

District: \$123M bond would fix ailing schools

BY MITCHELL FREEDMAN

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To prepare for a \$123-million bond referendum, the most ambitious ever in Riverhead, the school district is sending speakers to civic groups, offering tours of its buildings and posting video on its Web site in an effort to convince voters that now is the right time to do the work — even if the economy hasn't bounced back.

For some projects, the time appears to be past due.

At the Aquebogue Elementary School, for example, \$415,000 will be used to replace part of the roof — the section that dates to 1929.

The vote will take place next Tuesday from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the Riverhead High School gymnasium.

Superintendent Diane Scricca said the bond calls for about \$22 million to be used for repairs that have been put off for 20 years or longer — even as the community has managed to get a new library, a new fire house and an expanded hospital. She said the ailing economy means that more contractors are likely available, a situation that may result in lower bids.

The bond calls for improve-



School District Superintendent Diane Scricca hopes to get the bond approved on Feb. 9.

ments to every building in the Riverhead School District.

The Roanoke Avenue school would be converted for use as administrative offices. The current administration office — in prefab buildings near the middle school — would be removed and the space used to expand the school playing fields.

The Roanoke building, constructed in 1922, is “not suitable for children,” Scricca said. Its classrooms average 560 square feet, compared to a modern 825-square-foot classroom.

The bond's impact

■ The tax impact of the Riverhead school bond would change from year to year because four separate bonds would be sold between 2010 and 2013.

■ The owner of a typical \$400,000 house now pays \$56 a year on the district's existing \$2 million debt. If the bond is approved, that payment would increase to about \$112 this year.

The cost is expected to peak at about \$270 a year from

2013 to 2018, then drop to \$208 in 2018 and remain near that level until 2030, then fall to \$63 in its last year, 2033.

■ Precise numbers would depend on future interest rates, whether the town's tax base grows, and how much state aid the district will get each year. The district is anticipating \$30 million in state construction aid from New York State.

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Scricca said the larger rooms are important so classes can be divided into small groups for projects or individualized instruction.

Scricca, who has been in the district for three years, said it has grown by 1,100 students since 1989 to a current total of about 4,800.

For several years, the school board examined options that included looking at locations for a new high school. The board settled on renovation and limited expansion of the high school, enough to handle the

200 additional students expected over the next decade.

Luanne Nappe of Aquebogue has one child in high school and one in the middle school — which she attended. “I was in kindergarten 40 years ago and started in a portable [classroom]. They just took it down a few years ago,” she said. “My kids were using portables at the middle school and at the high school . . . We're in the same spot. Nothing has changed.”

Middle School principal Andrea Pekar pointed to some of

the problems in her building, including cold air seeping through large single-pane windows into the back stairway. When it rains, she said, water leaks through the windows onto the stairway.

And when that happens, “we bring out the towels,” she said.

The middle school would undergo the most significant changes, with \$24.6 million targeted for 15 new classrooms, a 10,800-square-foot gym addition, library expansion and removal of modular buildings. Another \$6 million would be spent on renovations, including \$2.2 million for window replacements, \$1.5 million for roof replacement and \$300,000 for electrical panel and receptacle improvements.

The second-largest expenditure is aimed at Riverhead High School, where \$22.6 million would be spent on 10 new science classrooms, a music room addition and removal of modular buildings.

The bond also aims to expand or renovate Riley Avenue Elementary School (\$14.2 million); Phillips Avenue Elementary School (\$6.6 million); Aquebogue Elementary School (\$10.1 million); and Pulaski Street Elementary School (\$11.8 million).