

State Funding for New Schools

by Pamela Hood, Superintendent

The Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) handles dollars approved in the state's budget for the construction of new school buildings.

The OSFC ranks all school districts in Ohio on an Equity List based on property valuation.

- *Lower wealth valuation* ranks a school district *higher* on the Equity list which means that district receives *more state funding* towards its new school construction project. It also means that district has to raise *less money* through its voters towards the costs of its school construction project.
- *Higher wealth valuation* ranks a school district *lower* on the Equity List which means that district receives *less state funding* towards its new school construction project. It also means the district has to raise *more money* through its voters towards the costs of its school construction project.

School districts in Trumbull County with new OSFC school construction rank higher on the Equity list in comparison to Champion Schools. Those districts had to raise LESS LOCAL dollars through a bond levy to meet their local share toward construction costs. Champion Schools' local share for 2009 is 44% of the total cost for new school buildings.

As the state moves through the Equity List to funding districts with higher wealth valuations, the local share increases and the state's share of funding decreases. Many districts ranked among *higher wealth valuation* are deciding to *defer* their school construction projects. The reasons for deferring on an OSFC project may include:

1. The condition of the current economic climate
2. The higher the local share for a district means the higher the tax millage to be borne by the voters for a school Bond issue.

Champion Schools received notification from OSFC in 2007 that the district was eligible for OSFC dollars towards new school construction. Members of the Board of Education, Superintendent and Treasurer met with the Ohio School Facilities Commission to investigate the possibility of splitting or segmenting the district's facility project into two phases in an effort to reduce the immediate cost to the tax payer. Due to the Board's efforts, as well as those of several other districts, a bill was passed to permit districts to segment their OSFC construction projects.

The OSFC has completed a preliminary evaluation of Champion Schools' three school buildings. The evaluation included assessing the age of the buildings, handicap accessibility, structural integrity, roofing needs, energy costs/efficiency, heating/cooling systems and a variety of other facility issues. The Board, after reviewing the findings from that assessment, considered district construction priorities to first be a new K-8 building.

The Champion Board of Education voted in 2008 and in 2009 to defer its OSFC new school buildings' project. Deferring means having the OSFC "hold onto" the district's share of state money until the district decides to proceed with securing a bond issue. At this time the OSFC does not limit the number of times a board can defer an OSFC project. However, when a board decides to place an OSFC project on the ballot, the board has up to *four consecutive attempts* to pass the issue. If the bond issue does not pass after four consecutive attempts, the district is moved to the end of the Equity list permitting other districts to move ahead of that district's ranking.

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