



Everything New Orleans

# The Times-Picayune

## School Board approves pre-K proposal

All students would be let into programs

Friday, October 17, 2008

By Sandra Barbier  
River Parishes bureau

The St. John the Baptist Parish School Board Thursday approved a proposal to allow all students into pre-kindergarten as part of an academic improvement plan that is part of a proposed 10-year, 8-mill property tax renewal for schools.

The board also approved a master plan for improving schools and administrative buildings, to be financed by a proposed \$46 million bond issue.

Both propositions will be on the Nov. 4 ballot. School officials say the approval of the bond issue would result in the renewal for up to 20 years of 10 mills in property taxes the board currently collects for debt payments.

Revenues from the eight-mill tax would be divided for three purposes, with four mills dedicated to a pay raise, one mill dedicated to a fund for retiree's health insurance, and three mills dedicated to implementing a written academic improvement plan.

The academic plan proposed dedicating the entire three mills to having universal pre-kindergarten in the parish.

Current programs for 4-year-olds limit eligibility. At a School Board Finance Committee earlier Thursday, school system Superintendent Courtney Millet said the estimated \$800,000 in tax revenue would be used for pre-kindergarten "start-up" costs for two years, including the purchase of desks and outfitting classrooms to meet requirements.

Revenue from the remaining years of the tax would be used to support the operating costs of the program, Millet said.

She said the program was favored by principals and administrators, and would help prepare all 4-year-olds equally for elementary school.

Other parts of the academic plan included broad goals, such as creating an "accelerated component" for high-achieving students, improving attendance and increasing the district's graduation rate to 85 percent.

The current rate is 56.7 percent, according to the plan.

Some goals, such as having six computers in each classroom, were clearly linked to the facilities master plan that the board also approved.

The 17-page master plan, drafted by consultants, closely tracked a plan favored by School Board members at a workshop last week.

The most expensive projects would be replacement of some classroom buildings at West St. John and LaPlace elementary schools that with other renovations would cost \$11 million at West St. John and \$12 million at LaPlace.

The plan called for repairs and completing some deferred maintenance and technology and security upgrades at every school. The amount that would be spent for general renovations at each school would vary depending on the school's needs, but most schools would have new intercom and fire alarm systems and roof, drainage and parking improvements.

All elementary schools would get a new playground that meets Americans with Disabilities Act standards, at a cost of \$104,200, and four -- East St. John, Fifth Ward and LaPlace elementary schools, and John L. Ory Communication Arts Magnet School -- would get a paved, covered playground, costing \$835,200 each, that could eventually be turned into gyms, consultant Chris Pellegrin said.

The district's other elementary schools have gyms, consultant David Williams said.

The district's two stadiums and administrative buildings also would be repaired. The stadiums' tracks are in poor condition, Pellegrin said.

Fewer repairs are planned to administrative buildings, he said. The focus is "toward children and learning spaces."

Copies of the plans will be available in public libraries and on the district's Web site, [www.stjohn.k12.la.us](http://www.stjohn.k12.la.us).

.....

Sandra Barbier can be reached at [sbarbier@timespicayune.com](mailto:sbarbier@timespicayune.com) or 985.652.0958.