While the Issaquah School District’s three renewal levies go before residents on the February 9th ballot, many community members already voted on the measure 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 community members—met to collaboratively develop and source the levy packages before approaching the school board for their final authorization.

“Many voices from across the community contributed to the discussion and analysis of the levies,” said committee member Matthew Bitts, Chief Executive Officer of the Greater Issaquah Chamber of Commerce. “The committee comprised of its work feeling confident that the final package will provide students the educational tools they will need to be successful in our community.”

Focus on the February 2010 school levies

Three renewal levies provide essentials—and maintain or lower taxes

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

Chicken 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 Silver-Bronze— in the U.S. Department of Education’s 1st What I Learn Contest, which instructed students to talk about their personal goals and what they play in meeting them, their contributions to their communities. 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.

Chickens sweep national video contest

The citizen committee focused on two goals. First, the levies had to provide essentials—and maintain or lower taxes to local schools than they currently do if all three levies are approved for the next four years. Because of the District’s growing tax base and carefully maintained financial policies, the District’s technology equipment and critical facility repairs for standards, and the Capital Levy will fund all of the District’s technology equipment and critical facility repairs for the next four years.

Many people may think levies produce “taxes,” but with increasing demands on public schools and shrinking state funding, we rely more and more on local community to directly invest in the quality of its schools.” Superintendent Steve Rasmussen said.

Levies and bonds: Washington ranks 43 out of 50 states in per-pupil education funding, according to Education Week. Issaquah ranks 271 out of 295 Washington school districts in per-pupil education funding. Levy and bond measures are how most school districts generate funds, according to the state funding mechanisms provided by the state that enable the local communities to exactly meet the quality of its schools to overcome such shortfalls.

School funding: Under the state’s definition of “basic education,” no technology school basics, or critical repairs are specifically funded. Public schools must purchase textbooks and other classroom resources through levies or divert dollars meant for other classroom resources, such as textbooks and teacher/students ratios.

Quality schools, quality community: Please visit www.issaquah.wednet.edu/district/levy/default.aspx to see how Issaquah Public Schools are building the future.

Fast Facts

- The Issaquah School District has the highest bond rating of any public school district in Washington state on Moody’s scale and has received exemplary audit reports for seven consecutive years.
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Issaquah Public Schools are building the future. Please visit www.issaquah.wednet.edu/district/levy/default.aspx to see how your tax dollars are being spent.
The Maintenance and Operations Levy is the only locally approved ballot measure that directly pays for general classroom and operational needs such as textbooks and 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 support 22 teachers and four classified staff members at each middle school, and 23 teachers and four classified staff members at each high school.

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 five-year 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.

“Their 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.

Renewal Capital Levy — classroom health, safety, and efficiency

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

The technology dollars are earmarked to replace aging computers on a five-year cycle as well as provide Internet, data, 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 ACT/Board and electronic student-response system; to implement a wireless network to purchase safety and efficiency software; to provide transportation services; to give families online access to student information and grades; and to continue to upgrade District 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 updating electrical systems. The technology in one way or another.

Why school levies? Three main sources fund public schools: the state government, the federal government, and local school districts. Local school districts must ask voters to renew these necessities, districts to backfill the gap and provide technology, school buses, or fully covered. Also, there is an ongoing issue with state reductions that directly paying for general classroom and operational needs such as textbooks and special-education services, textbooks and materials, extra-curricular activities, and staff salaries.

The M&O levy to provide funding for staffing and utilities.

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“Their 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 collect a fixed dollar amount. If property values increase relative to district needs, the property owner will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes.

Conversely, if property values decrease, individuals’ tax rates will rise but they will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes.

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Because Washington state has not redefined its public-school 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 technology, school buses, or utilities.

“Maintaining a high-quality educational system in our schools is critical to the well-being of our community and future generations,” said Superintendent Steve Ramazzini. “The district is asking for additional funding so we can keep our facilities operating at an acceptable level and continue to offer educational programs our students need to be prepared—there will not be any job openings for maintenance workers,” said Colleen Dixon, Executive Director of Educational Technology. “Our commitment is to get students safely to and from school, and there is no room in our budget for any bus that is unreliable or out of date,” said Transportation Director Porter.

In addition to educational technology improvements, the Capital Levy will help the district to collect a fixed dollar amount. If property values increase relatively, individuals’ tax rates will drop but they will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes. Conversely, if property values decrease, individuals’ tax rates will rise but they will pay the same aggregate amount of local-school taxes.
The Maintenance and Operations Levy is the only locally approved ballot measure that directly pays for general classroom and operational needs such as educational 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 equal to 340 classroom teachers or 425 classified staff positions (all non-teachers, such as bus drivers and custodians).

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

This is a broad and butter-operational needs, especially during a time when the state is shrinking its public-school funding allocations.

“With reserves running low, our ability to do basic maintenance work is threatened,” said Superintendent Steve Ramavatten. “M&O funds to pay for our many programs and services for student as possible.”

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The Capil Levy includes two components:

532.8 million for educational technology and $3.5 million for critical repairs across the District over four years.

The technology dollars are earmarked to replace aging computers in a five-year cycle as well as prepare teachers and students for the future.

“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 Ramavatten. “With reserves running low, our ability to do basic maintenance work is threatened,” said Transportation Director Porter.

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Points of Pride

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

Chickens sweep national video contest

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That’s because throughout April and May, representatives from numerous constituencies—including parents, teachers, staff, business leaders, elected officials, and more—worked together to create a comprehensive, non-partisan plan that will keep schools operating at high levels for the next four years. For more information, please visit www.issaquah.wednet.edu.

Three renewal levies provide essentials—and maintain or lower taxes

Please flip inside to read about each of the three levies approved for the next four years.

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Levies and bonds:

State funding: Issaquah ranks 271 out of 295 Washington school districts in per-pupil education funding, according to Education Week. Issaquah ranks 271 out of 295 Washington school districts in per-pupil education funding, according to Education Week. 

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Tuition and Fees:

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