



AIA Washington Council

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Issue Brief

School Construction — Support HJR 4204 / SJR 8207

Background

The quality of education offered by a school district is directly affected by the quality of permanent facilities available to the district. Many districts deal with inadequate housing for students because of failed bond elections, particularly in high-growth districts where portable buildings are almost a way of life.

The need for modernization and new construction for school facilities has reached a critical stage throughout the state. Schools face the enormous challenges of record high enrollments, new demands for education technology, the need for school-based before- and after-school programs, and the health and safety hazards of deteriorating facilities. The overwhelming need to improve the condition of Washington's schools and to construct new buildings to accommodate rising enrollments affects school districts throughout the state. Because of this situation, the AIA/WA supports legislation to approve school district bonds by a simple majority vote, eliminating the sixty- percent majority and the forty- percent voter turnout requirements.

Support HJR 4204 / SJR 8207 — School Construction Levies

The Washington Constitution requires a supermajority of three-fifths of voters to support school maintenance, remodeling or new construction levy before it can be passed. This extraordinary burden has left many school districts with inadequate housing for students because of failed bond elections. Several school districts have had to go back to the ballot several times to pass a levy, even though a majority of voters supported them. Because of this situation, the AIA/WA supports legislation to allow voters to approve school district bonds by a simple majority.

HJR 4204 / SJR 8207 changes the requirement to pass a school maintenance and operations levy to a simple majority of voters and eliminates the forty- percent voter turnout requirements. Passage of these levies is vital to the upkeep of our schools. Regular maintenance of school facilities can delay the need for major renovations or new school construction, saving taxpayers millions of dollars in future construction bonds.

Americans Support School Construction Funding

In a nationwide poll of voters conducted December 16-22, 2004, (1,000 sample, margin of error +/- 3.1) by two respected national pollsters - The Tarrance Group, a Republican firm, and Lake Snell and Perry, a Democratic firm - it was found that when considering projects that government could spend tax dollars on, an overwhelming 91 percent of voters surveyed said that "repairing unsafe and dilapidated school buildings" was an important priority. Of those, a large 66 percent rated it "very important."

On another question, 77 percent of voters polled said they agreed with the statement, "We are in urgent need of renovating existing school buildings." Moreover, a majority of the electorate polled - 51 percent - said they "strongly agreed" while 26 percent said they "somewhat agreed." High percentages of all demographic groups were in agreement on the need for renovating schools - notably, 82 percent of women and 86 percent of Hispanics were in agreement.

Additionally, the survey found that voters nationwide believe state and local governments are not doing a particularly good job when it comes to repairing dilapidated school buildings. Only 27 percent positively rate "state and local governments' ability to repair dilapidated school buildings." In fact, a whopping 11 times more voters rate them "poor" than "excellent" on this issue.