



2021 SSD Referendum FAQs

CARES and ESSER Funding

The district is receiving additional government funding, why are they not using this to help offset referendum costs? What is this extra money going towards?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided the district with subgrant opportunities through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) and Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) provisions. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act provided additional resources for Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER II). These funds are intended to support the district's response to the impacts of Covid-19. Deep cleaning and sanitization of facilities, PPE and hand sanitizer, Mifi, Chromebooks and online learning programs and mental health and wellness supports, to name a few, are expenses the district has incurred as a direct result of the pandemic.

The Special Services and Curriculum offices will be utilizing these funds to provide summer learning opportunities for our youngest students and those with the greatest need. We are also providing after school help for all ages of students. These students (after school and summer learning students) will have access to transportation.

The district's grant application indicated how the funds would be spent consistent with allowable uses and how their effectiveness would be determined.

These funds are intended to help districts maintain the operation of and continuity of services, not to purchase land or build schools and additions due to growth.

Land Acquisition

A local radio station reported that the property for the new school was donated by the developer, if this is true, why do you have a property cost assigned to the land?

This is not true, the developer is not donating the land to the district. The district must pay fair market value for the land as determined through the appraisal process. If the referendum passes, the local district share will be 23% of the total cost, as the state has approved paying 77%. We MUST purchase the land in order to build a new school.



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Why are we paying so much for the property? It's only 15 acres.

The district is required to pay fair market value when purchasing land. The property has been appraised by a state-approved vendor, and the appraisal has been submitted to the state. The state approved the appraisal. The parcel is within the county growth zone and is part of a municipal-approved development, so the price is dictated by those factors.

This is one of multiple parcels considered and the one approved by the state and the town in its strategic plan.

Why doesn't the district buy cheaper property out of town?

The district has attempted to find land outside of town. However, the state will not approve any parcel located outside of the growth zone, due to electricity, water and sewer availability. The cost to extend those utilities into the outer rings of the growth zone, if the parcel in Zone 4 were to be approved, is too costly to even consider. In short, the state does not approve undeveloped farmland outside of town as an option for a school.

District Budget/Staffing/Enrollment

Schools were shut down for several months and should have a lot of money saved in reduced operating costs, can't that money be used to offset referendum costs?

Actually, the district has continued to run all of its services, including meal preparation and delivery, deferred maintenance of the buildings and administration. Additionally, the buildings must still be maintained, and salaries are still paid for nearly 900 employees who have been working throughout the pandemic. While costs in some areas have decreased, the additional costs for curriculum, materials, supplies for enhanced, CDC-mandated sanitization, and technology have been extensive.



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Why doesn't the district use all of the money it receives from impact fees to build the new schools and support operating costs?

The district is appreciative of the impact fees assessed by Kent County and the Towns of Clayton and Smyrna. These fees help reduce the amount of taxes that would otherwise be collected from residents for new construction and renovations. These fees are built into our annual tax rate and significantly reduce the amount of taxes that would otherwise need to be collected. This year over \$447,000 did not need to be raised through taxes thanks to impact fees.

Why doesn't the district force the developers to pay more money when they build new developments?

The district has no such control. This is a local and state government issue. The developments being built currently have been approved by the state, county and town for approximately 10 years. The land has been untouched in some cases. In others, development has slowed to a point and picked up recently with the decrease in interest rates.

The district allows students from outside our community to "choice" to Smyrna. Why do Smyrna taxpayers have to fund the education of other students?

When a student from another district "Choices" into Smyrna, the state support for that student follows them. We receive funding for students through the annual September 30th count. Funding is provided by the state for students enrolled and attending our schools whether they are Choice students or reside in the district. In addition, the resident district provides Smyrna with a payment for the local cost of providing educational services.

The State of Delaware legally mandates that each public school district and charter enroll Choice students into each school unless that school has reached 85% capacity. Each year, we reevaluate which schools meet or are below the threshold. We then hold a Choice informational meeting and begin to accept new students based on multiple criteria met. Currently, only our secondary schools are open for new students.



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Our elementary schools are too full to open to new students through Choice. The immersion program “opens” North to Choice strictly for enrollment in that program.

Why do we need a new school or additions when our students are not currently in our buildings?

Currently, our schools are serving 65-70% of our students in hybrid instruction. We actually cannot combine our hybrid “One” and “Two” groups and maintain social distancing requirements because our in-person percentage is so high.

Though frustrations are rising, we ask that you please remember that there was life before, and there will be life after the COVID 19 pandemic. All that we have done that is best for kids in our long history will resume. We will be better than ever for the adversity we have endured.

Our hope is that we will approach “normalcy” in as much as the DPH restrictions allow in the coming months and school year. This pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. Our business is “kids”... all of them... in our classrooms... everyday ... with each other... healthy and happy. We will not settle for anything less.

Why now?

Why is the school district asking for more of my tax dollars now? We are in a pandemic and the timing is not good. We just voted for a referendum for North Elementary, why didn’t the district ask for this as a part of that referendum?

The district began its study of all buildings and facilities during the 2017-18 school year. The district submitted its first Certificate of Necessity (CN) request in August 2018, and it included the current growth plan, identifying the need to purchase land, building a new school, renovating two existing schools, and addressing repairs throughout the district. The state did not approve the CN due to fiscal constraints. The district updated its CN during the 2018-19 school year and submitted it a second time in August 2019. The state again did not approve the CN with the exception of a small roofing and mechanical project at North Smyrna Elementary School. Our district



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went to referendum in February 2020 to fund this project, and our community approved it, for which we are thankful.

