

Talking Points about New York State's Smart Schools Technology Bond Act

Q. What is the Smart Schools Technology Bond Act?

A. Although a part of the 2014 NYS Budget, this proposal must be put before New York State voters this November. The public will be asked to approve \$2 billion in bonds for technology, pre-K construction and security capital projects. Specifically, the bond is intended to provide funding to public and private schools for computer technology and increased bandwidth, security systems, and the construction of new classrooms for full-day prekindergarten programs.

This will be Proposition #3 on the November ballot and will be located on the back of the election ballot where voters might not notice it.

Q. How will this affect school districts?

A. If the bond passes, the allocation for each school district has already been determined by calculating what percent of the state's total school aid went to each district, and then giving each district that same percentage of \$2 billion. Each district was informed how much they would receive from the Smart Schools Bond on the printout of their state aid in April. MCSBA member districts are slated to receive \$93,315,515. Grants range from \$596,725 for our smallest district to \$47,234,577 for RCSD. The majority of our districts will receive \$1-\$3 million.

Q. What are the requirements in order to receive the allocation?

A. If the bond passes, before any funding is distributed, each district needs to submit to the state a "Smart Schools Investment Plan" developed with input from parents, teachers, students, community members and other stakeholders. These plans must then be approved by the Governor's Smart Schools Grant Review board which is a 3 person panel made up of the Commissioner of Education, the state budget director and the SUNY Chancellor. This bond also requires districts to use the funding to purchase and loan classroom technology to nonpublic school students at a rate up to a maximum of \$250 per student times the number of students in a school. Nonpublic schools can only use these loans for instructional technology such as laptops, tablets, computers, servers, and expanding broadband capacity. This free loan would parallel the way districts currently loan textbooks and computers to nonpublic schools.

Q. Why would schools support or not support this Bond Act?

A. If the bond passes, schools will be allocated the money regardless of their support/nonsupport for the proposition. What we know is:

- The Empire Center opposes the bond and questions the logic of bonding technology that will be obsolete before the bond is paid. The Governor's own 2013 capital program and financing plan identified the importance of "eliminating the practice of borrowing to finance...short-term equipment purchases."
- Interest on the bonds, estimated to be \$100-\$130 million per year, arguably could be used to increase state aid to schools.
- Parent groups opposed to high stakes standardized tests oppose the bond act because they believe the purpose of the technology upgrade is to enable computerized testing.
- School districts would benefit from the increased revenue although this money is targeted very specifically and will not be able to be used to offset funding shortfalls in other areas. (See MCSBA position on full funding education at:

<http://www.monroe.edu/webpages/mcsba/files/approved%20full%20funding%20for%20education,%2010-2014.pdf>