Referendum 2018
At A Glance

Beaufort County voters will go to the polls April 21 to decide on a school construction bond referendum that would build additional classrooms to serve our fast-growing community.

DRAMATIC GROWTH

Beaufort County’s vibrant culture, diverse community, beautiful natural environment, outstanding quality of life and improving public schools continue to attract new families. Each year, hundreds of new students are enrolled in district schools, particularly in the Bluffton community.

From 2000 until today, the town of Bluffton’s population has increased from 1,300 to an estimated 20,000. Over just the five-year period from 2013 to 2017, the number of approved building permits for new houses in Bluffton increased from 464 to 884.

The district’s two newest schools are both in Bluffton. River Ridge Academy opened in August 2015 and is already over capacity. May River High opened in August 2016 and is already nearing capacity.

When Pritchardville Elementary in Bluffton exceeded its capacity in 2015-16, about 140 students were reassigned to other Bluffton schools. At the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, roughly the same number of new students were enrolled, again exceeding capacity.

By tracking the numbers of births to county residents, the district can project future enrollment trends. Past projections have proved to be very accurate. Looking ahead, we anticipate more than 1,000 new students to enroll in Bluffton-area schools in just the next five years alone.

For more in-depth data on enrollment trends, review the district’s FY2019-2023 Five-Year Plan and Capital Budget in the “Referendum 2018” section of the district website.

PROJECTS — WHAT WOULD BE BUILT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Project Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>River Ridge Academy</td>
<td>Additional Classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May River High</td>
<td>New Wing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Riverside (adjacent to May River High)</td>
<td>New School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaufort High</td>
<td>New CATE Tech Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluffton High</td>
<td>New CATE Tech Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton Head Island High</td>
<td>New CATE Tech Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>$76 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE COSTS

If the district borrows $76 million for these construction projects and pays it back using the traditional method of funding a bond referendum, residents with homes valued at $100,000 can expect to pay $9.16 more a year in taxes. That works out to an additional 18 cents a week. The resident owner of a $200,000 house can expect to pay $18.32 more a year, or 35 cents a week. The resident owner of a $350,000 house can expect to pay $32.06 more a year, or 60 cents a week.

Whether voters approve the April 21 referendum or not, hundreds of additional students will continue to enroll in Bluffton-area schools each year and will have to be accommodated in some way. Options could include larger numbers of students in each teacher’s classroom, greater numbers of students being rezoned to different schools, and ongoing purchases of mobile classrooms.

BEAUFORT COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT | www.beaufortschools.net
During the fall of 2017, the superintendent held a series of town hall meetings to listen to residents’ and parents’ concerns with overcrowding in southern Beaufort County. A key theme with parents was their desire to avoid repeated redrawing of school attendance zones – and changes to students’ assigned schools – to address overcrowding.

Board of Education meetings during this time included discussions on this topic. The Board decided on December 12, 2017, to provide temporary mobile classrooms to address growth issues in the Bluffton Cluster. Fourteen mobiles were approved by the Board for the 2018-19 school year at a cost of $1.1 million for the first year of use.

The Board also approved a long-term plan to move forward with a $76 million bond referendum scheduled for April 21, 2018.

This bond referendum project list addresses southern Beaufort County’s immediate growth needs and the expansion of Career and Technology Education (CATE) programs at three high schools.

If the April 21 bond referendum is approved, Advanced Technical Centers (ATC) similar to those currently operating at Battery Creek and May River would be built at Beaufort, Bluffton and Hilton Head Island high schools. ATC buildings feature specialized classrooms equipped to offer CATE courses. The district’s CATE courses prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers across a range of fields. Some students use their CATE training to move on to two-year or four-year colleges, while others earn industry certifications that allow them to begin their careers after high school. Beaufort County CATE courses include engineering, aviation/aerospace, agricultural science, health science, welding, culinary arts and automotive technology. CATE courses can include work-based internships that allow students to apply their new knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

### THE NUMBERS

**NEW RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS IN BLUFFTON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>332</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>644</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>808</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENROLLMENT BY CLUSTER**

- Whale Branch Early College: 1,348
- Battery Creek: 3,064
- Hilton Head Island: 4,368
- Bluffton: 8,626
- Beaufort: 4,766

Total Student Enrollment: 22,172
WHAT IS A BOND REFERENDUM? It’s a county-wide election that lets citizens decide whether to give the school district the authority to borrow money to expand or renovate school buildings, or to build new school buildings. The Beaufort County School District’s bond referendum will be the only question on the April 21 ballot.

WHAT IS THE AMOUNT OF THE REFERENDUM? The bond referendum amount would not exceed $76 million.

WHAT ARE THE REFERENDUM’S GOALS? The two main objectives are to reduce overcrowding in Bluffton-area schools and to provide more opportunities for students in Career and Technology Education (CATE) courses.

WHY IS A BOND REFERENDUM NEEDED FOR THESE PROJECTS? Construction of new schools and expansions of existing schools are not financed through the district’s general operating funds. Instead, they are paid through long-term bonds that spread the cost over the years in which the facilities will be used – much like a home mortgage.

WOULD THE DISTRICT QUALIFY FOR LOWER INTEREST RATES ON ITS SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION BONDS? The Beaufort County School District’s bond ratings are excellent and among the best in South Carolina. Due to the district’s strong history of fiscal responsibility, taxpayers would save money on any borrowing costs because the district would qualify for lower interest rates.

