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DPS may ask for building bond vote

Health, safety fixes could cost \$300 million

By Nancy Mitchell, Rocky Mountain News (Contact)

Thursday, March 20, 2008

Denver Public Schools leaders will begin community talks in April about their chances this fall of winning a bond issue likely to top \$300 million.

If school board members agree to go to voters, it will be the district's first request for building dollars in five years. It also is likely to be their most expensive.

"It is our intention to discuss with you the idea of going out for a bond this fall," DPS Chief Operating Officer Tom Boasberg told school board members Thursday. "We will have a detailed discussion over the next couple of months."

Voter turnout is typically higher in presidential election years, and that tends to favor school district tax questions, according to data compiled by the Colorado Association of School Executives.

But DPS Superintendent Michael Bennet said campaigning also can be more expensive in high-profile election years.

"Those are the kinds of things we're going to be weighing," he said.

Boasberg told board members that he'll convene a community group next month to begin looking at the district's building and repair needs and the possibility of a tax question in November.

Board members, who will ultimately decide whether to go to voters, will need to decide by July so Denver election officials can be notified, he said.

DPS last sought a tax increase for buildings in 2003, when voters approved a \$310 million bond issue. The district last went to voters in 2005 for funding for a new pay system for teachers. It also passed.

Boasberg said Thursday that the district's basic "health and safety" building needs alone total \$250 million to \$300 million. That includes fire sprinklers and other improvements to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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Measure to curtail CSAPs advances

House bill would cut writing exam

By Berny Morson ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

Statewide student achievement tests would be scaled back sharply under a bill approved Thursday by the House Education Committee.

HB 1357 would eliminate the writing exam, along with all exams for ninth- and 10th-graders, the highest grades in which the test now occurs.

Juniors would continue to take the ACT test, a college entrance exam.

The bill passed 7-6 after testimony by parents and teachers who said children spend too much time taking tests.

“I feel CSAP fatigue,” Cindy Dreher, a teacher at Hulstrom Options K-8 school in the Northglenn-Thornton school district, told the lawmakers. “For the last two weeks, life has revolved around CSAP.”

The bill, by Rep. Judy Solano, D-Brighton, could face a rough road.

Gov. Bill Ritter has said he wants to address the testing issue as part of a comprehensive school reform package that has been introduced in the Senate.

Ritter has not threatened a veto, but he suggested earlier in the week that Solano work to include her ideas in the larger reform package.

Education Commissioner Dwight Jones and most members of the Colorado Board of Education back Ritter's strategy.

Solano said following the committee vote that the measure should move forward.

All the Republicans on the education committee opposed Solano's bill, as did Rep. Christine Scanlan, D-Dillon, the main House sponsor of the measure Ritter favors.

The tests administered under the Colorado Student Achievement Program are the state's way of measuring compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. That measure does not require the writing test Solano's bill eliminates.

The federal law requires only one test during the high school years. However, state officials would need federal approval to count ACT as that test.