



**School District OR-1**

**Palmyra/Bennet**

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District OR-1 Public Schools  
September, 2015

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*Together, we prepare our students to successfully meet  
the challenges of the future.*

# DISTRICT OR-1: 2015 SCHOOL BOND PROPOSAL

## What is happening?

On July 13, 2015 the Board of Education approved a resolution to place two construction bond issues on the ballot. The election is scheduled for November 10, 2015 and will be conducted by mail-in ballot.

Between now and November 10<sup>th</sup>, the District will provide two opportunities for residents to learn about the District's needs and proposed projects. The public is encouraged to visit the District website at [www.districtor1.org](http://www.districtor1.org) for up-to-date information, and to contact Superintendent Rob Hanger and members of the board with any questions. **Please Join us for Community meetings and school tours on September 28<sup>th</sup> at Bennet Elementary and October 5<sup>th</sup> at Palmyra Junior-Senior High School.** At both meetings tours begin at 6:00 p.m. followed at 6:45 by an informational summary in the gym.

## Superintendent and Board Members' Contact Information:

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## What is a bond election and how does it work?

A bond election is a vote of District OR-1 registered voters to decide whether to approve the issuance of bonds to raise funds for specific construction and facility projects. If voters approve their issuance, the District will sell bonds to the purchaser that charges the lowest interest rate and will use the funds for the purposes that the voters approved in the election. The Board will repay the bond debt over a period of 20 years with taxes raised through the bond levy on District property.

## How may bond proceeds be used?

The proceeds from the sale of bonds are limited to paying for the facility projects that are described on the ballot. Bond funds **may not** be used for operating expenses such as salaries, benefits, utilities, or other supplies.

## What will the District OR-1 bond issues include?

The proposed bond issue will include two separate questions on separate ballots. Voters will be asked whether to authorize the board to:

- 1) **Build an addition to and renovation of Bennet Elementary School and an addition to and renovation of Palmyra Junior-Senior High School**
- 2) **Build a new football field and track to be built north of the Palmyra City Park on land currently owned by District OR-1**

## What do the school building projects include?

Building plans for the facility expansions and modifications are listed below. They **have not changed** significantly since the 2014 bond election. The plans call for the school district to do the following:

### **BENNET**

#### **ACADEMIC**

- Maintain the Pre-Kindergarten-6<sup>th</sup> grade school in Bennet.
- Move pre-school instruction into the elementary school to improve the students' safety and security.
- Establish a separate entrance for Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students for drop-off and pick-up.
- Add 7 classrooms to provide flexibility for larger classes and an enrollment increase of 48 students over the past 8 years.
- Upgrade classrooms to be in compliance with current Americans with Disabilities Act and Life Safety Code requirements.
- Add a new Life Skills classroom.

#### **ARTS**

- Add a new music room that is 50% larger than the current music space.

#### **COMMON/COMMUNITY**

- Add a secure visitor entrance directly into the office for access and check-in to the remainder of the building.
- Expand the Commons/Dining Area and increase capacity. This will allow students to have more time to eat lunch and will provide additional space for events.
- Add fire sprinklers and cosmetic upgrades (ceilings, paint, carpet) to the existing school.
- Build up to 2,000 square feet of hardened rooms and spaces to improve safety during storms.

## PALMYRA

### ACADEMIC

- Demolish the 1935 wing due to the cost of renovating it.
- Create a new Computer Lab and new Career Center classrooms for Agriculture, Family Consumer Science and Instructional Technology.
- Consolidate the space for Life Skills and Special Education instruction into the same building wing.
- Consolidate the location of academic and career classrooms into the same building wings.

### ARTS

- Build a new stage, backstage and wings for drama, music and convocations.
- Build a new gym to provide increased capacity for music and theatre performances and for graduation ceremonies.

### COMMON/COMMUNITY

- Add a secure visitor entrance near the office.
- Expand the commons/dining area to increase capacity. This will allow students to have more time to eat lunch and will provide additional space for events.
- Add up to 4,000 square feet of hardened rooms and spaces to improve safety during storms.
- Add 1,000 square feet of office area for Guidance, Clerical staff, Superintendent or Principal and a Conference Room for faculty, Student, Community and School Board use with a secured entrance on the west side of the building.

### ATHLETICS

- Increase the space for PE classes and team practices in the new gym to eliminate the need for practices that begin as early as 6 a.m. and run as late as 10 p.m.
- Increase student safety by eliminating on-street bus drop-off.