DIDN’T WE JUST VOTE ON THIS? In November 2016, Beaufort County voters considered but did not approve a $313 million sales tax referendum for a variety of school projects. The “no” vote in 2016 did not stop the influx of hundreds of additional students into the district each year, however. The 2018 referendum takes into account voter concerns from the 2016 vote. The number of projects has been reduced, and the overall amount that would be borrowed has been reduced. In addition, the April 21 vote does not call for a sales tax increase. It will be a traditional bond referendum supported by revenues from property owners.

IF VOTERS APPROVE THE NEW REFERENDUM ON APRIL 21, WHEN WILL CONSTRUCTION BEGIN? The first set of priorities will be the expansions at River Ridge Academy and May River High; planning would begin in spring 2018, and the goal would be to open the new classrooms to students by January 2020. The second set of priorities would be planning and building a new school on district-owned land adjacent to May River High, and also planning and building new CATE center additions to Beaufort, Bluffton and Hilton Head Island high schools. The earliest possible date for those facilities to open would be August 2020.

HOW WILL MORE IMMEDIATE SCHOOL OVERCROWDING ISSUES BE ADDRESSED? The Beaufort County Board of Education has approved the installation of mobile classrooms at River Ridge Academy and Pritchardville Elementary, two schools that are already above 100 percent capacity. If voters approve the April 21 bond referendum, the proposed new facilities would address anticipated enrollment growth for the next five years.

HOW WILL TAXPAYERS KNOW IF THE MONEY IS BEING SPENT WISELY AND AS INTENDED? All proceeds from voter-approved bonds would be accounted for in a fund kept separate from other district money. Independent external auditors perform annual audits on the district’s financial statements, and all referendum funds would be part of that annual audit. A copy of the district’s Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) is posted on the school district’s website upon completion of each annual audit. Quarterly capital expenditure reports are posted on the district’s website. In addition, regular construction updates would be provided to the Board of Education so that it can monitor progress and track expenses.

WHAT IS THE DISTRICT’S TRACK RECORD FOR BUILDING SCHOOLS IN A COST-EFFECTIVE WAY? The district’s track record is outstanding. To cite the most recent example, May River High was built for $154 per square foot. Compare that to the 2014 national median for high school building construction of $235 per square foot. Savings from May River High’s construction will be used to fund the mobile classrooms at Pritchardville Elementary and River Ridge Academy.
WHAT’S BEHIND THE OVERCROWDING AT SCHOOLS IN BLUFFTON?

Growth, pure and simple. Bluffton’s population grew from 1,275 in the year 2000 to about 20,000 today – an increase of more than 1,400 percent. There were 332 new residential construction permits in Bluffton in 2012; in 2016 there were 808. This growth adds hundreds of additional students to Bluffton-area schools each year, and the upward trend shows no signs of slowing down. Our overall quality of life in Beaufort County, plus the school district’s growing reputation for academic excellence, is attracting more families.

IF VOTERS APPROVE THE REFERENDUM, WHAT WILL IT COST LOCAL HOMEOWNERS?

The $76 million referendum would add $18.32 to the annual debt service tax bill of an owner-occupied Beaufort County home valued at $200,000. For a home valued at $350,000, the local homeowners’ annual tax bill would increase by $32.06.

WHAT ARE CATE COURSES, AND WHY ARE THEY POPULAR WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS?

The district’s CATE courses prepare students for high-skill, high-wage, high-demand careers across a broad range of fields. Some students use their CATE training to move on to two-year or four-year colleges, while others earn industry certifications that allow them to begin their careers immediately after high school. Beaufort County CATE courses include engineering, aviation/aerospace, agricultural science, health care, welding, culinary arts and automotive technology. CATE courses can include work-based internships that allow students to apply their new knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE REFERENDUM DOESN’T PASS?

Hundreds of additional students are being enrolled in Bluffton-area schools each year, and those students will have to be accommodated in some fashion. Options could include larger class sizes, students being rezoned to different schools that have space available, and ongoing purchases of mobile classrooms. The Board of Education has been presented with a five-year plan to purchase additional mobiles at an estimated cost of $5 million.

IS STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IMPROVING IN BEAUFORT COUNTY’S SCHOOLS?

Absolutely. Student achievement in district schools is getting better all the time, and there are numerous indicators that prove it. To cite just two examples: On-time high school graduation rates have increased for six consecutive years to all-time highs, and college scholarships earned by graduating seniors have nearly doubled over the last five years, from $14.8 million to $40.7 million.

HOW AND WHERE TO VOTE

FIND OUT IF YOU ARE REGISTERED TO VOTE

The Board of Voter Registration and Elections of Beaufort County (843-255-6900) will tell you if you are currently registered to vote. Be prepared to offer your name and social security number so voter registration staff can search the system for your information. You should have a Voter Registration card identifying you and the precinct in which you vote.

WHEN AND HOW TO VOTE ON THE REFERENDUM

The referendum vote will occur on Saturday, April 21. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at precinct locations throughout Beaufort County. To find out your precinct location, please call the Board of Voter Registration and Elections of Beaufort County (843-255-6900).

WHAT IF I WILL BE OUT OF TOWN ON APRIL 21?

Absentee ballots are available at the Board of Voter Registration and Elections of Beaufort County (15 John Galt Road) and Bluffton (61B Ulmer Road). Those offices are open Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.; they will be open on Friday, April 20, from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.

WHEN IS THE LAST DAY I CAN VOTE BY ABSENTEE BALLOT?

April 20.

Visit scvotes.org for more information.