

WE HEARD YOU!

Loud and clear. There is no truer measure of approval and/or opinion than an election. As an elected body, the only route to official answers is to ask the questions at the ballot box. After years of successful levy requests, and a generous bond approval, you as a community called a “timeout” and told us to check our work. The message received was that our proposal was too complicated, too vague, and too many variables. That message is completely fair and acceptable.

Part of our challenge as a board is to communicate the complexities, both new and previously existing, that exist with public school funding and processes. The attention that the “McCleary Fix” brought to the forefront just adds to the complexity. In this letter, I will make an attempt to give a brief overview and ask that if questions arise, that you reach out and get the clarifications you need.

McCleary:

A common misconception about McCleary is that it would result in “fully funding” public schools. As the Washington State Constitution states in Article 9: “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction, or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.” The State Supreme Court was provided examples of where the state fell short in these areas, mostly special education and basic education funding, and some other components. What the court didn’t rule on was how the state is to create the formula or divvy out money to fulfill the lawsuit. The court did not mandate that the state needed to modernize a funding system that was rooted in the 1970’s.

Even with legislation being approved by the court, the state legislated that local funding levies would still be required to provide services. The state attached rules as to not allow districts the ability to move excess state funding in some categories, to different under-funded categories. As an example. If the state provided North Mason with \$1 million dollars in Learning Assistance Programs (LAP), yet it cost \$700,000 to provide those services, NMSD could not use the \$300,000 surplus in other under-funded categories such as special education or vocational tech. The state would simply take that \$300,000 back at the end of the year (regardless if LAP required more money the next year).

Property Tax

Yes, the state raised our property taxes around \$.84 last year. What is important to understand, is that \$.84 did not go directly to NMSD. It was put into an account and distributed statewide. Due to our assessed value, our return on that amount is not equal to the dollars generated. To make another example, our \$.84 (with 2300 +/- students) goes much farther than Shelton’s \$.84 (with 4,400 +/- students).

“Replacement Levy?”

This was also a common question as the new levy proposal would add roughly \$.17. The argument can be made that if it was a “replacement” the amount asked would be the same. That’s a good point. Short answer: the word “replacement” is required ballot language. Since the current levy is expiring, any levy, in any amount, is legally a replacement levy. If the district was running a levy for a different project, it would then be a “new levy.”

The most common feedback we, as a board, heard was the understanding that a levy was needed. Just not the one presented. The board took heart in that feedback; we heard you, and will be seeking a levy request that provides the basics and maintains status quo. This levy, if approved, will provide about 16% of our general fund budget.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at cpatti@northmasonschoools.org.

Craig Patti, District 5

North Mason School District Board of Directors