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Focus on the February 2010 school levies

Three renewal levies provide essentials—and maintain or lower taxes

While the Issaquah School District's three renewal levies go before residents on the February 9th ballot, many community members already voted on the measures last spring.

That's because throughout April and into May, representatives from numerous constituencies—including parents, teachers, classified staff, businesses, senior citizens, government, and at-large residents—met to collaboratively develop and scour the levy packages before approving them for the school board's final authorization.

"Many voices from across the community contributed to the discussion and analysis of the levies," said committee member Matthew Bott, Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Issaquah Chamber of Commerce. "The committee completed its work feeling confident that the levy package will provide students the educational tools they will need to be successful in our competitive, dynamic workforce."

The citizen committee focused on two goals. First, the levies had to provide essentials for local children: resources to ensure optimal learning, safety, and facility maintenance. Second, the levies had to respect taxpayers' tightening budgets in the midst of a lackluster economy.

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Why school levies?

Three main sources fund public schools: the state government, the federal government, and local levies and bonds.



Because Washington state has not redefined its public-education funding model since 1977, many basic needs such as textbooks and special-education services are not fully covered. Also, there is no specific funding for any technology, school buses, or critical facility repairs. In order to backfill the gap and provide these necessities, districts must ask voters to renew levies every four years and to approve bonds whenever significant construction is necessary.



Levy 1: Renewal Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Levy – classroom learning

The Maintenance and Operations Levy is the only locally approved ballot measure that directly pays for general classroom and operational needs such as special-education services, textbooks and materials, extra-curricular activities, and staff salaries.

That's to say, even if taxpayers approve a construction bond or school-bus levy, the District may not be able to open its new school or run its new bus without an M&O levy to provide funding for staffing and utilities.

If renewed, the M&O Levy will allow the District to collect between \$38 million and \$48 million per year from 2011 to 2014. Put in perspective, this levy will fund 19¢ of every classroom dollar. That

is approximately equivalent to 360 classroom teachers or 425 classified positions (all non-teachers, such as bus drivers and custodians).

Broken down, that equals 12 elementary teachers and two classified staff members at *each* elementary, 17 teachers and three classified staff members at *each* middle school, AND 22 teachers and four classified staff members at *each* high school.

“This is for bread-and-butter operational needs, especially during a time when the state is shrinking its public-school funding allocations,” said Superintendent Steve Rasmussen. “We stretch M&O funds to pay for as many programs and services for students as possible.”

Levy 2:

Renewal School Bus Levy — health, safety, and efficiency



If renewed, the School Bus Levy will provide \$1.7 million in 2011 to purchase 41 buses, enabling the District's fleet to run as safely, cleanly, and efficiently as possible.

By keeping the bus-retirement schedule current with Washington's safety and efficiency standards, this levy will maximize local dollars by qualifying the District to collect state matching funds to offset the cost of new purchases.

"Our commitment is to get students safely to and from school, and there is no room in our fleet for any bus that is unreliable or out of date," said Transportation Director Jo Porter.

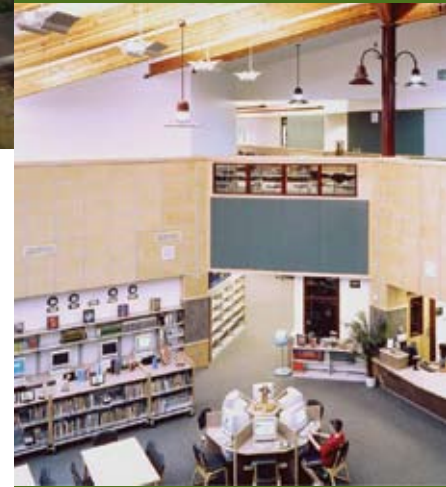
Modern buses also run more efficiently and cleanly, which benefits students and the community. Every dollar saved on fuel and maintenance can instead be used for classroom learning. The Issaquah School District was one of the first in the nation to begin to upgrade its fleet to reduce emissions and pollution by up to 90 percent through the use of special filters and fuel.

Tests show that directly breathing the new buses' exhaust may be as safe as breathing outdoor air, or even safer depending on general air quality. "But most people don't want to try that out for some reason," Porter said with a laugh.



Property value and levies

School districts do not receive more or less money as property values increase or decrease.



Levy 3:

Renewal Capital Levy — classroom technology and critical repairs

The Capital Levy includes two components: \$32.9 million for educational technology and \$5.6 million for critical repairs across the District over the next four years.

The technology dollars are earmarked to replace aging computers on a five-year cycle as well as printers, servers, and document cameras; to conduct staff trainings; to develop online classes and other educational opportunities; to fund school technology specialists; to ensure all classrooms have an ACTIVBoard and electronic student-response system; to implement a wireless network; to purchase safety and efficiency software for transportation operations; to give families online access to student information and grades; and to continue to upgrade District websites, emergency alert systems, and

other e-communications.

“Technology is revolutionizing education and the world,” said Colleen Dixon, Executive Director of Educational Technology. “Our students need to see and use technology in their classrooms. Not only does technology bring curriculum to life, but our students need to be prepared—there will not be any job in the future that will not involve the use of technology in one way or another.”

In addition to educational technology improvements, the Capital Levy will help the community protect its investment in school facilities. Projects here include maintaining and updating heating and cooling systems, fixing roofs, replacing failing kitchen equipment, and repainting facilities inside and out.

When voters approve a levy, they authorize the school district to collect a fixed dollar amount. If no growth occurs in the district's tax base and all property values in the district increase relatively, individuals' tax rates will drop but they will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes. Conversely, if all property values decrease, individuals' tax rates will rise but they will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes.



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Why am I getting this newsletter?

As a resident of the Issaquah School District, you are an important stakeholder in the education of local children. *Focus* newsletter is designed to keep you updated on the work and accomplishments of the District and its students—which contribute to the quality of our community and future. This edition provides factual information about the District's levy measures on the February 9th ballot.

Points of Pride *A few of the reasons you have to be proud of your schools*

Pinocchio comes to Briarwood



Briarwood students recently learned what happens when they tell lies—their noses begin to grow! Or at least that was the case with fourth-grader Arianna Vinup, who played the lead role in the school's production of "Pinocchio." Trying in vain to keep her from going astray was Pinocchio's trusty green conscience Jiminy, played by fifth-grader Kendra Selby.

Moroccan artists show their craft

Artists from Issaquah's sister city, Chefchaouen, Morocco, visited Issaquah High and several other schools in October to give demonstrations of their metal- and wood-working skills. Students were enthralled

by their craft and culture, and they were especially eager to sample the Moroccan tea the artists brought with them!

Chickens sweep national video contest

When the President of the United States asked all students to take greater responsibility for their education, Pine Lake Middle School eighth-grader Jordan Lederman answered his call—with chickens! She submitted a video—featuring Meri, a Rhode Island Red, and Gertrude, a Silkie Bantam—in the U.S. Department of Education's "I Am What I Learn Contest," which instructed students to talk about their personal goals and the role education plays in meeting them in a two-minute film clip. Jordan's hens are quite the convincing actresses, apparently, because her submission beat out more than 600 others! Jordan won \$1,000 and a personal congrats from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

Complete stories at: www.issaquah.wednet.edu/news/