

## Levy Topic

# In Lake Washington, Tour of Kirkland's Juanita High School Reveals Serious Deficiencies

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I dearly love the Juanita High School community. Many of my friends' children have graduated from this school or currently attend. Although I don't have children at the school, I am a Juanita PTA member and have attended many sporting and music events, plays, and graduation ceremonies.

I can personally attest to the spirit, pride and warmth that the students, teachers, principal, building staff and parents all feel about their school. Once a Rebel, always a Rebel.

Now voters in the Lake Washington School District have the opportunity to pass a bond that would modernize Juanita High School three years ahead of schedule.

Curious about the needs of the school and having some experience in assessing school infrastructures, I recently toured Juanita High School in the company of Associate Principal Timothy Hupperten and Head Custodian Les Richey.

On the tour, I first observed that the staff and students at Juanita keep their hallways, bathrooms, cafeteria, and classrooms clean and free of graffiti.

Second, I saw that the facilities are way too small for the growing needs of the students. Everywhere I visited, I saw that teachers and students, having been squeezed into tight spaces, have been remarkably resourceful in making good use of that space.

**But most important of all, I came to understand that Juanita High School has serious deficiencies in many essential operating systems, including those for heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, electrical, and plumbing. And the roof leaks.**

For example,

- Even though five portables are in daily use, classrooms are still crowded, averaging 32 students per class with little space for storage, computer stations, or small group meetings. Students in math, social studies, special education, transitional English, and health classes jam the eight classrooms in the portables.
- The science labs were built with lab benches meant to accommodate six groups of four students. The hands-on experience of 32 students in chemistry class is necessarily limited in this setting.
- The school's electrical capacity is limited. Teachers curb their use of electrical devices to avoid blowing fuses. Students have lost their computer work when overloaded circuits popped.

- The school would clearly like to increase its technology capacity. But adding new hardware or wiring must contend with the fact that the school's electrical wiring largely runs underground beneath the school. The school's main building sits on piers creating a space for electrical conduit to run uninterrupted, but accessible only by drilling through the thick concrete pad that supports the building.
- The bathroom facilities are sparse, especially for the girls and disabled students. Over 500 girls rely on just 13 toilets in the girls' two main bathrooms, only one of which is wheelchair-accessible.
- The roof is flat. No amount of repair or retrofit has ever overcome this basic design flaw. Water perennially pools on the roof and eventually finds its way down into Juanita's classrooms, hallways, library, theater, gymnasium, locker rooms and offices, causing expensive damage.
- The gas-powered boiler is too small to properly heat a building that has 18-foot tall ceilings. Although new HVAC ducts were installed in 1985, when the main building was subdivided into smaller classrooms, not all classrooms were properly fitted. As a result, some classrooms are always too hot in the warm months, and too cold in the winter. Staff and students are especially cold and miserable on wintery Monday mornings.

These are costly problems that no amount of elbow-grease and can-do spirit can solve. They affect the education of our children in very serious and profound ways. Our children deserve better.

So, YES I will vote to pass this bond and absolutely encourage you to do the same.

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Now if you're interested in the complete gritty details of my tour, keep reading.

Walking into Juanita High School, you are immediately impressed by the tall 18-foot ceilings that span a frame of concrete pillars and wooden cross-beams as thick as old stereo speakers. Built in 1971 on the "open school concept," the architects enclosed the cavernous space with sturdy, windowless walls and divided the interior into four quads. Narrow skylights rim the top edge of the building.

This then is the core structure that underlies most if not all of the school's many building deficiencies and limits the learning opportunities of our kids.

Properly heating or cooling the tall-ceiling school is nearly impossible. The gas-powered boiler is too small for the job, says Les Richy, the school's head custodian. Richy said he would have to turn the boiler on at 1:00 am Monday morning to ensure enough heat by 7:00 am. Richy gets to school around 5:00 am.

On cold mornings, the school office's manager says she keeps her hat and scarf on while working. Students sit hunched over and shivering in class, hardly of a mind to concentrate on their studies.

Although new HVAC ducts were installed when the quads were divided into smaller classrooms in 1985, not all classrooms were properly fitted. As a result, some classrooms are always too hot in the warm months, and too cold in the winter, said Richy.

Heat rises to the ceiling, leaving the lower areas cold. This is especially problematic for the medically fragile students who, not able to move well, stretch out on soft bean chairs and mattresses on or near the floor.

The lack of windows is a problem. Teachers talk about retreating to their “caves” when it’s time for classes and worry about the negative effects of no natural light on their students’ ability to learn.

Even though five portables are in daily use, classrooms are still crowded, averaging 32 students per class with little space for storage, computer stations, or small group meetings. Students in social studies, special education, transitional English, and health classes jam the eight classrooms in the portables.

