

DISD Bond Election set for May 10

The \$56 million proposal calls for the construction of a side-by-side elementary school and middle school to be built as an “education village” similar to CCISD’s Clear Falls campus.

The new campus will be constructed on a district-owned site of 40 acres just west of Calder Road. The proposal for this bond issue came from a 50-member local Task Force Committee representing a balanced mix of the DISD community and stakeholders who were tasked to solve the problem of increased and increasing enrollment.

"Dickinson ISD has seen a tremendous growth of nearly 4,000 students over the past decade, increasing from 6,000 students in 2003 to 9,900 this school year," said Superintendent Vicki Mims. "Projections are that we will easily surpass 10,000 students at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year."

The projections are supported by a demographic study the district recently completed by a professional demographer. The study indicates that the growth in the elementary schools will increase by nearly 400 students before 2016 when the proposed schools would open if the bond is approved. Without the new elementary school, this would put four of the district’s six elementary campuses above capacity. Between now and 2016, middle school enrollment is projected to grow by almost 100 students. The district’s two current middle school campus are already over capacity at this time.

This would be the seventh elementary campus and third middle school campus in Dickinson ISD.

The cost of the bond issue is projected to add no more than 3.3 cents per \$100 home valuation, which in the case of a \$100,000 home would cost \$33 per year or \$2.75 per month. However, based on rising home values and increased commercial and residential growth in the area, it is projected that this number could be significantly lower when the bonds are sold.

Vote May 27 as if your Life Depended on it

adapted from an article in the Ft. Worth *Star-Telegram*, 3-3-14

The question is not how many people voted March 4. It’s how few. In the last five gubernatorial primaries, 3 to 6% of Texas voters chose our state’s leaders. Two years ago, Ted Cruz went to the U.S. Senate after winning a primary runoff with votes from 1 out of 20 Texans.

Taking over Texas is that easy.

If nobody else shows up to vote in the telling Republican primaries and runoffs, the most driven 600,000 or so voters get their way....

Sure, Texas Democrats always talk a good game. But “**the reality is that in Texas the primary is the de facto election,**” Southern Methodist University political science professor Matthew Wilson wrote by email.

The stakes are high. But voter interest is low. Primary voters tend to be more ideologically extreme than Texans as a whole, Wilson wrote, which is how guns, gays and immigration become fodder for even down-ballot campaigns.

But there’s another reason the most extreme Texans hold all the power. The rest of us get distracted and don’t vote in the primary, or we’re disenchanted with the campaigns. Or out-and-out disgusted.

Texas’ best recent primary turnout was in 1978, when Democrat John Hill upset Gov. Dolph Briscoe. But Hill lost on Election Day to the late Dallas Republican Bill Clements.

Since then, Democrats have lost numbers, and some independent voters have lost the connection. Most Texans see politics “as a game dominated by the lobby and wealthy donors,” SMU political science professor Cal Jillson wrote by email.

“The average voter, looking at a long list of five- and six-figure contributions to a Texas governor’s race, knows intuitively that the Texas political system is not built to respond to them,” he wrote.

The results are a government dominated by the most extreme or most obsessive and the worst voter turnout of any state. You read that right. We’re No. 51.

Early voting for the CCISD board and the DISD bond election will be April 28 to May 6. Early voting for the May Primary will be May 19 to 23.

Legislative 129: You Must Choose!

Throughout primary season both **Sheryl Berg** and **Dennis Paul** visited at our CCART meetings and produced very positive answers in response to three crucial questions:

1. Do you support a defined benefit plan for all current and future TRS retirees?
2. Do you support providing reasonable, affordable healthcare for TRS retirees?
3. What will you do as my legislator to ensure that the TRS pension fund and TRS-Care health insurance program are preserved and improved?

Now these two candidates face a showdown in a second Republican primary on May 27. Below are both candidates' responses:

Dennis Paul responded:

I promise that I will support the current defined benefit plan for all current personnel in the TRS system. This is not negotiable! I am supportive of SB 1458 that was passed in the last legislative session. As far as going forward in the future we are open to working with TRTA and the TRS in developing a workable plan that will meet TRTA's and any future TRTA member's needs.

At that point, TRTA would have a solid foundation for which it could demand that the legislature maintain this program in perpetuity. I favor a health plan that meets the needs of our public servants. It is difficult to say where Health Care will end up in today's environment. I would support a plan that would be equitable to both the membership of the ERS and TRS systems.

As stated earlier, I will be supportive of working to maintain the plan for all current TRS members. As your representative I would want to work with you and your group to come up with solutions to all of the issues concerning your membership.

