

Why We're Voting Against *this* Bond

As Helenans, we support our public schools and quality education. We want Helena to continue to be a thriving community where families can live and learn. Because we want all of our kids to have an equally good learning environment, we have united against the current bond proposal. That bond proposal reflects a “vision” for our schools that includes school closures – this is well-documented in meeting minutes, news articles, and public statements. That “vision” is tearing apart our community and pitting neighbor against neighbor. The proposed bond is flawed, fiscally unsound, and puts schools in jeopardy. **We stand united against that “vision” and against this bond because THERE IS A BETTER WAY.**

◆ Middle Schools Matter!

All of our students will attend middle schools at some point! Our elementary district is a K-8 district, not a K-5 district. The current bond plan provides nothing for the overcrowded, deteriorating middle schools – not one penny. Yet our middle schools have nearly \$15 million dollars in critical needs. These needs will go unaddressed for over a decade because they aren't included in this bond. *We cannot ignore 1,600 students at HMS and CRA!*

◆ Deferred Maintenance and Life/Safety Issues Matter!

The District estimates \$55 million in Deferred Maintenance (undone repairs) in our K-8 schools, including \$6 million in life/safety issues. The proposed bond plan fails to fund many of these critical repairs at several schools. A good bond would address fairly the deferred maintenance at every school in the elementary district, still expand schools in the valley, and create flexible learning spaces and technology-friendly buildings for 21st century learning FOR ALL KIDS.

◆ Neighborhood Schools Matter!

The proposed bond is “phase one” of the District’s vision to create five big elementary schools mostly on Helena’s perimeter or on the outskirts of town and to close smaller schools in residential neighborhoods, using siting principles based on Wyoming and Ohio guidelines that require driving and busing of students to all schools. More up-to-date school siting guidelines consistently cite the benefits of walkable neighborhood schools to student health and performance, as well as to their communities. We are fortunate that this is already how Helena’s in-town elementary schools are laid out, but that won't be the case if this bond passes. Building excess student capacity at three schools will force smaller schools to close. The superintendent has publicly stated (and confirmed) that Bryant, Kessler & Hawthorne will soon be closed and those kids will be “redistributed.” Central could become an administrative building or sold.

◆ A Solid Plan Matters!

What business or school system invests \$70 million and calls it a “stand-alone” event, especially when it is the product of a three-part “vision” that sets the rest of that “vision” in motion? This is permanent infrastructure and capacity-building decision that will change our school district and community. The District’s current VISION Plan is to turn CRA and HMS into elementary schools, the high schools into middle schools, then building two new high schools outside of town... all for a quarter of a billion dollars. This bond will increase operating expenses and reduce funds for instructional materials.

◆ All Kids Matter!

This bond plan results in some kids winning big and some kids losing big! \$43 million of the \$70 million bond would be spent on just *three* schools that serve only one-fourth of the students. Only \$8 million will be split between seven schools in the elementary district, even though these seven schools have \$27 million in deferred maintenance and serve over 60% of the students. The proposed bond also fails to give most of the students in our elementary district what they need for 21st century learning. ***Sound fair? We don't think so, either!*** We want a bond that doesn't leave some kids and some schools out in the cold. We need an independently facilitated community consensus bond process where we as a community create a supportable, fair bond. NOT *this* bond!

