

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Rebuilding Highland High School: Bond Resolution Approved

POCATELLO, IDAHO – The unprecedented challenge to restore Highland High School is now one-step closer. On Thursday, March 14, the Pocatello/Chubbuck School District Board of Trustees approved a bond resolution to fund facilities construction at Highland High School. The election will be held on May 21.

The decision to approve the bond resolution was made in light of the March 22 deadline to place the measure on the ballot. Without having completed the legislative cycle for approval, the pending status of Idaho House Bill 521 also played into the decision. HB 521 is currently stalled in the Senate. Once signed by Governor Little, the new state facilities funding is projected to provide PCSD 25 with \$43 million. Should HB521 be signed into law by the Governor, the Board authorized the administration to pull the bond election ballot language before printing. More information to educate the public about the bond proposal is forthcoming.

“We continue to await the results of this proposed legislation. With or without this new funding, we have a responsibility to returning Highland High School to a fully functioning high school as soon as possible,” said Board Chair, Deanna Judy.

“The Board is united in its commitment to accomplish the monumental task of addressing Highland’s critical needs *and* bring the school’s facilities up to today’s modern standards,” Judy said.

If passed, the bond, in combination with insurance replacement monies, will fund the reconstruction of Highland High School as the project was proposed to local voters in November. While a fifty-six percent majority of the community was in favor of the November bond proposal, the final vote tally did not meet the nearly insurmountable supermajority threshold.

Nearly a year into the process, the Pocatello/Chubbuck School District 25 Board of Trustees, together with Highland and District administration, has worked diligently with meticulous planning to rebuild and restore the affected areas of the school as soon as possible. Ruled accidental and electrical in nature, the fire left behind a trail of lost or damaged facilities, including the gymnasium, cafeteria, weight room, band, orchestra, and choir rooms.

As part of Idaho’s public school system, the school district’s fundamental responsibility is to provide fair and equitable access to the highest quality, rigorous education possible in a safe, supportive and caring learning environment. While the district met its goal to return learners and staff home to Highland High School with a traditional schedule for the 2023-2024 school year, many of the school’s classes and

extracurricular programs continue to function despite being temporally displaced (with gratitude) to alternate locations.

Funding provided by the bond will enable the district to undertake the comprehensive rebuilding project with a goal for completion in Fall 2027. The priority is to restore essential facilities and implement modern amenities to enhance the learning experience at Highland. In total, Highland lost approximately 75,000 square feet of space. The project includes: (a) replacing facilities lost or damaged in the April 2023 fire, (b) adding, remodeling, and modernizing science classrooms, (c) replacing and increasing the size of the gymnasium and activity space, (d) constructing an auditorium.

Throughout their discussions, the Board has focused on guiding goals to:

- Educate learners in facilities design for today's standards;
- Return all learners and extracurricular programs to campus;
- Modernize science and music classrooms to meet the evolving needs of a growing student population;
- Restore the gymnasium as a central hub of physical, academic, social, and cultural development, increasing the capacity and versatility of the facility to resume as the community-building heart of the school.
- Restore functional gathering spaces critical to elevating the high school experience;
- Build a functional auditorium to meet educational, cultural, and community needs;
- Make prudent and fiscally responsible decisions.

"I appreciate the Board's diligence in looking at this challenge from every angle to balance fiscal responsibility with our obligation to educate learners in safe and functional facilities that are conducive to their overall educational experience and development," said Dr. Douglas Howell, Superintendent.

Howell also explained how the PCSD 25 Board and administration work to manage the district's operational budget with a conscientious approach to their role as fiscal stewards of taxpayer funds. The outcome of this conservative approach is a long list of accomplishments that has prevented the District from having to ask local taxpayers to fund bonds for large facilities projects for nearly three decades.

With this long history of prudent fiscal management, PCSD 25 has consistently demonstrated responsible stewardship of local tax dollars. The approval of the last bond proposal more than twenty-five years ago, which was refinanced and retired in 2017, not only saved taxpayers over \$700,000 in interest but also left the district with zero bond indebtedness. Despite comprising only 12 percent of local tax collection, PCSD 25 remains committed to maximizing educational resources and minimizing financial burden on taxpayers.

The Board has framed its work on this issue with the belief that rebuilding Highland High School is not just an investment in educational facilities; it is an investment in the community's economic vitality. Every time we modernize our schools' infrastructure, we build the capacity to create jobs, attract businesses, and elevate property values, laying the foundation for a prosperous future. The district continues to pledge an unwavering commitment to stretch every taxpayer dollar as far as it will go as we work together to position PCSD 25 for a strong, successful future.

To review a comprehensive history on the issue, please visit sd25.us/highland-fire-updates.

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