.... The TRS Care program is at a critical state....

I need you and the TRTA to work with me in identifying what solutions will work for your members....

Sheryl Berg responded:

I stand proudly with the members of CCART in the goals relating to pensions and affordable healthcare. I fully support the defined-benefit plan as the soundest and most reliable way to provide member pensions. I understand that the longevity of pooled investments protects

individual enrollees from market volatility. I also support reasonable and affordable healthcare -- TRS Care -- for all TRS retirees. This will be possible only if future Legislatures make its long-term viability a priority. I supported passage of Senate Bill 1458 from the most recent Legislative Session as it established new sources of revenue and increased contributions to the pension fund, all the while reaching actuarial soundness--hence the name, "TRS Actuarial Soundness Bill". I understand that the TRS data points out actuarial soundness will be reached if the state's contribution to the pension trust fund is 8.62%. Future legislatures need to address increasing the state's contribution to achieve sound funding, and as a candidate I commit myself to working toward this goal.

For more information go to:

Sheryl Berg . . . [sherylbergfortexas.com]

Dennis Paul . . . [dennispaul.com]

Republicans Babin & Streusand in CD36 May 27 Combat

For CCART Republicans who live south of Ellington, east of Highway 3 with the exception of a narrow strip from Bay Area Boulevard to Pineloch east to Diana, you are part of Congressional District 36. You must choose between:

Brian Babin – a dentist and Woodville mayor,
Website: babinforcongress.com

Ben Streusand – investment banker, chair of
Americans for Prosperity,
Website: benstreusand.com.

Streusand may have the advantage. According to *opensecrets.org* Streusand spent \$560,650 and Babin spent only \$208,506 for the March primary.

Three November Races Set

For the Bacliff/Texas City area [legislative Dist. 23] it's Republican **Wayne Faircloth** [votefaircloth.com] vs. Democrat **Susan Criss** [votesusanocriss.com].

For Congressional District 14 (Galveston, Brazoria & Jefferson counties) it's incumbent **Randy Weber** [randyweber.org] vs. **Donald G. Brown** - a Vidor mortgage broker [donbrown4tx14.org].

Greg Bonnen [legislative Dist. 24] is unopposed in both primary and general elections this year.

TRTA Launches Initiative Reaching Out to Active School Personnel

Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 3-12-14

The Texas Retired Teachers Association (TRTA) has been working on a website that would create a community for both active and retired school personnel.

***Before the Bell* is a website and email newsletter that provides classroom tools and features articles about projects implemented by schools all around Texas. The site also offers insights from active and former education employees and information about retirement. There are even entertaining articles about everything from travel to book reviews to recipes to grant opportunities. It is truly a one-stop education resource designed especially for Texas educators.**

TRTA would love to hear from our members and friends! Please take some time to visit www.beforethebell.org and also to sign up for the free e-newsletter. You can sign up for the every Monday e-newsletter by submitting your name, email address, and zip code on the home page in the far right-hand column.

To submit feedback, please send an email to info@trta.org. Is the site helpful and informative? What types of articles would you like to see on the site? Are there any site improvements you would like to suggest? Are you willing to submit original articles to be published on the site? Your feedback is vital to us as we make plans to deliver *Before the Bell* to all school districts in Texas.

TRTA hopes to make this site valuable not only for active school personnel such as teachers, principals, superintendents and administrative workers but also for retired educators who want to stay in the know about what's happening in education in Texas. Please share this site with active school personnel and retirees you may know.

TRTA is leading the effort to help protect the benefits that retired and active school employees have earned. We must remain united in our efforts with active school employees as they carry the torch that was passed to them when our members retired.

Many positive things are happening in our public schools. Education employees are often criticized. This community will help all active and retired school employees stay focused on the good news in our schools and provide unique insights from current TRTA members about retirement.

TRS-Care Premiums Could Triple if No Action by Legislature in 2015

Adapted from Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 2-13 & 3-6 - 14

In February the TRTA Board of Directors and staff attended a 3-day TRS board retreat in Corpus Christi. There was a hearty discussion about TRS-Care and TRS Active-Care. Since TRS by law cannot lobby TRTA members filled the meeting rooms to overflow capacity and made TRTA's presence known with their participation.

Considering the impending TRS-Care crisis, TRTA members must know that the burden of protecting this benefit falls to us as a professional advocacy organization. We need ALL public education retirees and interested stakeholders to join TRTA and be ready to fight for the TRS-Care program!

