

Presented by Jim Schlachter, Superintendent of the Gresham-Barlow School District

I am honored and grateful to present today as a representative of an Oregon school district that is currently utilizing a matching grant of \$8,000,000 from the Department of Education's (ODE) Oregon School Capital Improvement Matching Program (OSCIM Program).

The Gresham-Barlow School District is the 10th largest district in the state, located in the heart of a historic tax-averse community. The last time a school bond passed in the Gresham-Barlow School District was in 2000. The school district placed a bond before the voters in 2013, which failed.

Over the years, the capital needs of our 18 schools increased considerably. Between 2013 and 2016, the school district worked to build community trust and support for a 2016 bond measure. Due to the substantial needs of our schools, the district was compelled to place a \$299 million school bond on the November 2016 ballot, resulting in a tax increase for the community; it was not a replacement measure.

The November 2016 school bond passed with 51% of the votes. While a number of factors led to its success, I do know that the school district fully utilized our qualification for the OSCIM match in our communications. On August 4, 2016, with our selection for the OSCIM program in hand, our school board lowered the size of the bond from \$299 million to \$291 million and actively communicated the reduction in tax rate made possible by the State match. (I have provided a copy of our press release following the August 4 school board meeting.)

We are in the design phase of new schools and major remodels at this time. There is a buzz in the community as students, parents, community members, the Chamber of Commerce, business owners, and especially contractors and suppliers begin to realize the schools, opportunities and commerce made possible by the school bond's passage.

This exciting work and the associated community benefit will hopefully pave the way for our district and region to begin a tradition of supporting education bond measures.

I am here to ask that you continue the State's investment in local communities by continuing to fund the OSCIM program. In the latest phase of the program, the Gresham-Barlow School District was one of eleven matching grant winners. I know there are many more districts that would stand a better chance of passing their bonds if they were able to communicate to local voters that the State is providing a matching grant. Small and rural districts where low property values require disproportionately high tax increases for bond projects are particularly in need of support.

One way to think about the impact of the matching grant—in the case of the successful Gresham-Barlow bond, the State made an investment of \$8 million. That investment influenced and was partially responsible for a local community choosing to invest an additional \$291 million in its schools. That is a profound local return on a State investment.

Through the OCSIM program, the State has increased community support for school bond measures. I strongly encourage you to continue this important program which has the potential to make a difference in many more communities throughout Oregon. ■

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Gresham-Barlow School Board votes to lower amount of proposed school bond

Gresham-Barlow School District receives \$8 million matching grant from state for school construction to help stretch local dollars and address urgent school building needs

The Gresham-Barlow School Board voted on August 4 to reduce the amount of the proposed November school bond from \$299 million to \$291 million. The school board made the decision after learning the district will receive \$8 million from the state of Oregon for school construction if the school bond is approved by voters.

“The school board made a decision to lower the school bond amount based on what we heard from the community,” said Chair Carla Piluso. “We know that Gresham-Barlow residents want to support their schools but are also sensitive to how that impacts their family budget. The state matching grant allows us to lower the cost of the school bond to the taxpayer while maintaining the complete bond package of high need projects identified by the Bond Planning Committee.”

The school district learned in July that it is one of a select group of school districts eligible to receive the matching grant. Of the 11 school districts selected, the Gresham-Barlow School District received the highest grant amount of \$8 million. The next highest grant was awarded to the Sherwood School District for \$4.5 million.

“This is an exceptional opportunity for our community,” said Chair Piluso. “This is the first year the state of Oregon has chipped in funds to help communities pay for critical school improvements. Thanks to the \$8 million grant we won’t shoulder the cost of this school bond alone. If the bond is approved, the entire state would help pay for our community’s school bond projects.”

The \$291 million school bond will be placed on the November 2016 ballot. The cost to taxpayers is estimated at \$1.89 per thousand of assessed value. According to Multnomah County, the average assessed value of a home in the school district is approximately \$200,000. An individual with a home with an assessed value of \$200,000 would pay an additional \$31.50 a month.

Every school building in the district would be impacted by the school bond. Projects include safety and security upgrades, improvements to technology infrastructure, replacement of roofs, and heating and cooling system upgrades.

School improvements in the package would allow the district to update its vocational-technical programs, as well as its science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes that help prepare students for careers and college.

Major renovations would occur at Gresham High School and Sam Barlow High School. North Gresham and East Gresham Elementary Schools would be replaced. Classrooms would be added to Hall and Hollydale Elementary Schools. The school bond would include renovations to Deep Creek Elementary School so it can become a K-8 school.

More information about the proposed school bond is on the district's website at www.gresham.k12.or.us.