WESTONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

VOTE

ADVANCING THE WESTONKA EDGE

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Nov. 7, 2023 school district election

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ADVANCING THE WESTONKA EDGE

On Nov. 7, voters in the Westonka School District will consider two ballot questions that will advance the Westonka Edge—those small school advantages and big school opportunities that make Westonka Public Schools a valuable asset and source of pride for our community. Voters will also elect four school board members.

Question 1 is a request to renew an existing capital projects levy that provides a strong technology system and access to up-to-date curriculum, both print and digital. Because the district's tax authority would remain the same as originally approved in 2014, renewing the capital projects levy will not result in a new tax increase.

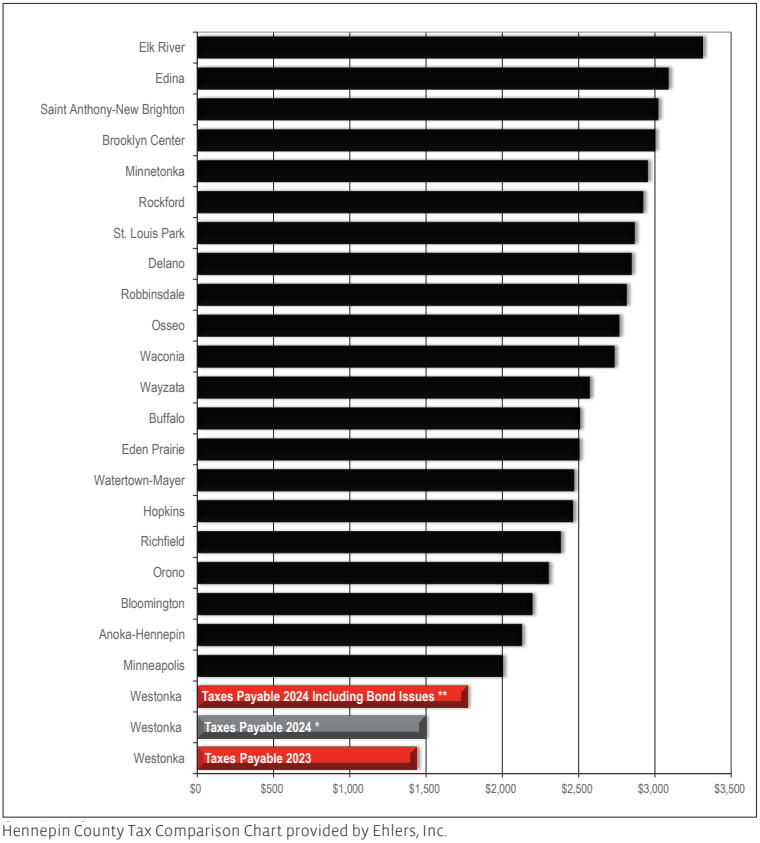
Question 2 asks voters to consider approving a new $93.4 million building bond investment in school facilities to support safety and security, deferred maintenance, and a redesign of Mound Westonka High School. The bond referendum follows over a year of research and community input on district facilities.

Westonka has best-in-state results...

Overall, Westonka Public Schools students scored #3 in the state in math, #4 in the state in reading and #3 in the state in science of districts testing at least 100 students in a grade level on Minnesota statewide assessments in 2023.

and the lowest total school property taxes in Hennepin County

Total School Property Taxes, Payable 2023, on a Home with an Estimated Market Value of $600,000



Hennepin County Tax Comparison Chart provided by Ehlers, Inc.

* Includes the estimated tax increase for the $350 per pupil increase to the district's existing operating referendum authority approved by voters in November 2019. Estimates do not include changes for any other school tax levies as compared to taxes payable in 2023.

** Includes the estimated tax increase for $93.4 million in voter approved school building bonds.

Question 1: Capital Projects Levy Renewal

Preserving technology and access to curriculum

Renewal of the district's capital projects levy will maintain a strong technology system and provide continued access to up-to-date print and digital curriculum without a new tax increase.

Maintaining excellence in technology and digital learning benefits every student. Westonka's existing capital projects levy, which has funded technology and digital curriculum since 2014, will expire next year. Renewing this levy at its current level ("authority") for another 10 years will maintain the strong technology system and digital learning program which, for the past decade, has prepared Westonka students to use technology to apply their learning in the K-12 classroom, in college and in their careers.

