



## REFERENDUM 2018: THE BASICS

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. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

### 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?** Two main things: to reduce overcrowding in Bluffton-area schools and to provide more opportunities for students in Career and Technology Education (CATE) courses.

**WHAT WOULD BE BUILT?** Additional classrooms at River Ridge Academy; additional classrooms at May River High; a new school in Bluffton; and new CATE classrooms at Beaufort, Bluffton and Hilton Head Island high schools.

**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.

**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.

### 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.

### 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 bill tax bill would increase by \$32.06.

**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 ON THE FIRST PROJECTS?

The first 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 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 High, Bluffton High and Hilton Head Island High.

### **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 revenues from voter-approved bond sales 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 national average for school building construction of \$267 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 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 Beaufort County Board of Elections and Voter Registration office (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.

### **REGISTER TO VOTE**

To vote on the referendum, you must be officially registered with the Beaufort County Board of Elections and Voter Registration office (843-255-6900). The last day you can register to vote is Wednesday, March 21. [VOTER REGISTRATION FORMS](#)

### **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 Beaufort County Board of Elections and Voter Registration office (843-255-6900).

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

Absentee ballots are available at the Board of Elections and Voter Registration's office in Beaufort (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. Visit [SCVOTES.org](http://SCVOTES.org) for more information.