



Voters Approve \$271.2 Million in Construction Spending

Voters on April 20 approved six of the eight construction questions on the ballot. The approved spending proposals totaled more than \$271.2 million.

Six school districts sought voter approval. Projects were approved in five of the six districts. The approved spending proposals were led by a \$168.3 million renovation project in Clifton, Passaic County, which the district called a “big picture, long-range approach” to upgrading all of its 19 buildings. In Bergen County, River Vale had three spending proposals on the ballot, and two were approved. Voters narrowly approved the district’s plans to upgrade security but rejected a third proposal to build health and wellness centers for its students.

Most of the other ballot questions around the state concerned construction of new classrooms and renovations.

Typically, April 20 is one of five dates during the year when school boards may ask voters to approve school construction, but due to the pandemic, Gov. Murphy canceled elections earlier this year. Under the Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act, the state will fund at least 40% of eligible school construction costs through annual debt service aid. Proposed construction projects in all six school districts were at least partially eligible for state funds.

Here are the statewide figures gathered by the New Jersey School Boards Association from the offices of the county clerks and from school district officials. Results are unofficial until they are certified by the county clerks.

Statewide amount proposed – \$302,667,142

State funding proposed – \$106,780,818

Statewide amount approved — \$271,222,551

State funding approved — \$103,336,643

A synopsis of the proposed spending plans follows:

Buena Regional School District (Atlantic County) APPROVED

The board of education won approval for upgrades throughout the district, including an artificial turf field, roof, outdoor physical education, wrestling, training and related facilities at the Buena Regional High School.

Upgrades will be made for administrative and health offices and a media center. A new HVAC system will also be installed. At the middle school, the district will upgrade its athletic facilities and make other improvements including a roof and an upgrade to the security system. A new gymnasium and stage will be built for the Jol Milanesi School, which will also see expansion of the cafeteria and additional classrooms. New classrooms

a stage in the gymnasium will be built at the Dr. J. P. Cleary School in addition to athletic fields and a roof. Improvements at the Collings Lakes School include administrative and health offices, athletic fields, a parking lot and classrooms.

The district says that \$23.6 million of the project is eligible for state funds and the state will pay 53.9% of the debt service for the final eligible costs.

Total amount: \$30,604,822

State funds: \$12,720,727

River Vale (Bergen County) TWO APPROVED, ONE REJECTED

- **Bond Proposal One APPROVED**

By a seven-vote margin, the district won approval to build new front entrance canopies at Holdrum Middle School, Roberge Elementary School and Woodside Elementary School. The unofficial vote tally was 660 to 653. The board of education also won approval for the construction of a Wellness Center at Holdrum Middle School at a total cost of \$31.8 million. About \$6.8 million will be allocated from the district's capital reserve, with \$25 million to be paid for through the proceeds of bond sales.

Total cost: \$31,770,463

State funds: \$11,041,838

- **Bond Proposal Two APPROVED**

(This second proposal will go into effect only if both the first and second proposals are approved by voters.) By a margin of 669 to 640, voters approved the school board's plan to provide air conditioning at Holdrum Middle School, Roberge Elementary School and Woodside Elementary.

Total cost: \$9,025,031

State funds: \$3,610,012

- **Bond Proposal Three REJECTED**

(This third proposal will go into effect only if the first proposal is also approved by voters.) By a vote of 715 to 591, voters rejected the school board's plan to provide for Wellness Centers at Roberge Elementary School and Woodside Elementary School. The project was not eligible for state funding.

Total cost: \$1,704,091

State funds: n/a

Waldwick (Bergen County) APPROVED

The district won voter approval for the following:

- **The high school/middle school:** A new secure front entrance; energy efficiency improvements including window replacement, replacement of the HVAC system and new lighting. The project will also include flooring, building upgrades and athletic facilities.
- **Traphagen Elementary School:** Renovation of Building #5, including energy efficiency improvements, window replacement, replacement of the HVAC system and new lighting, flooring and building upgrades.
- **Crescent Elementary School:** Site improvements including repaving and restriping.

Total cost: \$30,550,000

State funds: \$10,987,020

Fairfield (Essex County) REJECTED

Voters rejected the following construction plans:

- **Adlai E. Stevenson Elementary:** Additional classrooms, including a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) classroom, and renovations to provide technology space, resource rooms, special education classrooms, main office/administrative space and building upgrades including electrical system and toilet rooms; and
- **Winston Churchill School:** Expansion to provide additional classrooms, including science classrooms, small group instruction areas, a STEAM classroom; a gym, kitchen and ancillary mechanical, electrical and storage rooms. Renovations would have made room for a technology space, special education classrooms, guidance and administrative spaces; a nurse's suite, music room, band room and building upgrades including electrical system upgrades, boiler replacement and roof replacement.

Total cost: \$29,740,500

State funds: \$3,444,175

East Amwell (Hunterdon County) APPROVED

The district won permission to make a series of interior and exterior renovations and upgrades including the installation of a generator at the elementary school. The projects will be undertaken at a cost not to exceed \$989,500 which will be funded through the issuance of a short-term bond.

Total cost: \$989,500

State funds: \$395,800

Clifton (Passaic County) APPROVED

The district won approval of a \$168 million project to improve safety and efficiency, and to modernize every school in the district. The state will pay nearly \$55 million toward the costs. On the district's website, the school board said the project reflects "a big-picture, long-range approach" to providing what Clifton students need to learn while upgrading facilities to be safe, modern, and financially efficient.

The Clifton school district includes 19 buildings that have all been well maintained, but they – and their equipment – are old, the district said. Repair costs are increasing, and inefficiencies strain the operating budget. Almost all bathrooms will be renovated; some are original to 100-year-old buildings. Some heating/ventilation equipment is more than 60 years old, far beyond its recommended lifespan. The schools will now have modern security measures such as enclosed security vestibules and improved security cameras, the district said.

Total cost: \$168,282,735

State funds: \$64,581,246

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