

Antioch District 34 takes next step toward funding \$25M in capital improvements



The portable classrooms outside three Antioch schools were removed this past June ahead of planned construction this spring, Superintendent Jay Marino said. (Antioch District 34 / News-Sun)

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Just a few weeks after removing the portable classrooms outside three Antioch schools, the Antioch District 34 school board took the next step toward funding the improvements their removal has made way for.

The school board took the first of three steps needed to issue an initial \$17 million in new debt, which was approved by voters in April, in a unanimous vote Tuesday, Superintendent Jay Marino said.

He said the district is grateful to the community for supporting the referendum, calling it the "next step in our improvement journey in Antioch."

The plan is to take out an additional debt next year to bring the total to \$18.8 million, according to board documents.

The borrowed money will supplement \$6.8 million in savings as the district seeks to complete an estimated \$25.6 million in repairs, renovations and upgrades across its buildings, according to interviews and district documents.

The vote Tuesday authorizes the district to notify the public that it intends to take out the debt and opens up a 30-day petition period, during which voters have the opportunity to collect 1,535 signatures and force the issue to go to the voters at the next election, according to board documents.

That rarely happens in these sort of situations, especially since voters approved a referendum in April that gave the school board the authority to take this step.

If no petition is submitted, a public hearing will be held next month, followed by a vote by the school board, or Aug. 14.

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Hurry, sale ends 7/31 **FREE TRIAL >** determine when the best time would be to sell the bonds so that the district can secure the lowest interest rate possible, Marino said.

The plan isn't to start construction until March when the winter season passes, he said. The work is expected to last two years.

Work on additions at both Oakland and W.C. Petty elementary schools will start immediately, Marino said. Each site will have a full-time construction manager on site so the work can happen concurrently.

The construction management firm hired by the district specializes in construction projects that take place during business hours, Marino said. They will use sound barriers and other strategies to minimize any noise that could disrupt classrooms.

The elimination of the portable classrooms will also mean that the schools will be "pretty jammed up for the next two years," Marino said. The portable classrooms were previously used for classes like art, music and a science and technology program called Project Lead the Way.

The programs won't be eliminated, but they might have to turn to mobile art classes or the use of the library for those classes, he said.

Oakland Elementary School will get a new gymnasium, since a cafeteria is currently providing dual use, as well as more classrooms and an air conditioning system, according to district documents. W.C. Petty Elementary School will have its library revamped and a new gymnasium and classrooms added.

The interior renovations at the schools, as well as additional renovations at Antioch and Hillcrest elementary schools, will have to be done during the summer because they impact spaces in which students are currently, Marino said.

Architects are in the process of putting together the actual schematic drawings needed to put the project out to bid, he said. The goal is to have those ready by December.

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