

BELLE PLAINE COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

BOND VOTE

November 4, 2025

WHY ARE WE VOTING?

On November 4, residents of the Belle Plaine Community School District will have the opportunity to vote to allow the district to extend an existing loan to pay for improvements to Longfellow Elementary School and the Jr/Sr High School without raising property taxes. A new cafeteria at the elementary school and a gym at the secondary school were overwhelmingly the community's highest priorities identified in the 2024 facility survey.

JR/SR HIGH SCHOOL COMPETITION GYM AND TRACK

A new athletic and activities addition will create a much-needed competition gym for the district. The addition will be located at the southwest corner of the high school near the football field with views from both levels, including the weight room, to the field. The connection to the high school will be at the second level to allow visitors to continue to park to the north of the school. The project will include site work and accessible parking.

The two-story addition will include:

- Gym will be sized for high school competition, practices, PE classes, and middle school games
- Space for three wrestling mats
- Spectator seating for over 1,000 people
- Elevated walking track
- Weight room that is more than double the size of the current weight room
- Male and female locker rooms
- Space for dedicated football locker room that is accessible from the outside
- Coach/referee office and changing space
- Concessions
- Flexible community room
- Storage

LONGFELLOW ELEMENTARY CAFETERIA

A cafeteria addition at Longfellow Elementary School with room for over 100 students to eat plus storage for tables. Currently, all students eat in the gym. Not only is the space too small, but it is also a challenge to schedule sufficient lunch and PE time for all students in preschool through sixth grade. The addition, which will be placed between the gym and the fifth and sixth grade classrooms, will also provide an activities entrance to the school, specifically during events at the gym.

HOW WILL WE PAY FOR IT?

The total cost of the project is approximately \$14 million. Half of the project will be paid for with a general obligation bond, which is paid back using property tax levy funds. The other half will be paid for using sales tax revenue that the district already receives from the state.

WILL THIS VOTE AFFECT MY PROPERTY TAXES?

Property taxes will not go up as a result of this vote.

Belle Plaine's board and leadership have been committed to maintaining a steady overall levy rate of \$15.92 while paying off existing debt. The community group also did not support raising the property tax levy rate.

Although the district has other facility needs, the \$2.70 per thousand option will allow the district to keep property taxes at or below the current property tax rate. A bond that included other facilities such as an auditorium or other facilities would have required an increase in property taxes and a bond up to \$4.05 per thousand valuation.

How is this possible?

We will continue the current rate by extending our current debt and managing our existing overall tax levy.

The overall levy rate is used for a variety of expenses such as the debt service levy (used to pay off bonds), the management levy, the PPEL levy and the instructional support levy among other things. The school district has the ability to increase or decrease individual buckets within the overall levy. If the bond is approved,, the district will manage those levies to make sure there is no increase to property taxes. For example, the management levy would be reduced to make sure property taxes do not increase.

WHAT WILL THE BALLOT SAY?

On November 4, 2025, Belle Plaine Community Schools will ask residents within the district's boundaries to vote on a general obligation bond that will partially fund additions at Longfellow Elementary School and the Jr/Sr High School. The following language will appear on the ballot. Sixty-percent of voters must approve the question for the bond to pass.

“Shall the Board of Directors of the Belle Plaine Community School District in the Counties of Iowa, Benton, Tama, and Poweshiek, State of Iowa, be authorized to contract indebtedness and issue General Obligation Bonds in an amount not to exceed \$7,950,000 to construct, furnish, and equip additions to the elementary building, including a cafeteria, entrance, and storage areas, and to the secondary building, including a gymnasium with a walking track, weightroom, concession area, and related spaces, and parking and site improvements?”

HOW WILL I VOTE?

EARLY: In-person absentee voting is available through 5 p.m. November 3, the day prior to the election. Vote in your county auditor’s office or satellite locations, if available.

ABSENTEE: Mail-In Absentee Ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day or hand deliver your ballot to the auditor. Request a ballot at: <https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/pdf/absenteeballotapp.pdf>.

ELECTION DAY: Vote in-person on November 4 at your assigned polling place from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. To find your polling location go to <https://apps.sos.iowa.gov/elections/voterreg/pollingplace/search.aspx>

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

How did the district arrive at the plan?

In 2024, the district conducted a community-wide survey to inform future facility planning. The results of the survey were unanimously in favor of an additional gym at the Jr./Sr. High School and a dedicated cafeteria at Longfellow Elementary School. In early 2025, the district hired OPN Architects to work with a steering committee of district leadership and board members to explore what these improvements might look like. The initial concepts were reviewed with a committee of community members and following further refinements and additional feedback were ultimately approved by the school board. A petition was signed by the required number of district residents and the election was called earlier this summer.

Will the community be able to use the new athletic facilities?

Yes! The facilities were designed with the community in mind. Just as our facilities are available now for community use, during regular hours when not in use by students, the track can be used by community members for walking and running. Also just as our other gyms are now used by the community recreation leagues, the new gym will be able to be used by the same groups. Additionally, the design includes a room adjacent to the concessions area that can be used during events as well as used by the community for meetings and other events that need a larger gathering space with tables and chairs.

What about a performance facility?

While a performing arts facility did not rise to the top of the community’s needs in the survey, the district knows that it is a need. We asked the architects to explore how the gym could also include a stage. Unfortunately, while it is possible to have a space that serves both functions, the reality is that it

generally doesn't do either as well as we would want it. Sacrifices have to be made to function as both a gym and a stage. So, we decided to pursue a fine arts facility at a later date. That being said, a space the size of the competition gym can also serve as a performance venue for large events like honor bands and choirs and speech competitions. It can also seat more families for events like graduations and all band or choir concerts.

