

Bond Election Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the BEST program?

Building Excellent Schools Today legislation was passed in the spring of 2007 for the purpose of assisting school districts with low property values in upgrading facilities to a minimum standard of safety and functionality. Without this BEST funding low property value school districts, like Center, would never be able to build more modern school facilities like what is currently being proposed.

2. Where does BEST Money come from?

BEST funding comes from a portion of the proceeds (50%) of rent and royalty income that is collected by the State of Colorado on state lands. In addition, a portion of lottery proceeds are allocated to the BEST program.

3. How long will the BEST Program remain in effect?

It is estimated that Colorado will invest 760 million dollars in BEST Program grants and local matching funding over a period of approximately 5 years. Center's project was approved in the 3rd funding cycle and already nearly 60% of all funding has been allocated. This may be Center's last chance to participate in the program.

4. How did the district arrive at the decision to build a new PK-12 School?

Center Schools began a "Facilities Master Planning" process in September 2009. The district hired The Neenan Company to oversee this process. Three community engagement meetings were conducted whereby participants were able to express their opinions about their desires and the various options for upgrading our facilities through the BEST process. When the Master Plan was completed several things became clear to the Board of Education regarding possible facility upgrades. First, it was greatly desired to have the school remain on its current site. Second, to improve safety, operational efficiency and control of access it was desired to combine all 3 schools into one building. Finally, after much community input and after looking at the various possibilities of keeping the structure of the current Haskin Elementary School intact, it was decided that the best value for the dollar would be to build an entirely new school.

5. How much will the proposed new school cost?

The total cost presented in the Center Schools BEST Grant proposal was just over \$31 million dollars. To receive the 26.7 million dollar BEST Grant it will be necessary for district residents to "match" about \$4.7 million of this cost (or only about 15%). This is even less than the BEST determined match amount because our district property tax base is very low. Center offered as a match all that it could under Colorado's debt limit law, 20% of assessed value. At 26.7 million dollars, the State of Colorado will be providing 85% of the approved BEST project funding costs.

6. What would it cost to simply renovate our current facilities or to turn Haskin into a PK-12 building?

The total cost for completely renovating our current facilities where they stand came in at approximately 27 million dollars. First estimates at converting the Haskin building into a PK-12 facility came in at 34 million dollars, 4 million more than a new school. After further inspection, however, it was determined that it could cost as much as an additional 14 million dollars to simply bring the Haskin building up to seismic code.

7. Will we keep any of the buildings we already have?

The plan that the Board of Education intends to follow includes keeping the Auditorium/Administration Office, the Bus Garage, the newest High School Wing (for use as the future Alternative School site) and the Wrestling Room/Pee Wee Sports Facility that was built as a result of many community contributions.

8. How disruptive will the construction process be to the education process?

The Master Plan shows it is possible to build and open the new school prior to vacating the old ones. There will be minimal disruption of access to gymnasium space, but this will occur at times of year where gymnasiums are less in use.

9. Why is it so important to do this now? Are our current buildings no longer safe?

During the 2010 BEST application process, Center Schools ranked in the top 5 of the state as to need for new facilities. The district has invested more than 3 million dollars in facilities upgrades during the past 5 years through the State of Colorado Capital Construction Grant process and it still ranks as one of the districts most in need of upgraded facilities. In addition, there is only a limited amount of BEST funding available for projects like the one Center has had approved. This could be a once-in-a-lifetime funding opportunity to provide much needed school improvements in Center Schools. With our low property tax base, we could never do what we really need to do to provide both today's and tomorrow's students with the safe and modern facilities they deserve. Already in the San Luis Valley, Sargent, Alamosa, Monte Vista and Sangre De Cristo schools are building new facilities with BEST funding.

10. How much will this cost me as a taxpayer if I own a house in the district?

A good rule of thumb is that local property taxes will increase \$1.20 per \$1,000 dollars of your home's market value per year. If your house is determined by the county to be worth \$50,000, your increase in taxes will be \$60 per year. In monthly terms, that's only \$5 per month.

11. How much will this cost me if I own farm or agricultural land?

Saguache County agricultural land taxes will increase 81 cents an acre per year for flood irrigation land and 77 cents an acre per year for sprinkler irrigated land.

Rio Grande County agricultural land taxes will increase \$1.20 an acre per year for flood irrigation land and \$1.36 an acre per year for sprinkler irrigated land.

Alamosa County agricultural land taxes will increase 97 cents an acre per year for flood irrigation land and 92 cents an acre per year for sprinkler irrigated land.

Note: Acreage not under actual irrigation receives the classification of “grazing” with an assessed value of only about \$7 per acre. The tax increase on this type of land value is only 11 cents per acre.

12. How long will it take to pay the bond off?

The term of the bond will run 20 years. This is a requirement of the BEST process.

13. How long is the new facility designed to last?

The general rule of thumb is that school facilities are designed to have a life of 30 years. The current ages of our facilities in Center are 92 years for Haskin Elementary, 62 years for Center High School and 50 years for Skoglund Middle School. Building a school now would guarantee excellent educational facilities for two generations of current and future students.

14. Will the library remain open to the public?

Center Schools currently houses the Saguache County public library. A centerpiece of the new facility design includes an expanded school/public library that will allow greater space and easier access to the collections and facilities. The library will remain open to the public as long as Saguache County wishes to continue its relationship with the district, and the intent of the new building design is to greatly improve the facilities for public use by including a children’s collection area, “public only” space, and public restrooms.

15. Who gets to vote in the election?

All persons who reside in the Center School District, whether in Saguache, Rio Grande or Alamosa counties, and are legally registered to vote by Monday October 4 (the last day to register) will have the opportunity to decide this issue. You can vote by absentee ballot (permanent absentee ballot voters will have ballots sent to them on/after October 12) or at your local polling place on November 2.

16. What happens if the Bond issue fails?

The grant award reverts back to the State of Colorado to be distributed to another school district that is willing to meet its BEST match requirement. The first district in line to receive this money if we fail to pass our election is Akron, which has already been selected by the BEST Board as an alternate project should any project ahead of them fail to provide their match this November. The citizens of Akron are going forward with an election to provide their match this November, too, in case funding becomes available to them.