### **What does the track and field project include?**

Plans for the new track and field facility **have not changed** since the 2014 bond issue. A new 400-meter track and football field north of the city park would replace the gravel track on the west side of the school and provide upgraded field and site amenities. The land north of the city park was purchased in 2014 for this potential use.

## **New Track & Football Field**

With only three lanes, Palmyra's track cannot be used for competition with other school districts. Students must practice on gravel or be driven to another school's track. The football field has drainage problems and gets worn down by frequent use. The new site would provide competition-level facilities and the existing football field would be used for practices, PE, and band. Building a new track at the present site would require closing streets, the purchase of property, and extensive earthwork to address slope issues.

### **What will the proposed projects accomplish?**

#### **1) Address existing facility challenges (codes, maintenance, etc.)**

Facility challenges include bringing the buildings into fuller compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, meeting fire and life/safety codes, including fire sprinkler systems, and addressing deferred maintenance issues. At Palmyra Junior-Senior High School, the 80-year-old 1935 wing will be demolished and replaced with a classroom addition and second gym with a performance stage.

#### **2) Address school programming and space challenges**

Construct a competition gym with top loading bleachers, with capacity to seat 900. Build a new stage, backstage and wings for drama, music and convocations. Construct career classrooms for IT, Agriculture, Computer and Family Consumer Science classes. Organize the building into wings for academic courses, career courses and performing arts.

#### **3) Address existing and future enrollment increases**

Enrollment growth has impacted space needs at Bennet Elementary with an increase of 48 students or 20% over the past 8 years. This has the potential to impact space needs at Palmyra Junior-Senior High within the next few years.

The Bennet Community has experienced significant growth in its population. From 2006 to 2014, approximately 91 new home construction permits were issued. There are additional subdivisions in development. The Village of Bennet population estimate in 2013: 814 resulting in a Population change since 2000: +42.8%.

<http://www.city-data.com> and the Village of Bennet.

## **The District's Mission Statement and Vision.**

The Board's Mission Statement and Vision have guided the Board in making decisions about building projects and the District's future. They are:

**Mission Statement:** Together, we prepare our students to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

**Vision Statement:** District OR-1 commits to a course of action providing continued academic growth through a curriculum that recognizes limitless potential and inspires faith in a positive future for every student. With a sense of community ownership and responsibility, we will remain fiscally accountable and attentive to current and future high-tech facility and staffing needs.

## **What process did the Board go through in early 2015?**

In the spring of 2015, the District hired Dr. Larry Dlugosh as a consultant to evaluate the District's planning efforts and make recommendations for ongoing planning. Dr. Dlugosh is a long-time Nebraska superintendent and college professor. He surveyed 5<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students to help develop short-term and long-term strategies. His recommendations centered on the District's Mission and Vision, data-gathering and dissemination, the need for adequate facilities, proactive planning and timely implementation of the plans. His findings and recommendations included the following:

Students and learning are the district's mission, so it is essential to commit to the success of current and future students. Changes in education are coming fast, and the board must plan ahead and be prepared to meet changes before they arrive. Pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade education is a competitive field and the board must be able to plan and act at the same time. Continually communicate the district's vision and mission. Everyone needs to be at the table, but decisions must be made immediately and those decisions drive the future. Continue to make accommodations for additional educational space. Monitor the impact of early childhood education on student numbers and building space and monitor the effect of Lincoln's expansion and influence on Bennet, Palmyra and your schools. When new residents arrive, listen to and monitor their requests. Continue to deliver on your mission and vision so their children will want to attend OR-1 schools.

## **What if we focus only on Bennet, where enrollment is growing?**

The board has a goal of retaining all students through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Grade 7-12 facilities will need to be able to accommodate the children when they move from the Elementary School in Bennet to the Junior-Senior High School in Palmyra.

Some in the community have suggested that District OR-1 should become an elementary-only district. However, such districts no longer exist in Nebraska. Every district must provide K-12 education.

Others have suggested that students can easily option to another school district if they want a better learning environment. However, this is not necessarily the case because

our neighboring districts can refuse to take Palmyra students, particularly as their schools reach capacity.

### **Did the board consider alternatives to reduce the cost or size of the project?**

The Board considered many alternatives with the goal of finding the most cost-effective solution to meeting the District's needs. In assessing alternatives and priorities, Board members focused on alternatives that help the District: 1) meet its enrollment projections, 2) enhance or expand program and academic offerings; 3) improve student safety and security; 4) promote student recruitment and retention by achieving greater parity with other schools; and 5) offer cost-effective solutions.