The increased costs of TRS-Care premiums may occur **as early as September 1, 2015.** The specifics of the problem were outlined in an *Inside Line* on March 6:

The official TRS report indicates the shortfalls to TRS-Care are \$424 million in FY 2016 and \$591 million in FY 2017. This combined total of \$1.02 billion is what is needed to keep the fund solvent through the next biennium. Another \$721 million shortfall is expected in FY 2018. In 2013 alone, costs exceeded funding for TRS-Care by \$190 million. ...shortfalls will continue to increase dramatically each biennium. It also tells us that the Legislature will be looking at all options to "fix" the TRS-Care crisis. The definition of "fix" is now being discussed by TRS, TRTA, other stakeholders and our elected officials.

This crisis is not like the manufactured crisis wrought by groups and individuals who want to rob public servants of their hard-earned pensions. The TRS-Care crisis potentially is far more detrimental because the reserve fund is nearly gone and the options for dealing with it are not easy fixes.

TRTA will have the next legislative session to be active (beginning in 2015) and help resolve this TRS-Care crisis. But remember these March discussions were about what **MAY** happen in a worst case scenario. If the 84th legislature in 2015 chooses to completely rely on retirees to make up the \$1 billion shortfall your premiums for TRS-Care could triple.

TRS-Care Corpus Christi Town Hall Meeting Produces Scary Possibilities

Adapted from Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 2-13-13

How much could those TRS-Care premiums increase? That premium hike would force many TRS-Care participants out of the program as it would far exceed their ability cover the costs and still live comfortably. However, please understand that TRS has indicated that TRS-Care premium increases are NOT needed for the current biennium (2014-15). TRS Executive Director Brian Guthrie stated that the resolution to this shortfall is dependent upon the Texas Legislature and legislative action, and that TRS has exhausted its available options for saving the plan money at this time....

TRS answered a TRTA question about what the premiums for retirees may be if the Legislature decides to place the entire burden of the shortfall on retirees, and the result would be devastating. For retirees paying about \$350 per month, the premium would rise to about \$585 per month and continue to rise.

TRTA believes the Legislature must increase revenues to the program that do not rely upon increases in retiree premiums. TRS retirees do not receive regular pension increases, and the increase provided in 2013 did not apply to ALL retirees. As the cost of living rises and as health care costs increase, retirees are not able to cover the burden of these rising health care costs through increased premiums.

During the Town Hall meeting, TRTA Executive Director Tim Lee emphasized that a health care program is a necessity, as are affordable premiums for both retired and active members. Although TRTA members understand the concept of “shared pain,” solutions must be realistic, as retirees and active employees can only afford so much. He also suggested that TRTA and the active educator groups and perhaps even legislators or their staff members come together during the interim to discuss potential solutions well before legislative session begins in 2015.

TRTA is willing to work with all stakeholders to find viable solutions that provide reasonable, affordable health care for retirees and active school personnel. The crisis is here now and is not going away, and in fact, could only become worse even IF the \$1 billion shortfall is paid for in full. Long-term solutions and sustainability are KEY and should be the focus of

discussions about TRS-Care. All solutions must be put on the table and vetted.

As was reported by a healthcare actuary during the meeting, the best solution to TRS-Care long-term sustainability is pre-funding the program. Pre-funding a program that has an immediate \$1 billion shortfall is nearly impossible; BUT it could be possible if the Legislature made TRS-Care pre-funding a priority at a time when state revenues have been robust and the economic stabilization (rainy day) fund has a sizable reserve. Using a portion of those dollars to pre-fund TRS-Care may be a long shot, but putting it on the table for discussion could help legislators see the long-term benefit of pre-funding a vital program and maintaining it many years in the future....

As you review this Inside Line message, please think on these next steps and how you can help TRTA protect TRS-Care:

- 1. Continue to support TRTA through your membership and help us get the message out to ALL public education retirees that we need their membership too;**
- 2. Sign up for the TRTA Inside Line and encourage others to sign up for this email news service;**
- 3. Be ready to VOTE in the May run-off primary election—ask those running for office if they support TRS retirees and the preservation of TRS-Care and the TRS pension fund;**
- 4. Remember that early primary voting begins on May 18, and be sure to VOTE and ask your friends and family to be involved—your vote in the primary may be the deciding factor in who represents you next session when these issues are discussed;**
- 5. Understand that the TRS-Care issue is a CRISIS and we must prepare to do all that is necessary to protect the program.**

The TRS-Care crisis is no longer distant. It is here now and we need to gather our strength and be ready.