

Hackensack Public Schools
Response to Open Letter from Mayor J. Labrosse
December 31, 2018

The Hackensack Public Schools Board of Education and Administration thank Mayor John Labrosse for expressing his concerns about the upcoming school bond referendum on Tuesday, January 22, 2019.

The proposed Building A Brighter Future referendum is based on the district's long-term facilities planning, which began over five years ago, to accommodate our growing student population. Enrollment has increased by nearly 1,000 students over the past 10 years. The district currently meets the needs of nearly 5,800 students in PreK – 12th grade in six schools as well as an Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC), a facility we have leased from the Newark Archdiocese for the past five years. An approved referendum will save approximately \$700,000 in annual lease payments and enable the district to bring preschoolers back to their neighborhood schools, strengthening and enriching our community.

Plans for the proposed referendum were presented at monthly BOE meetings, beginning last school year, when we requested and welcomed input from staff, parents, community members and our sending districts, Rochelle Park, South Hackensack and Maywood. Hackensack Public Schools has a long history of positive collaboration and cooperation with our sending districts; one we look forward to continuing long into the future. We currently are working to address Maywood's concerns about tuition, however those concerns do not affect the district's agreements with South Hackensack and Rochelle Park.

Recognizing the impact on and the important role of our schools in the community, the BOE and administration also have met regularly with Hackensack City officials. Beginning in June 2018, we shared monthly updates about the facilities plans, including a detailed presentation to the Hackensack City Council on August 21, 2018, followed by a presentation to the Planning Board in October 2018. The District also has been working

with an Advisory Team comprised of educators, parents and community members of all ages, including those without students in our schools. This team is helping us with community outreach to communicate with and share factual information about the proposed referendum with as many residents/taxpayers as possible.

The BOE received approval from the NJ Department of Education on Wednesday, November 14, and we acted immediately to schedule the January 22, 2019 referendum to address the critical facilities needs and take advantage of state aid and accelerate community outreach. The BOE held six Town Hall-style information sessions in early December, some of which were even attended by members of the City Council. We have scheduled similar meetings with community organizations in the first half of January, with another Town Hall meeting scheduled for 7 PM on January 8, 2019, at the Logan Family Life Center at Mount Olive Baptist Church.

During these meetings, we present detailed information about why we are proposing a comprehensive plan to address the district's extensive facilities improvement and construction needs, rather than a phased-in, piecemeal approach. In fact, the negative results of a such an approach have been a concern expressed by attendees during public meetings. The Board of Education, with the input of educators, parents and community members, came to this decision to propose one question to Hackensack voters, to address all the district's needs in a fiscally responsible and efficient manner.

We share Mayor Labrosse's interest in ensuring that our community is informed about the referendum and have been diligent and proactive in our efforts to reach out to the community-at-large. We will continue our outreach and will work with the City Council to do what is best for our community.

The total cost of the referendum's proposed projects is \$169.9 million. With state aid, the tax impact based on the average assessed home value of \$245,431 would be an average of \$308.66 per year or less than \$1.00 per day. State aid would cover 24% of those costs,

but only if voters approve the referendum. This state funding would greatly reduce the impact on Hackensack taxpayers.

A referendum to finance facilities improvements and construction is one of the most critical decisions for any community, one that has an impact on the growth and vitality of not just the school district, but the entire community for generations to come. The appropriate time to request a postponement has passed. Postponing the referendum now, after Hackensack residents have already received their ballots and, in some cases, already cast their votes, would be problematic. For more information about the Building A Brighter Future referendum please visit: www.hpsreferendum.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemary Marks

Acting Superintendent of Schools