

Greetings:

Coming up in February, voters in North Mason will be asked to vote on a replacement levy for local school operating funds. The last time such a levy was run, voters approved (in 2016) a four-year levy at the rate of \$2.36 per thousand of property values. With the expiration of that levy after 2020, voters will be offered a replacement levy of \$2.36 per thousand of property value. This is the same rate as in 2016, but I do want to give you some explanation of how this works and what this means, to help you decide when voting.

First, the rate being asked for is the same as in 2016, and this is deliberate in that the State of WA allows school districts to ask for no more than \$2.50 per thousand, and while many school districts make that maximum ask, we at NMSD feel it important to not try to get every possible dollar out of the levy just because it is allowed—instead we feel that the level being asked for is sufficient to fund the things we need to do to educate our students, and will help us realize our ambitious goals for our kids. Please note also that this levy is a replacement levy and is not a new tax. The last levy goes away after 2020, and the new one, if approved, will start in 2021.

Next, levy funding, while not rocket science, can be complicated. The \$2.36 rate per thousand translates to a set single dollar figure that the district can collect, and once that dollar figure is set, the amount collected cannot be more than that for the duration of the levy (four years). Each year, the district will collect the same amount of dollars, and that amount is divided among all the property taxpayers in the district and is based on the assessed value of each property. Property values change over time, and often because there is growth and development of the taxable properties in a district, overall property values rise, and the rate of taxation overall can decrease. This has happened in the past four years such that the \$2.36 rate voted for in 2016 is no longer needed to collect the total dollar amount approved. As of now, the effective rate is about \$1.99 per thousand. The proposed levy in February will ask for \$2.36 again, and it is certainly possible that the rate will go down over the following four years due to overall property values going up. This can be confusing, but it works if you remember that the \$2.36 rate is set for the first year based on current property values. The rate translates to a single total dollar amount, and though total dollar amount is adjusted each year due to inflation, it is likely property values will increase more than the projection on the rate per \$1000 will decrease.

Hopefully I haven't confused you because there is more to understanding the levy process, but if you follow the above, you have the gist of what the levy is about in dollar terms. Otherwise, it is also a truth that levy funds are the community's way of supplementing the State allocations to schools for education in order to cover the things the state will not pay for. The State works off a specific funding mechanism that determines how much they will give a district and for what—this is their definition of what it costs to operate the schools. A particularly glaring example of what the state does and does not fund can be seen in their formula for how many custodians and maintenance personnel they think it takes to take care of our NMSD buildings and grounds—their formula allows for a bit over 3 persons to be paid to do all of the grounds, maintenance and custodial duties for all of our school buildings. In fact, we have 18 such staff, and need a couple more at least. Levy funds are how we can pay for this and many other areas that the State does not consider in their funding formulas (this would also include school buses and drivers, food services, health, and many other areas of operating a school district).

There is much more to discuss about the funding of local schools, and how levy dollars are used to support educating our children, so I invite you to stop by the schools and ask for more information, or

even schedule a time to talk with one of the school administrators about the levy. The more you know, the better you can inform yourself for your vote. I'll close by reminding you that levy dollars support learning, whereas bond dollars are for building school buildings; it is a levy you will be asked to vote on in February.

--Art Wightman

Director, District 1

North Mason School District