounded education for all students. After much study, thought, and input from many sources, the Board of Education of USD 494 approved a resolution scheduling a bond issue election for May 6th to request the authority to issue no more than \$6.425 million in general obligation bonds to finance capital improvements in Syracuse USD 494.



EDUCATIONAL & FACILITY CHALLENGES

- Syracuse and Hamilton County represent rural Kansas and our educational system must prepare our students for jobs related to this vital agricultural industry.
- Farming, ranching, and dairy are the primary industries in our area.
- USD 494 currently does not have an agriculture-education program or adequate spaces for one.
- The current Industrial Arts building is outdated and inadequate for this vital part of our curriculum.
- In addition to woods and metals education, USD 494 needs additional spaces for other Agricultural education programs as well as Career Technology education.
- Kansas educational policies appropriately offer incentives for the development and expansion of Career & Technical Education (CTE) course offerings.
- Our current Industrial Arts building is outdated and limited in its ability to provide adequate spaces for our limited curriculum and the desired additional course offerings.
- School facilities as well as the educational programs and extra-curricular opportunities available are the primary concern of families and businesses considering relocation.
- Physical Education is a mandated part of all schools curriculum and extracurricular activities such as team sports are important parts of a well-rounded education.
- Well over half our students in grades 7-12 participate in team sports in Syracuse Schools.
- Younger students also use District athletic facilities on community supported teams.
- The existing B. A. Gym facility, constructed nearly 40 years ago, is outdated and in need of upgrades.
- The Old gym is more than 70 years old, in a state of decline, and inadequate for hosting large events.
- Both gym facilities are outdated and inadequate for our student body and community needs.
- The Syracuse community could benefit from a planned walking track in the proposed new gym facility.
- At the District Stadium, the track facilities are inadequate and non-regulation—not allowing our community to host competitions and the economic benefits of such.
- Approximately 60 students participate on competitive track and field teams within Syracuse Schools.
- The existing grandstands face west (into the sun) and locker room facilities are below today's standards.
- The football field surface is in need of improvement for player safety.
- The condition of our facilities does not allow our Syracuse community the opportunity to host league, regional, and state-level competitions and other activities.



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PROPOSED BOND ISSUE SOLUTIONS

- Construction of a new larger Agriculture Education building including classrooms, shop areas, and support spaces.
- New Ag-Ed structure adequate for today's Agricultural education needs as well as Career Tech programs.
- CTE facilities and courses would benefit both our students and our community in the future.
- Plan is for cooperative agreement between USD 494 and Northwest Technology for teaching blended and adult-education classes in the proposed new facility.
- Construction of a new modern physical education facility including completion gym, new multi-sport locker rooms, commons area, restrooms, and an indoor running/walking track and exercise facilities available also for community (patron) use.
- Construction of a new regulation track and field complex with an 8-lane all-weather track capable of hosting all levels of competitions in Syracuse.
- The District Stadium improvements include enhanced and expanded multi-level grandstand seating for Syracuse supporters on the west side of the field (facing away from the evening sun)
- A new natural turf football field surface is also planned.
- Other stadium improvements include natural earth berm seating, a large covered commons area, improved restrooms, and an improved concession facility.
- The current grandstands will be reconfigured to seat visitors and greatly increase storage athletic equipment.
- Plan also includes development of additional parking to support these facilities as well as new ticket booths and fencing to enhance security.
- Research conclusively shows that students who participate in extra-curricular activities do better academically and score higher on the ACT exam.
- Hamilton County and Syracuse will benefit greatly by developing and increasing a skilled labor, and good, stable jobs can be an incentive for our students to come back home and for new families to choose our area.
- Preparing students for the future by equipping them with usable skills is a primary function of CTE programs and a goal of the Board of Education and community.
- An investment to enhance teaching and learning for current staff and students as well as to make our educational facilities and community more attractive to potential new families and businesses.



FINANCE-- A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

- Proposed \$6,425,000 bond issue to pay project costs as well as bonding costs of issuance.
- Interest rates, estimated at 4%, are near 50-year low levels. Similar bond issues have sold recently at near 3%.
- Bonds to be retired in 12 years.
- USD 494 has existing bonds issued in 1999 which will be retired this year and require a levy of 16.08 mills.
- Proposed new bonds will require a mill levy estimated at 12.98 mills—estimated to be 3.10 mills less than what the current outstanding bonds require.
- Significant capital improvement can be accomplished with a projected reduction in the USD 494 mill rate.
- A mill is \$1 of tax on each \$1,000 of assessed valuation of property in the District.
- A net decrease of 3.10 mills is reduced taxes on a \$100,000 home of \$35.65 per year as compared to current taxing levels.
- A 3.10 mill decrease is estimated reduced taxes on 160 Acres of Irrigated Farmground of \$39.43 per year.

IT'S AN IMPORTANT DECISION

In communities like Syracuse, schools are the lifeblood with not only education but activities for all generations. Our schools have served our students, community and area well for many decades and have contributed to the growth and success of hundreds of graduates. The support for Syracuse USD 494 is evident in the support of capital improvements throughout the years and continuing support for our educational programs. Our facilities have challenges physically and educationally for today and the future. We must strive to provide opportunities for our children today and for generations to come. Our children and grandchildren are our future and the future of our community and area. Communities are known by the schools they keep and to what degree it makes education a priority. With historically low interest rates and the retirement of a previous bond issue this year, it is sincerely believed that now represents a unique window of opportunity to improve our schools with a net decrease in local property taxes.

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