### **Couldn't we simply improve the existing football field and add a track?**

The District evaluated several options for expanding and improving the existing football field to accommodate a competition track. One alternative involved expanding/relocating the existing football field to the west and adding a track around it. This option involved buying several properties, vacating streets, relocating utilities and completing extensive earthwork on the west side of the property. The costs and feasibility of developing the west field were compared with the costs and feasibility of developing the 15.5-acre site north of the Palmyra city park that the District owns. This analysis determined that the west field alternative would cost \$170,000 more than the north site, excluding site acquisition.

	North Field	West Field
Construction	\$1.55 Million	\$1.72 Million
Property Acquisition	\$100,000	Unknown

### **Comparing a multi-purpose room to a gym.**

Some people have suggested building a multipurpose room at Bennet Elementary or Palmyra Junior-Senior High School, instead of a new gym. This option does not address the academic, performance, programming, and scheduling needs associated with having only one gym. The existing gym is heavily scheduled all day. To meet demand, some students begin practices at 6 a.m. while other practices do not end until 10 p.m. Some activities such as wrestling must be held at Bennet Elementary because there is not sufficient practice space at the high school. This intense scheduling creates barriers to student participation and challenges for families who must transport students between towns early in the morning and/or late at night. A second gym at the high school would allow more students to participate in activities including performing arts simultaneously and would reduce stress on families and on students' study time.

The new gym would be designed for joint use by the athletics and performing arts departments. With a stage, back stage area, and green room/music room, it would be suitable and District events such as athletic tournaments, speech contests, and one-act competitions and for hosting community activities.

Telescoping bleachers in a gym can expand or contract to increase spectator seating from about 650 seats to about 900 seats. Though building a full gym with telescoping bleacher seats would cost about \$408,000 more than a multipurpose room with floor seating, it would provide greater program flexibility and use than a multipurpose room. For example, the gym would allow for two cross-courts for practice instead of the single court that a multi-purpose room would offer plus the added advantage of a full stage and green room allowing for performing arts practices and the opportunity to host contests for music and dramatic arts.

### **Why a bond issue rather than alternative funding sources to pay for capital improvements?**

General Obligation (G.O.) Bonds are the primary method of funding capital construction in Nebraska school districts. They allow districts to generate funds for substantial building projects with a payback period of up to 20 years at a rate that is typically lower than other funding sources. Funding sources such as qualified Capital Purpose Fund (QCPUF), Special Building Fund, Qualified Zone Academy Bonds, Technology Bonds, Lease Purchase and Promissory Notes are generally limited to a repayment period of two to seven years and are typically issued at a higher bond rate than G.O. bonds. They are also generally limited to specific expenditures (e.g. environmental hazard abatement, code violations, technology, equipment, etc.), and are limited within the current levy.

### **How much will this construction cost?**

There will be two separate ballot questions. The ballot question for the school building project would cost \$11,385,000 (\$3,550,000 for the Bennet Elementary School renovation/addition and \$7,835,000 for the Palmyra Junior/Senior High School renovation/addition). The ballot question for the new track/Football Field north of the Palmyra City Park would cost \$1,565,000. If the voters approve both projects, they will total \$12,950,000

### **What effect will the bond issue have on the taxpayer?**

Only the current levy for the 1998 bond issue will apply in 2016. It is roughly 6.4 cents so the owner of a \$100,000 home currently pays about \$64 per year toward this existing bond issue. The district has two more payments to make before this bond issue is fully paid – one payment in December, 2015, and the final payment in December, 2016.

If voters approve both bond initiatives of the new issue, the District will start the levy for the new project in 2017 after the 1998 bond issue is paid off. The new bond levy is estimated to be 17.8 cents per \$100 of taxable valuation. That would amount to about \$178 on a \$100,000 home, a net increase of \$114 over what you are currently paying (\$9.50 a month).

For example, for a \$100,000 taxable valuation  $\times .00178 = \$178.00$  year

Increase over current:  $\$100,000$  taxable valuation  $\times .00114 = \$114$  year/ $12 = \$9.50$  monthly.



### Is this a good time to bid the project?

Interest rates are currently low and the construction climate is favorable. For a bond issue passed in November, the design team would complete documents by spring for contractor bidding, which is typically a good time for bidding school construction projects.

