

This non-partisan report was prepared by volunteer members of the League of Women Voters of Lane County.

**Measure 20-379**  
**Siuslaw School District Bond**

**Official Title:** School Facility Improvement Bond; Allow for State Matching Grant

**Referral:** This measure was referred to voters by Siuslaw School District NO. 97J.

**Question:** Shall District provide new high school, improve elementary school, upgrade infrastructure; issue \$139 million of general obligation bonds? If the bonds are approved, they will be payable from taxes on property or property ownership that are not subject to the limit of sections 11 and 11b, Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

**Financial Impact**

This measure would authorize the Siuslaw School District to issue up to \$139 million in general obligation bonds to finance capital improvements. The measure would also secure a State grant of \$6,126,000 to pay for part of the capital improvements.

The estimated annual tax rate would be \$2.75 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The actual levy rate may differ due to final interest rates and changes in assessed value. For example, a homeowner with a house assessed at \$250,000 would see their property taxes increase by \$688 each year, or \$57 a month.

*NOTE: Assessed value is the value used to calculate property tax. It is shown on the property tax statement. It is NOT the same as real market value, which is the market price of the property.*

To calculate the cost to your property, see <https://siuslawschoolbond.com/>

**Probable Result Of A “Yes” Vote**

A “Yes” vote would authorize the school district to issue bonds not to exceed \$139 million, which would meet the requirements for a \$6,126,000 State grant. The funds would finance capital costs, including building a new high school and elementary school upgrades. Taxes would increase.

**Probable Result Of A “No” Vote**

A “no” vote opposes the issuance of the bonds. The proposed new high school and renovations to the elementary school would not take place, and taxes would not increase.

**Background**

In 2016 and 2018, similar bond measures proposed replacing the high school along with other school building renovations. Those measures were put on the ballot on relatively short notice with considerably less study and planning. The current ballot measure is the result of a two-year planning process by the Facilities Advisory Committee which investigated potential upgrades to Siuslaw School District facilities and which involved detailed study of all available options. The community was actively engaged in the process.

Siuslaw High School was constructed more than 55 years ago, before modern earthquake safety standards were adopted. Engineering assessments indicate the building could sustain only a relatively minor seismic event. Located within the Cascadia Subduction Zone, the region faces a meaningful risk of a major earthquake within the coming decades.

The current high school also presents significant safety and infrastructure challenges. With 17 separate exterior entrances, the campus is difficult to secure and monitor during the school day. Aging heating and cooling systems frequently malfunction, sometimes resulting in school closures. The building’s original electrical system — designed in the early 1970s — struggles to support today’s technology needs, including computers, chargers, printers, and digital learning tools. Many utility systems are embedded in concrete floors, making repairs complex and costly. Science labs cannot use gas burners due to corroded pipes that cannot be replaced easily. The school was designed for approximately 350 students but now serves about 400. It lacks an auditorium and cafeteria, and some classrooms have no windows. Locker room facilities do not meet current Title IX standards for equitable access.

The proposed new facility would be located behind the middle school.

The bond measure also includes approximately \$13 million in improvements to the elementary school, such as four new classrooms to bring kindergarten students into the main building, enclosed walkways for improved safety, seismic upgrades to older sections, and modernization of classroom systems.

The Facilities Advisory Committee extensively studied the alternative process of hiring contractors to do individual projects such as replacing electrical, plumbing and HVAC systems over a two-year planning process involving an architect and facilities experts. The conclusion was that renovating the aging building in stages would not necessarily reduce long-term costs. With the unknown factors of such an extensive remodel, any large unseen problem or deficit would need to be repaired to current building codes, with the potential for additional expenses that could easily lead to cost overruns, while leaving many of the same floorplan problems that exist today. Finally, the piecemeal approach would likely require significant disruption to students and staff over multiple years and leaves the same basic footprint with no additional space. No plan was offered for how the piecemeal approach would be managed or financed.

Replacing the high school would allow students to continue attending classes in the existing building until the new facility is complete, reducing disruption and providing greater certainty in budgeting and construction timelines.

### **Supporters Say**

- Investing in schools is an investment in the future of the entire community. Strong schools help attract families, support local businesses, and ensure that communities continue to grow and thrive. Florence already faces a shortage of medical providers and other professionals. Quality schools are one of the most important factors families consider when deciding where to live. The facilities committee says some young professionals have chosen not to move to the Florence area—or have left—in part because of the condition of the school facilities.
- Supporters note that construction costs are expected to continue rising over time, which they believe makes addressing these needs sooner more cost-effective.

### **Opponents Say**

**There is no organized opposition to this measure; however, some public comments about this measure include:**

- Some voters may oppose any measure that is likely to increase property taxes.
- Opponents argue that repairs/renovation could be done piecemeal by hiring contractors to do individual projects.
- The cost is too high, the proposed projects are not affordable.

### **Editors' Notes:**

There is a PAC registered with Sos supporting this measure:

[https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/sooDetail.do?sooRsn=105459&OWASP\\_CSRFTOKEN=NO5R-NJJ9-A6XV-CUFL-23G7-HTM7-FJM5-DQ95](https://secure.sos.state.or.us/orestar/sooDetail.do?sooRsn=105459&OWASP_CSRFTOKEN=NO5R-NJJ9-A6XV-CUFL-23G7-HTM7-FJM5-DQ95)

Eugene Register-Guard, Nov. 7, 2023: “Voters in the Siuslaw School District appear to have chosen to renew a 5-year option levy to pay staff and help students access technology for online learning.” . The levy continues a tax rate of \$0.75 per \$1,000 of assessed value to maintain school operations, Career Technical Education (CTE) programs, and lower class sizes, raising roughly \$8.5 million over five years.