The capital projects levy funds technology that supports student learning and effective school operations. The renewed capital projects levy will be used for:

- Technical staff support
- Device replacement (students and staff)
- Technology to enhance safety and security
- Digital and print curriculum
- Technology infrastructure and network improvements
- Classroom and building technology
- Testing

A renewal means no new tax increase

Westonka voters will be asked to renew an existing capital projects levy that will expire in December 2024. The district's tax authority will remain the same as originally approved in 2014, so renewing the capital projects levy will preserve its benefit to students but will not result in a new tax increase.

A no-increase renewal means the cost for a $600,000 home under the renewed levy will be the same as a $600,000 home under the current (expiring) levy.

If Question 1 passes

✓ If the capital projects levy is renewed, our schools will be able to maintain the technology system that supports student learning and effective school operations, and provide continued access to up-to-date curriculum.

If Question 1 fails

If the capital projects levy renewal fails, the district will not be able to maintain its current technology program. Without dedicated technology funding:

- Technology staff would be reduced, causing teachers to spend more time troubleshooting issues and less time teaching.
- Student device replacement would be delayed or phased out at some grade levels.
- Infrastructure would not keep up with changing technologies.
- Fewer tools, resources and support would be available to protect against, detect and respond to cybersecurity vulnerabilities and threats to student learning and district data.
- The current schedule of refreshing/replacing curriculum to provide students up-to-date learning materials and tools would be delayed.
- General operating funds that currently pay for smaller class sizes, student support, and other daily costs of running schools would be repurposed to preserve the essential elements of a minimal technology system.

Question 2: Facilities Bond Referendum

Investing in school facilities throughout the district

School buildings in our district are showing their age; the newest school (Mound Westonka High School) is more than 50 years old and the oldest (Shirley Hills Primary) is more than 70 years old. Improvements are needed at every building in order to maintain safe and secure schools with well-functioning core systems in facilities that are also structurally designed to best serve Westonka students and the community.

District leaders have spent more than a year studying school facilities, talking with staff and families, and listening to what our community thinks. In response to those conversations, the proposed facilities bond will support:

- districtwide safety and security,
- districtwide deferred maintenance, and
- a redesign of Mound Westonka High School.

Safety and Security

Deferred Maintenance

High School Redesign

Districtwide safety and security

One of the most critical elements of safe schools is the ability to provide facilities that are responsive to safety and security needs.

Safety and security features that were common when our schools were built 50-70 years ago are no longer sufficient. The world we live in today requires current best practices and up-to-date technology to help ensure safe and secure learning and working environments. Bond-financed improvements will include:

Secure entrances

New secure entrances at Grandview Middle School and Mound Westonka High School will increase supervision capabilities and provide better control over who accesses the buildings. (Shirley Hills and Hilltop primary schools received secure entrances through a 2011 voter-approved bond referendum.)

Lockdown capacity

All Westonka school buildings will gain a centralized lockdown function that, at the press of a button, will immediately secure doors and hallways and limit access by an intruder. Every school will also have notification lights to signal that a lockdown has been implemented, reducing reliance on intercom communications.

Limiting building access during evenings and weekends

Every school in the district will be able to isolate specific areas within each building, providing public access only where it's needed for night and weekend activities.

Hardened glass

In every school districtwide, hardened glass will be installed in main entrance areas and other select areas to help prevent unauthorized access.

Door alerts

In every school, alarms and strobes will activate when a locked door has been propped open or not fully closed.

Deferred maintenance needs

District facilities have served generations of Westonka students. They require maintenance to core mechanical systems, equipment and fixtures to serve the next generation.

District facility with maintenance needs	Year built
Shirley Hills Primary School	1951
Grandview Middle School	1958
Hilltop Primary School	1964
Transportation Building	1970
Mound Westonka High School	1971

The high school, which receives the most school and community use, has the most significant deferred maintenance needs. Those projects will be wrapped into work to redesign the building to enhance learning spaces and improve functionality, safety and pride.

Some of the bond-funded deferred maintenance plans include:

- Replace original domestic water piping at every school.
- Replace the boilers at Hilltop and MWHS.
- Replace or add air handling units at Hilltop, Grandview and MWHS.
- Upgrade the electrical system at Hilltop, MWHS and the transportation building.
- Add dehumidification in the Hilltop gym.
- Replace the MWHS gym roof and MWHS gym bleachers.
- Replace the high school track and tennis courts due to their deteriorating sub-base.