Construction would begin in spring 2016. Bennet improvements could be ready for the 2017 school year. Palmyra improvements could be phased in with some work completed in 2017 and the rest completed in 2018. Construction is estimated at 14-16 months for Bennet, and 24-26 months for Palmyra. The final schedule will be developed by the selected contractor, but it is possible that construction could go on simultaneously at both schools. Builders can use the summer break to complete the more disruptive activities.

### How does our 2014 levy compare with other Districts?

	District OR-1	Lincoln Public Schools	Norris Public Schools	Waverly Public Schools	Adams- Freeman Public Schools	Syracuse- Dunbar- Avoca Public Schools
Levy Amount	\$1.0883	\$1.2438	\$1.1728	\$1.2021	\$1.1063	\$1.0471

### If the bond issue does not pass, what will the District do?

If the bond election does not pass, District OR-1 will have to make short-term improvements from the general and special building fund budgets. This would reduce the amount of revenue available to fund the day-to-day operations. In the interim, the cost of construction typically rises and deferred maintenance projects would likely be delayed. If enrollment rises, classroom space would diminish and it might be necessary to purchase portable classrooms with money from the District's General Fund.

### What is involved with a mail ballot election?

A mail ballot election will be necessary because there will not be a general election this fall. All registered voters in the District will receive their ballots in the mail on or around October 21, 2015. They must mail or deliver the completed ballots to the Lancaster County Election Commissioner by 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 10, 2015. Ballots must be returned in the signed and sealed Identification Envelope with \$0.49 postage attached if mailed.

If you do not know whether you are registered to vote, contact the election office for your county:

**Otoe County Clerk's Office**

1021 Central Avenue, Nebraska City, Nebraska 68410  
402-873-9505

[www.co.otoe.ne.us/webpages/election/election.html](http://www.co.otoe.ne.us/webpages/election/election.html)

**Lancaster County Election Commissioner**

601 North 46th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska 68503  
402-441-7311

[www.lancaster.ne.gov/election](http://www.lancaster.ne.gov/election)



Be sure to vote whether you support or oppose the bond issue. Community meetings and school tours are scheduled for September 28<sup>th</sup> at Bennet Elementary School, and October 5<sup>th</sup> at Palmyra Junior-Senior High School. If those dates do not fit your schedule, contact Superintendent Hanger at (402) 780-5327 or [hanger.rob@districtor1.net](mailto:hanger.rob@districtor1.net) to schedule a time that works better for you. The school buildings belong to the public, and are available for inspection and meetings by supporters and opponents of the bond issue. Contact Superintendent Hanger to arrange an inspection or meeting for your group.

## How to Vote in the Special Bond Issue Election

Watch the mail for your ballot on or about October 21, 2015.

### How to Vote the Ballot:

- Use a black or blue ink pen to mark your ballot. No pencils or markers, please.
- You must blacken the oval completely.
- If you make a mistake in marking your ballot, do not cross out or erase the error. Write "**VOID**" across the face of the ballot and call the Election Commissioner in your county for instructions.

### How to Return the Voted Ballot:

- 1) Place the voted ballot in the Identification Envelope and seal. Do **NOT** place more than one ballot in the envelope.
- 2) Sign the Identification Envelope and Voter's Oath where indicated and provide your street address on the Residence Address line.
- 3) If you are returning your ballot by mail, place postage of \$0.49 on the envelope.

- 4) Mail or hand deliver your ballot to the Lancaster County Election Commissioner, 601 N 46<sup>th</sup> St., Lincoln. For the convenience of voters, a ballot drop box is available 24 hours a day and is located in front of the Lancaster County Election Commissioner's Office.

**All ballots must be in the possession of the Lancaster County Election Commissioner no later than 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, November 10, 2015. Failure to complete and sign the Identification Envelope and/or Voter's Oath may result in your ballot NOT being counted.**

**If you have questions about voting,  
contact the Lancaster County Election Commissioner, (402) 441-7311**

**Key Voting Dates**

- October 20** Mail official ballot to all registered voters
- October 23** Deadline for voters to complete voter registration/postmark of mail in voter registrations.
- October 30** Last day for in-person voter registration
- November 4** Last day a replacement ballot can be sent to voter
- November 10** Deadline for Lancaster County Election Commissioner to receive **ALL** ballots in the office (5 p.m.) including early vote ballots