The district again updated its CN during the 2019-20 school year and submitted it a third time in October 2020, as the deadline had been extended due to the pandemic. The state approved the major capital projects outlined in our presentation—a 15-acre parcel, a new school, and renovations/additions to CIS and NSE. The next step in the process is to present the referendum for community consideration.

The formula for these major capital projects is 77% funded by the state, so our local share is 23%. Given the likelihood of inflation and rising costs due to the pandemic, the overall cost of these projects is expected to rise, maybe dramatically, if we do not pass this referendum. The state funding cycle begins July 1, so deferring the referendum will delay starting the projects for another year, leading to increased costs.

How will voting yes make education better for the students in Smyrna?

The district's enrollment continues to rise, and classroom space is nearly exhausted. The referendum would allow the district to build a new school and create a second middle school in Clayton. Each middle school would be configured for grades 6, 7 and 8, thus doubling the number of activities and athletics for our middle school students, as well as creating those opportunities for 6th graders.

Providing the necessary funds to purchase 1-to-1 technology devices for students three different times during their Smyrna School District experience in grades 1, 5 and 9 would present innumerable educational advantages to every student.

Conversely, without the referendum the district may have to purchase portable classroom units for multiple schools and fund them 100% through local dollars at the cost of over \$80,000 per unit. Since portable classroom units are temporary installations, the expense associated with them would present no educational benefit to our students in the long run.

\$90,000,000+...why is this so high? How will the taxpayers in our community come up with all of this money?

The good news is that the local portion is 23% of that total and is just under \$21 million. The other 77% or nearly \$70 million would be funded by the state. For a



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relatively small local investment, the community can prepare for the certain enrollment growth just ahead. Without its passage, the district would be left with no way to effectively and proactively prepare for certain enrollment growth.

I can't vote yes unless I see how all of the money is being allocated.

Please see our materials available on our website for a more detailed explanation of costs.

Referendum Brochure:

<https://www.smyrna.k12.de.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=1987&dataid=4758&FileName=Referendum%20Brochure.pdf>

Why does the district continue to hire high paid administrators? If they didn't hire more administrators, they could afford the capital projects.

The number of administrators allotted to a district is formulated by the state based on the enrollment of the district and each school. We have "cashed in" 2 to 3 administrative positions to meet budget cuts from the state for many years, including this most recent year. The district is very conservative in its approach and does not hire new administrators or even create new administrative positions just because we earn them.

Unfortunately, as teachers can wholeheartedly confirm, the district is never relieved of any task, report, or responsibility, especially as we continue to grow. Quite the opposite. We continue to accept the need for additional programming and expectations which require leadership and supervision.

Our administrative salaries are "mid-range" when compared to the State of Delaware and other districts, both county- and state-wide. This approach allows us to retain our best leaders, while also recruiting exceptional new ones when the occasion arises.

Allocations of administrative units can be found in Delaware Code Title 14 and is reported to the district through the Needs-Based Position Entitlement Report at the close of the annual September 30th count. The state portion of salaries is provided in the same manner it is provided for teaching units.



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Will cutting spending raise enough money to pay for growth and operations?

Similar to most homeowners who take a mortgage that is repaid over time to purchase a home, the district must sell bonds that are repaid over 20 years to finance its construction costs. By spreading these expenses over twenty years, the district can maintain the staffing and other key services required by our students and community.

The district is always exploring ways to cut costs and improve efficiencies including energy efficiency projects and performing routine preventative maintenance to extend the life of our schools and equipment.

What has the district done to try to make the current capacity work in light of the growth in the community?

Sunnyside Elementary has been overcrowded for years. In 2017, we had to relocate two large developments to Clayton Elementary. The enrollment at Sunnyside dropped approximately 60 students as more students transferred to Clayton, while other students moved into the Sunnyside zone to take their place. Sunnyside's student population has increased yearly since then, already meeting and soon surpassing previous enrollment totals.

North Smyrna Elementary continues to be overcrowded. We moved the 4th grade from North (and Smyrna Elementary) in 2019 to make room for more pre-kindergarten classrooms, specialists for therapies and growth in the K-3 population. In just two years, North has already utilized those classrooms vacated by the 4th grade.

Related Arts teachers are mobile in some elementary schools. More will be mobile as we bring back more students post-pandemic.

Our 1st to 3rd grade Comprehensive Learning Program classrooms moved from North Elementary to Smyrna Elementary in 2020.

North Elementary continues to make use of all available space, including the libraries, the stages and even partitions in classrooms in order to support student needs.



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Are my property taxes going to increase again once the reassessment occurs? What part did the district have in the push to reassess?

<https://www.delawarepublic.org/post/kent-county-perform-full-property-tax-reassessment-part-legal-settlement>

The reassessment is part of the settlement between the ACLU and the State of Delaware to address the unconstitutional nature of the assessment process which determines school funding that last occurred in Kent County in 1987. The last reassessment in New Castle County occurred in 1983. The Smyrna School District is a party of the State of Delaware. We played no role in the decision of the Chancery Court nor did we “sign on” as a plaintiff. When the reassessment occurs, the district will be required to adjust the tax rate so that there is no change in the total amount of revenue collected.

Where can I find more information about the tax implications and specific projects?

Referendum Brochure:

<https://www.smyrna.k12.de.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=1987&dataid=4758&FileName=Referendum%20Brochure.pdf>

Notice of Special Election:

https://www.smyrna.k12.de.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=1987&dataid=4756&FileName=NOSE_March_23_2021_Final.pdf