

## **EPISD tries to garner support for proposal**

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By Gustavo Reveles Acosta

The El Paso Independent School District Board of Trustee has met with at least one professional organization and plans to make the rounds with other groups as it tries to garner support for the district's upcoming bond election.

Earlier this month, the Board of Trustees and the district's administration met with Association of General Contractors to present facts and figures regarding the proposed 2007 bond election, which is expected to go to voters in May.

Trustees said they expect more meetings with other professional associations, chamber of commerce and civic groups from now until election day.

"We'll try to get in any agenda or be invited to any meeting we can," board President Lisa Colquitt-Muñoz said. "The key for the success of this bond is to communicate and to be open with all the stakeholders in the district."

A political action committee is likely to take on the advertising of the bond, which would include courting traditional voters to support the proposal.

But the board and administration will do their part to inform business and civic leaders about the details of the \$230 million project list that includes a new Northeast high school, a new West Side middle school and five new elementary schools.

Colquitt-Muñoz said the district is being careful to follow any rules about employees promoting the bond.

"We are just providing the facts about the added growth that we're going to have," Superintendent Lorenzo Garcia said. "It's only smart to give groups like these an update on what our situation is."

Fort Bliss growth is expected to add 10,100 new students to the 63,000-student school district. According to EPISD figures, that means an additional 547 classrooms will be needed to adequately accommodate them.

The meetings with the groups normally consist of an update on how the \$207-million bond program from 2003 is going.

The district also will give a presentation on the facts and figures that led it to the approval of the project list and the bond amount.

“We want to present this information so that they know the district is up to date,” Garcia said. “We are updating these facts continuously and want to share them with the community as a sign of our wish to manage taxpayer funds properly.”

Because of the holidays, there are few meetings scheduled between the board and other organizations, but Colquitt-Muñoz expects to be busy as the new year begins.

Raymond Aduato, the executive director of the El Paso Association of Builders, said the group he represents will likely meet with EPISD officials in January.

The association, which consists of home and commercial builders in the county, is eager to hear the district’s plan – especially the tax impact the bond could have on homeowners.

“For one thing, school taxes have a large impact on affordability issues,” Aduato said. “Any time we see taxes increase, we can expect to see fewer people trying to buy homes.

Aduato said he would also like to review the facts and figures about the needs in the district before his group supports the bond.

“We understand it is hard for teachers to work with limited funds and inadequate facilities,” he said. “But in order for an entity to come to us and ask for our support, they’re going to have to prove that they are working with everything they have right now and that they are streamlining.”

Colquitt-Muñoz said the meetings will serve not only to present information, but also to answer any questions the leaders and stakeholders in these organizations might have.

“Many of these groups are professional associations that deal with the type of work that is involved in a bond program,” she said. “they understand the numbers and they are a good judge of what is happening in the district right now and what could happen if the bond is approved.”