School Board to ask $215 million in new taxes

By MIKE DUNNE
Advocate staff writer

The School Board agreed Thursday to ask voters to support $215 million in new taxes to renovate schools and build facilities for a new desegregation plan.

If voters face "the highest tax (increase) ever, then there's a reason for it... a number of years of neglect and complacency," said board member Jacqueline Mims.

Hers was just one of many pleas to place tax measures on the April 30 ballot. The board voted to ask the public to renew one current tax and approve two new ones.

"We send our prisoners to a better place than we send our little children," said board President Bob Meador.

Board member Mike Branch cast the only votes against the new taxes. He voted for the tax renewal and voted against proposals for capital improvements and salary increases.

"It's not easy being the only red light on the board," he said, adding that he voted his convictions.

The tax proposals are:
- A 10-year renewal of an existing 6.78-mill property tax that generates about $7.5 million for general operations.
- A $215 million package expected to go before parish voters this spring, Here's the list:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Board</td>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>31.96 mills</td>
<td>$215 million total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>3.13 mills</td>
<td>$3 million a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BREC</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>6.2 mills</td>
<td>$6.6 million a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City-parish*</td>
<td>April 30?</td>
<td></td>
<td>officials won't say</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Election not yet called

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A TAXING SPRING

The School Board is proposing the largest of several property tax packages expected to go before parish voters this spring. Here's the list:

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temporary buildings, she said.

$215 million to fund the capital
improvements/desegregation plan.

Associate Superintendent for
Business Affairs Grady Hazel.

passed in 1969, and the millage
employees.

raise $8.25 million annually to fund
pay raises for teachers and other
employees.

Branch pointed out that
businesses pay 90 percent of,
properties and that there would
be additional hidden costs to
property taxes and that there would
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classic "tax and spend" response to
the capital improvements proposal a
overcrowding and desegregation
parried by recounting a litany of
create community schools, as selling
would be needed to activate
new temporary buildings that
Branch's plan.

$40 million for new classrooms to
at this very minute to eliminate"

$68 million to renovate schools and
plan calls for $93 million for 10 new
schools and refurbish virtually
every school in the parish.

would generally attend the nearest
attendance zone.

The plan draws attendance zones
students were drawn only from its
around all schools, and students
would generally attend the nearest
community school.

One of the goals is to reduce
busing for desegregation, except in
cases where people choose to attend
magnet schools or special programs
designated to integrate schools
that would be one-race schools.

Even with magnets, there would
still be 10 one-race schools, which is
less than the current 31.

Predictably, employee groups
spoke favorably of the new taxes.
They like the idea of a pay raise.

"We consider this to be the first
step in the professionalization of
teachers," said David Lovely of the
East Baton Rouge Parish Federation of
Teachers.

Manager of the East Baton
Rouge Parish Association of
Educators said the pay raise is
needed.

"Our school system is under-
 funded. Two, the employees are
poorly paid. Three, we need to make
every effort to get out from under the
budget director. And four, our
physical plant is in dire need of
repair," she said.

Hal Ruddick of the Baton Rouge
Association of School Employees,
the union that represents support
personnel and bus drivers, said
employees would not really get a
raise.

"This salary millage will won't
catch us up with ... the cost of living
increases" since the last special tax
raise would be $1,358.

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In addition to new schools, the
plan would significantly expand 35
schools and refurbish virtually
every school in the parish.

With the new facilities would
come new school attendance zones,
if approved by a federal court judge.
The plan draws attendance zones
around all schools, and students
would generally attend the nearest
community school.

doing this is aimed at reducing
busing for desegregation, except in

The plan calls for an annual
minimum raise for maintenance
and clerical workers of $700 for 12-
month employees and $525 for
nine-month employees.

By increasing all beginning
salaries and giving a 3.5 percent
raise to everyone else, average
raises would be $1,160 for 12-month
employees and $882 for nine-month
employees.

The proposal raises the beginning
step for each management
classification by $700 and then
provides a 2.5 percent pay raise.
The average management pay raise
would be $1,200.

Bus drivers and attendants would
get a flat $2,757 annual raise.

Employees funded by federal and
other special funds would get
similar raises, with those funds
absorbing the costs. Food Service,
which generates its own funds,
would pay for its own raises. The
average raise in Food Services
would be $739 annually.

Ruddick said BRASE would like to
see a higher raise for nine-month
employees, bus drivers and
attendants.

Dick Kruste of the East Baton
Rouge Parish Association of
Educators said the parish ranks
27th in Louisiana among 69 school
systems in terms of local tax sup-
port for schools. Louisiana ranks
44th in overall support for
education, he said.

"Even this package will not bring
us to the Southeast average in per-
pupil expenditures for public
schools," Bellanger said. "We hope
that this proposal is only the
beginning of a more substantial
improvement."