Visit the district website for a full list of planned deferred maintenance projects, www.westonka.k12.mn.us/election2023.

High school redesign

The redesign of Mound Westonka High School is being prioritized as it has the greatest need and impact in our community.

Education has changed considerably since the last comprehensive improvements to the educational wings in the high school were made 30 years ago. In addition to serving 8th-12th graders during the day, the building supports programs for all ages before and after school, on weekends, and throughout the summer. In an environment of school choice, updating the design and expanding opportunities at MWHS will serve our community well.

The high school redesign will include renovations to the entire building, with the exception of recently renovated spaces (business education classrooms, the Transition Plus program, locker rooms), as well as added square footage.

Enhance security of building entrances

- Redesign the main (courtyard) entrance so it can securely accommodate the large volume of students coming in and out each day.
- Redesign the north entrance to be a more prominent entry point for school and activities outside the school day.

Improve student academic and support spaces

- Enlarge undersized general education classrooms, allowing for more collaborative learning and flexible groupings and making the spaces work better for current needs.
- Enlarge special education classrooms to accommodate growth and program needs.
- Improve mental health and other student services by consolidating them in a new and appropriately private area.

High school redesign, continued

Expand vocational opportunities

- Expand vocational options to include machining and nursing/emergency response programs, and a carpentry extension to our current woods program. Increasing vocational options will provide more career opportunities for students and a trained workforce for local businesses.

Enlarge spaces to accommodate high levels of use

- Enlarge the cafeteria and weight training areas, both of which currently spill into hallways.
- Add parking to provide more convenient access to the school building and activities spaces for students, staff and visitors.
- Reconstruct the track for longevity and install a synthetic turf field inside the track that will increase durability, extend the playing season, and allow for extensive use.

Redesign activities spaces to meet student and community needs

- Create a stadium surrounding the track that will serve track, soccer, lacrosse and football. This will include bleachers, lights, scoreboard, storage and a press box so Westonka can safely host varsity and section competitions. These improvements will also provide a better experience for spectators, along with access to indoor concessions and bathrooms at Thaler Center.
- Remove the 1980s tennis courts, which will allow for parking lot expansion. Build 12 tennis courts in a new location to accommodate program growth; the courts will also be lined for pickleball to support community interest.
- Reconstruct Field 10 to rebuild the infield, regrade the outfield, and install an irrigation system and appropriate backstop.

Facilities bond investment

This table shows the financial investment associated with each part of the facilities bond referendum request.

Bond Referendum Component	Investment
Districtwide safety & security	$7.36M
Deferred maintenance • *Buildings: $26.45M* • *Campuses: $10.57M*	$37.02M
High school redesign	$47.12M
Cost of issuing bonds	$1.9M
Total investment	**$93.4M**

More to Explore

Visit westonka.k12.mn.us/election2023 for a more detailed look into Question 1, Question 2 and the school board election, including:

- Tax calculator
- Conceptual diagrams
- Pre-referendum planning budgets
- Project financing schedule
- FAQs
- and more

If Question 2 passes

- ✓ Districtwide, students, staff and visitors will benefit every day from safety and security improvements.
- ✓ Buildings across the district will have well-functioning core mechanical systems.
- ✓ The most significant maintenance needs will be addressed at all schools.
- ✓ High school renovations will improve learning spaces, expand vocational options, increase building safety and functionality, and build community pride through:
  - Redesigned building entrances to improve security and functionality both during and after school
  - Enlarged classrooms that allow for more collaborative work and flexible learning spaces, plus more appropriate space for mental health services
  - More vocational opportunities for students to gain career-ready skills
  - More space in heavily used and currently overflowing areas (cafeteria, weight training, parking)
  - Activities spaces that are high quality, forward-looking, and able to accommodate growth while instilling student and community pride

If Question 2 fails

- Safety and security improvements will not be implemented. Staff will continue to be challenged to address current safety and security needs in our schools.
- Core mechanical systems will not be replaced, requiring costly repairs and risking failure.
- Significant school building maintenance and repairs will be delayed.
- Mound Westonka High School will not be improved, and the opportunity to address facility needs in a comprehensive way will be forfeited for the foreseeable future. MWHS students will not benefit from expanded educational opportunities, enhanced safety, improved building functionality, or strengthened pride in their school.
- High school activities areas (track, tennis courts, athletic fields) will not receive the maintenance and improvements needed to support growing interest and demand for use. Facilities will not be considered competitive with those in neighboring districts.

