

Build it

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Building plans will start moving ahead quickly now that voters approved the \$28.9 million tax levy override for Austin Public Schools in Tuesday's referendum.

More than 5,500 voters came out to the polls, and 53.88 percent voted in favor of the plan.

The result means a new intermediate school for fifth- and sixth-graders will be built, and Woodson Kindergarten Center will get an addition and modifications.

A total of 2,971 people voted yes, while 2,543 voted no.

"The efforts to get people out to the polls really paid off," said a pleased Superintendent David Krenz.

Numbers looked positive with just one precinct left to report Tuesday night, but Peggy Young, chairwoman of the community-organized Vote Yes committee, said she didn't want to jinx anything. And when it was official? "Yay!" she said.

Young said she was "pleasantly surprised" with the results as they came in.

"We knew coming into this it was going to be a battle," Young said. "We had to work for the votes that we got."

Only two of the six precincts had more no votes than yes votes.

School Board Chairman Aaron Keenan said he felt "pretty good" about the vote.

Now it's time to move forward with plans to give the district more space for students, starting with additions and remodeling at Woodson, where it's "desperately needed," Keenan said.

"This is where the school employees do a lot of work now," Keenan said.

Construction at Woodson will start in spring and continue through summer, Krenz said, in order for the six additional classroom spaces to be ready for the 2012-13 school year.

The plan is for the intermediate school to open for the 2013-14 year. Construction also will begin in spring, according to Krenz.

Now that the project is official, Director of Finance and Operations Mark Stotts will work with architects and the construction manager on design.

Stotts said he would like to seek bids on the Woodson project let just after Jan. 1.

"We're really going to have to hit the ground running on that one," Stotts said. "I look forward to working on the project."

The district has a \$110,000 purchase agreement in place for 13.2 acres south of Sixth Avenue Southeast and

east of 15th Street Southeast, just south of Ellis Middle School.

Adding space will help the district cope with projected enrollment increases of 400-500 students in the next four to five years.

The referendum capped a two-year process that included a demography study, a task force and 42 community presentations about the referendum, Krenz said.

"You always work hard in something you truly believe in," Krenz said. "It keeps you working hard, and it keeps you motivated."

The process required a lot of education to get people to understand the need, Stotts said. The task force was a "critical piece" to bringing the referendum to a reality, he said.

"The members of the committee, I think, really need to be commended," Stotts said. "To me, that was the biggest piece of this whole puzzle."