How does the project take enrollment trends into account?

Belle Plaine's enrollment has held steady for the last few years and we expect this to continue. These projects are as much about creating better spaces for our current students and community as well as looking at statewide trends. Families increasingly "shop" around for districts, particularly when they may live in one district but work in another or have several within a reasonable commuting distance. Because families are looking at facilities when they decide where to send their children to school, we must continue to invest in our facilities.

What are the next steps if the bond does not pass?

If the bond does not pass, our facilities will still have significant needs and the cost of the work will increase as construction costs go up each year. Because the district is planning to extend existing debt to fund for the majority of the project, taxes will not immediately go down. We will continue to pay off our existing bond. Our needs will not go away.

What will the new addition look like?

The concepts the district's architects have developed are only hypothetical to illustrate what a new gym at the high school and cafeteria at the elementary school might look like and where it will likely be built. In order to arrive at a cost estimate to take to voters, we know approximate square footage and certain factors like equipment have been accounted for, but the renovated and new spaces will not be designed until after the bond passes. At that point, our architects will spend time getting to know the community's collective vision for this project. Final dimensions, exact layout, and general aesthetic both inside and out will be determined at this point in the process. These details will be determined by a core group identified by the school district.

Once the bond passes, what are the next steps for the project and when will the project be complete?

Once the bond passes, OPN Architects will start the design process, which includes detailed conversations about space needs, adjacencies, and aesthetic preferences. Once design is complete, we would plan to bid the projects in Spring 2026. Bidding typically takes about a month to complete, so the selected contractor will be in place in spring and able to prepare to begin construction as soon as school is out in May 2026. We will continue construction during the school year and complete the project over the summer of 2027 so it is ready for the start of the school year in Fall 2027.

How will construction be managed to minimize disruption during the school year?

The elementary school addition is likely to cause more disruption than the Jr/Sr high school addition. However, in both instances we will put student safety first. Students will not use or have access to any space that is actively under construction. Due to the nature of school construction, the phasing of this process is not new to our architects and will likely be something the contractors who bid on the work will have dealt with before. Exact phasing of the project around the school calendar are conversations that will happen during design.

Will local contractors be used to do the work?

In Iowa, projects are publicly bid, so work cannot just be given to a specific contractor. Any local contractor, general or sub-contractor, is able to bid on the project if they are able to meet bidding requirements. These requirements are typically related to being able to provide performance bonds that cover their contract. The district hopes that any and all contractors, including local companies, will review the bid documents to consider supplying bids.

**The district already collects property taxes, why can't we pay for a new school without a bond vote?
Where is my tax money going now?**

The district cannot take on large-scale projects without taking on debt. Districts receive some state funding, but the majority of property tax collected by residents of the district supplements state funding to pay for day-to-day operations, including teacher and staff salaries and benefits, educational and instructional materials, and operational costs of the district. While generally it is considered wise to save money for a rainy day – or in this case a large expense – school districts are not legally allowed to stockpile large savings accounts. As a protection for taxpayers, they are encouraged by law to operate in such a way that they spend all that they bring in each year. The general fund, where state funding and property tax funds are allocated, is like a checking account for day-to-day expenses.

That is why districts turn to general obligation bonds to fund larger scale new or improved facility projects. Through a special election, voters of a district give their approval for the district to levy additional property taxes that will go directly to paying back the bond. The additional taxes cannot be used for anything other than paying down debt.

The district does have access to two other funding streams. PPEL funds can be used for small-scale grounds and building projects. The state also created the 1-cent sales tax (SAVE) funding mechanism for schools to use for smaller capital projects on an annual basis. The district currently uses both SAVE and PPEL to pay for minor facility improvements, chromebooks, other technology, buses and other vehicles, classroom facility improvements, sports fields, among other facility related costs.

This plan would use a combination of the state sales tax (SAVE) and property tax. This strategy is an effort to limit the burden on tax payers. Additionally, the proposal would extend the district's current debt. Taxes will not increase as a result of this bond project.

What happens if the projects go over budget?

The district is not allowed to bond beyond the amount approved by voters. Of course, anyone who has ever taken on a construction project no matter how big or small knows that there are always unforeseen costs. In the architecture and construction industry, these are called contingencies. A contingency budget is built into the overall budget. Typically, at this point in the project, this is around 20% of the total project budget. This means that our budget is built to be flexible to accommodate unforeseen situations. Throughout the design process, there will be regular cost estimates, each with more detail that help the design team and district stay aligned with the budget.

Will tariffs and inflation affect our project?

OPN has a great deal of experience working on publicly bid projects, including many new and renovated school buildings. They have relationships with local contractors who are all well-versed in procurement phasing. The budgets for the project have also included contingencies, which are partially in place to protect the district from unforeseen costs.

What is the economic value of maintaining a school building in each community?

School facilities are integrally tied to a community's economic vitality. According to a recent study by real estate search engine Trulia and Harris Interactive, the majority (57 percent) of parents with children under 18 would pay above listing price to live in the neighborhood with ideal schools. As districts around us improve their facilities and the community continues to look to the future, our school facilities will play a critical role in our community's viability. The strength of our school is directly tied to property values. When schools decline, families leave, housing demand drops, and property values slide.

You may not have children attending schools in our district, but chances are you attended a school as a youth. You benefited because someone else who may not have had their own children in school understood that there is an interconnectedness to living in a community. We collectively pay for public facilities like schools because it is an investment in our shared wellbeing and in our future generations.

In a rural area like ours, a school is also the gathering place — ball games, concerts, meetings, programs, community dinners. When we improve the school, we are investing in the heart of the community.