

Remember Me 

# Albuquerque Journal

## Voting yes on Feb. 2 is for the children

By [The Rev. Trey Hammond / La Mesa Presbyterian Church](#)

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On Feb. 2, Albuquerque voters have a great opportunity to ensure that children in Albuquerque Public Schools study in the best learning environments possible, by voting “yes” for the school bond package.

This bond and mill levy will invest some \$575 million into updating aging school campuses, creating learning-friendly classrooms, and providing technology for students to succeed in an increasingly digital world. Better yet, this investment comes without an increase to the current tax rate.

The APS Capital Master Plan is an equitable process for upgrading schools. Every three years, all the buildings in the district are assessed and ranked in order of need.

Going down this “worst to first” list, the \$575 million will fix the most deficient schools in the city.

How big is the need? It is estimated it will take \$5 billion to bring all the buildings, education technology infrastructure and classroom equipment up to adequate condition.

This bond package gets at about 11% of the need, but for the schools upgraded, it is a huge boon for the students and teachers.

We write as clergy leaders of Albuquerque Interfaith, an organization of congregations, schools, unions and non-profits that acts on our religious and democratic values in public life. We have undertaken a “Get Out the Vote” walk for every school bond election since 2002.

It seems ironic that our societal “pro-child” rhetoric does not translate to voting, as consistently less than 10 percent of registered voters take the time required to participate in bond elections. Hundreds of Albuquerque Interfaith leaders are walking from six sites this month, visiting thousands of voters, to encourage them to exercise their democratic responsibility and support our children.

A recent editorial in the Albuquerque Journal (Jan. 5) compared the current situation at APS, with the messy departure of two superintendents in the recent past, to a leadership crisis in 2002. In that year, the scandal-tainted leaving of a superintendent resulted in the public expressing its frustration by voting down the first bond package in 28 years.

The truth is, defeating the bond does not punish the “bad adult behavior,” it only hurts children, whose learning environments continue to deteriorate.

If one is interested in holding the APS administration and board accountable for fiscal and leadership decisions, the most effective strategy is to organize and press for change at school board meetings and by voting for qualified school board members and holding them accountable.

Voting against the school bond might feel like a “protest” to the recent turmoil in the leadership of APS, but, in reality, it only punishes the kids.

The Journal editorial concludes that “local voters facing a difficult choice,” because if APS has made poor decisions in leadership that have had financial implications, how can they be trusted with the bond monies? The

answer is simple enough, the bond monies are not general operating funds, nor are they discretionary. They are capital dollars earmarked for specific, budgeted capital projects and historically these funds have been spent in a responsible fashion, with better schools being the result.

Our organization serves as a watchdog to ensure such fiscal accountability.

We urge our neighbors to vote “yes” to the upcoming bond package. It really is a no brainer.

The bond helps kids learn, spurs the construction industry, creates jobs, upgrades the infrastructure and is a wise investment in public education.

Then, after the bond election, roll up your sleeves and get involved in the decision-making and accountability that guarantee quality education for our children. Their lives will be the better for these investments!

*Also signed by the Rev. Christopher McLaren, St. Mark's on the Mesa Episcopal Church, and Monsignor Richard Olona, retired.*

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