Tax impact

Question 1 and Question 2

There is a 25-year payment period for the facilities bond referendum (Question 2).

Home Est. Market Value	Question 1	Question 2	
	Per Year	Per Month	Per Year
$300,000	$0	$10.67	$128
$400,000	$0	$14.67	$176
$500,000	$0	$18.33	$220
$600,000	$0	$22.92	$275
$750,000	$0	$29.83	$358
$1,000,000	$0	$41.33	$496

Source: Ehlers, Inc. More tax impact information, including a tax calculator, is available on the district website, westonka.k12.mn.us/election2023.

If both questions (capital projects levy and bond referendum) pass on November 7, Westonka is still projected to have the lowest total school property taxes in Hennepin County.

How to vote

Voting has never been easier. Minnesota law allows any eligible voter to vote early by absentee ballot (in person or by mail) Sept. 22 through Nov. 6, 2023. On Election Day, Nov. 7, polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Early voting in person

In-person early voting will be held at the Westonka Educational Service Center, 5901 Sunnyfield Road E, Minnetrista.

When can I vote early?
In-person early voting will be conducted during regular business hours, typically 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, Sept. 22 through Nov. 6.

During the last two weeks of in-person early voting, Oct. 24 through Nov. 6, voters will be able to vote by "direct ballot," meaning that they will be able to feed their ballot into a ballot counter just as is done on Election Day. The district will offer some extended hours during the direct balloting period. Please visit www.westonka.k12.mn.us/election2023/voting for the in-person early voting schedule.

You may also vote early by mail. For details, please visit the Minnesota Secretary of State website, www.mnvotes.org.

Election Day Nov. 7: Polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Use the pollfinder on the Minnesota Secretary of State website to find your Election Day voting location: www.mnvotes.org.

Voting questions?

- **Visit** www.westonka.k12.mn.us/election2023/voting
- **Contact** Emily Labuz in the superintendent's office at (952) 491.8007 or labuze@westonka.k12.mn.us

SPECIAL ELECTION BALLOT
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 277 (WESTONKA)
NOVEMBER 7, 2023

10-year renewal of an existing levy that pays for technology and curriculum

SCHOOL DISTRICT QUESTION 1
RENEWAL OF EXPIRING CAPITAL PROJECT LEVY AUTHORIZATION

The school board of Independent School District No. 277 (Westonka Public Schools) has proposed to renew the school district's existing capital project levy authorization of 3.400% times the net tax capacity of the school district, which is scheduled to expire after taxes payable in 2024. The money raised from the capital project levy authorization will provide funds for classroom and building technology, digital and print curriculum, technology to enhance safety and security, technology infrastructure and network improvements, technical staff support, device replacement, and testing. The proposed capital project levy authorization will raise approximately $2,575,178 for taxes payable in 2025, the first year it is to be levied, and would be authorized for ten years. The estimated total cost of the projects to be funded over that time period is approximately $25,751,780. The projects to be funded have received a positive Review and Comment from the Commissioner of Education. Shall the capital project levy authorization proposed by the school board of Independent School District No. 277 be approved?

◯ **YES**

◯ **NO**

Renewing the levy has no new tax increase

BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING TO RENEW AN EXISTING CAPITAL PROJECTS REFERENDUM THAT IS SCHEDULED TO EXPIRE.

The proposed bond to support safety and security, deferred maintenance, and a redesign of Mound Westonka High School follows over a year of research and community input on district facilities.

SCHOOL DISTRICT QUESTION 2
APPROVAL OF SCHOOL DISTRICT BOND ISSUE

Shall the school board of Independent School District No. 277 (Westonka Public Schools) be authorized to issue its general obligation school building bonds in an amount not to exceed $93,400,000 to provide funds for the acquisition and betterment of school sites and facilities, including the construction of secure entrances and other safety and security improvements at all school sites and facilities; districtwide deferred maintenance projects, including replacement of boilers, piping and electrical systems; the redesign, renovation and equipping of academic and activity spaces at the Mound Westonka High School site and facility; and the reconstruction and repair of athletic fields, tennis courts and track?

◯ **YES**

◯ **NO**

Taxes on a $600,000 home will increase by $22.92 per month

BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.

SAMPLE
SAMPLE

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Prepared and paid for by Westonka Public Schools. This publication is for informational purposes only and is not meant to advocate for or against a ballot question.

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