The science labs were built with lab benches meant to accommodate six groups of four students. The hands-on experience of 32 students in chemistry class is necessarily limited in this setting. Also, the fume hoods have never worked properly, further limiting the experiments that can be done.

Minimal storage space is a huge issue throughout the school and especially in the gym and music areas. The girls’ shower room is completely given over to the storage of gymnastic mats and other equipment. Music stands line the hallways outside the practice rooms. In a creative adjustment, the school fenced in narrow areas along the gym’s walls to create cage-like storage areas.

Juanita’s roof is flat. No amount of repair or retrofit has ever overcome this basic design flaw. Water perennially pools on the roof and eventually finds its way down into Juanita’s classrooms, hallways, library, theater, gymnasium, locker rooms and offices. Over the years, teachers have lost books and equipment to water damage. Yearly maintenance includes replacing damaged ceiling tiles and repainting spotty walls.

Scheduling and space issues force all 1,100 students to share the same 35-minute lunch. The extremely awkward configuration of the cafeteria’s tiny kitchen and serving counters relative to the cafeteria’s entrances and exits is a traffic nightmare. Hupperten said that the school had to experiment with many traffic flow patterns before settling on the current one.

For a school that daily serves about 1,100 students, Juanita’s bathroom facilities are sparse, especially for the girls and disabled students. The two main girl’s bathrooms contain a total of 13 toilets, of which only one is wheelchair-accessible.

That’s about one toilet for every 42 girls - much less than the state’s building code ratio of 1 to 30. About five times each year, plumbing issues occur in one of the girl’s bathrooms, forcing its closure for the day. On those days, this is a *significant* problem for the girls, said Hupperten.

The boys' bathrooms have old urinals that don't flush easily under the new, more conservative standards for water flows. Richy, unfortunately, has to spend too much time keeping the urinals flowing freely.

The school's electrical capacity is limited. It's not uncommon, especially at crunch time, for students to lose their computer work because of a popped circuit. Teachers in the transition room, where young people with disabilities learn practical life skills, know not to run too many appliances at the same time. Over in the field house, parent volunteers who sell treats at sporting events run the risk of blowing a fuse if they plug in two coffee pots.

The school would clearly like to increase its technology capacity. Currently, the school supports four computer labs and a bank of computers in the library. A few classrooms have the space and electrical capacity to support 3 to 5 computers. All computers are in constant demand, with classes and individuals competing for their use.

But adding new hardware, networking the school's internal operations and connecting with the outside world must deal with the fact that the school's electrical wiring largely runs underground beneath the school. The school's main building actually sits on piers creating a space for electrical conduit to run uninterrupted, but accessible only by drilling through the thick concrete pad that supports the building.

Finally, the potential for Juanita's auditorium and field house to be used as a community resource is severely limited. The auditorium seats only 250 and lacks an automated lighting system. Before each play, the drama teacher climbs at least a 20-foot ladder to manually adjust the ceiling stage lights to particular angles, where they stay for the duration of the play.

The field house has a capacity of 3,500 and 4 stalls in the women's bathroom. On graduation night, when the field house is packed, the lack of bathroom facilities is just one prickly issue. The lack of air conditioning is another. Although the school brings in two giant fans, students and their families and friends often swelter throughout the ceremony.

I could go on. I haven't written about the lack of space and equipment in the transition room for the medically fragile students and the students with disabilities, or the crowded art rooms, or the lack of surveillance cameras and exterior lighting, or the need to update the athletic fields.

Enough is enough. It's time for our community to stand up and demonstrate its commitment to our children and their futures. It's time we voted for the bond. Please vote yes for all three school measures on February's ballot.

**Postscript:**

During my tour I observed that the transition room used to teach students practical life skills is quite crowded and is connected to an even smaller room for medically fragile students. Next year, Juanita's population of students with special needs is expected to increase. It's hard to imagine this space accommodating any more than the 15 students and their teachers and care assistants who already use it.

I also asked teachers in the medically fragile room what they needed to improve their environment, and this is what they said:

1. Window coverings with no cords.
2. Doors that can be opened electronically for students in wheelchairs.
3. At least two wheelchair accessible bathrooms (the area currently has one such room).
4. Non fluorescent lighting in the medically fragile room.
5. A sturdy gate between the transitions room and the room for medically fragile students.  
The teachers need to see into each room but can't keep the door open because they have kids who would wander out. So for safety reasons, a sturdy gate is needed.
6. A mat table (changing table) that has a privacy curtain.
7. A bathroom sink that is large and lower for kids in chairs.
8. A place, other than the crowded kitchen, to wash and sterilize hanging bags and tubes used for feeding.
9. Lower ceilings to hang swings, etc. (Current ceilings are 18 feet above floor).
10. Better traffic flow between rooms.

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