

Highline Bond & Tech Levy Fact-checker

Hearing claims and questions from bond or levy opponents? **Here are the facts.**

School Construction Bond

Claim: The district doesn't know how much the Cascade Middle School project will cost because it has not done a comprehensive site assessment and traffic study on the proposed site.

Response: *Highline has a 25-year record of delivering new schools on time and on budget.* Following standard procedure for school construction projects and working with architects, the district has done the assessments needed to determine a reliable preliminary cost estimate for construction on the proposed site. Bond dollars are needed to complete a more detailed assessment that will refine the estimate. Highline's record of completing projects on time and on budget speaks for itself.

Claim: The district may use eminent domain to seize property from neighboring homeowners to enlarge the proposed site for Cascade Middle School.

Response: The district has explicitly stated that it will not seize neighboring property. While the proposed site is not as large as some other Highline middle schools, it is bigger than the current Cascade property. Architects evaluating the site have assured the district the property dimensions are adequate for constructing Cascade.

Question: Why does the bond include money to rebuild Chinook Middle School when construction won't begin for several years?

Response: The Capital Facilities Advisory Committee (CFAC), the community-led group that developed the bond plan, included Chinook on this bond to ensure that Chinook students would not be left behind when all four other Highline middle schools are new and equipped for a modern instructional program. CFAC members were concerned that a future bond may not pass or may be delayed by many years, leaving Chinook students in an outdated facility not built for today's safety and learning standards—a school dramatically inferior to the schools of their peers in other Highline neighborhoods.

Question: Why is Chinook getting a partial rebuild rather than a completely new school?

Response: One of the buildings on the Chinook campus is newer. CFAC reviewed architects' assessment of the building conditions and determined that it would be more fiscally responsible to renovate that building rather than replace it.

Question: Why not rebuild Chinook at the same time as Cascade and Sylvester?

Response: School construction projects are phased for two reasons: 1) the district has only one interim site to house students while their school is under construction and 2) district staff have limited capacity to manage projects without spending money to hire additional staff.

Question: Why does the renovation plan for CHOICE Academy not include a school library, full-size gym and a full kitchen?

Response: CHOICE serves about 200 students in a non-traditional program that does not require all aspects of a traditional school. Students attend class in the morning have the opportunity to leave campus for off-site, independently-developed electives in the afternoon. High school juniors and seniors are typically enrolled full-time in a local college through the Running Start program.

Question: What will the district do with the money for the Chinook project until construction starts?

Response: Bond dollars are collected from taxpayers over a period of 20 or more years. The district does not collect all the money up front. A bond measure authorizes the district to sell bonds as it needs dollars for construction. Property taxes are used to pay interest to the investors who buy the bonds when the bonds come due.

Claim: The district is asking for money for unidentified critical needs and is not saying what those needs are.

Response: The district's list of critical needs include known maintenance projects such as repair and replacement of roofs, HVAC systems, painting, and other improvements necessary to extend the life of district facilities. This fund is also used for unanticipated emergency repairs or system failures. This list was shared with CFAC. [More information](#) is posted on the district website.

Claim: The bond resolution allows excess funds to be used on any capital improvements the district wishes.

Response: By law, bond dollars must be spent on the projects specifically named in the bond resolution. Bond resolutions also include standard legal language that allows the school board the flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, such as a dramatic increase in material costs that prevents a project from being completed as planned. Any change from the voter-approved plan would require a public vote of the school board. District administrators could not just decide to spend the money on a new central administration building, for example.

Claim: The superintendent has a blank check to spend up to \$1 million without public oversight.

Response:

The superintendent does not have a blank check to spend district funds. School Board policies and procedures require multiple levels of review and approval for contracts.

For contracts funded by the Highline's general fund, School Board approval is required for amounts of \$500,000 or more.

The \$1 million threshold applies only to certain capital projects. For bond- and levy-funded construction projects, the School Board approves the projects and their budgets upfront. Additional Board approval is required when a project exceeds its approved budget by any amount.

All district spending is reported to the School Board at public meetings. This provides an additional layer of transparency and accountability for expenditures that do not require direct Board approval.

In addition, the Capital Projects Oversight Committee reviews bond spending to ensure transparency and accountability. The committee is composed of Highline residents and professionals with expertise in architecture, construction, law, and finance. The committee meets quarterly to review financial statements related to bond projects.

Tech Levy

Claim: The 2020 tech levy did not result in improved math and reading scores.

Response: The 2020 tech levy, passed during the pandemic, was focused on enabling students and staff to do teaching and learning from home. It paid for devices, software, hotspots and other technology that was critical—and mandatory—for conducting school during the pandemic.

Claim: Use of classroom technology reduces teacher-led instruction.

Response: The vast majority of classroom time is spent in direct, teacher-led instruction. Technology may be used to supplement or provide individualized practice on skills. Using software such as i-Ready allows teachers to assess individual student growth so they can target teaching and fill gaps in a student's learning.

Claim: Software compromises student data privacy.

Response: The tech levy funds the cybersecurity systems that keep student and staff data safe and confidential. Software has replaced paper recordkeeping in every aspect of modern life. In schools, it is used for student attendance, medical information, test scores, grades and more. Cybersecurity measures must constantly be updated to ensure data security.