



ISSAQUAH SCHOOL DISTRICT
565 NW Holly St. Issaquah, WA 98027
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Issaquah, 98027

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 is intended to provide factual information related to Issaquah School District's February 11, 2014 election.

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

The Issaquah School Board Swears in New Member and Elects New President



Family members looked on as Superintendent Ron Thiele administered the oath of office to newly elected

board member, Lisa Callan, (*left*) and second term board member Marnie Maraldo (*right*) at the December 11, 2013 board meeting. As is customary at the December meeting, the board reorganized, electing Mrs. Maraldo to serve as board president.

Brian Deagle, as immediate past president, received a special gavel and thanks from Superintendent Thiele for his service.

Meteorologist Talks Weather at Issaquah Middle School



King 5 meteorologist Jeff Renner spent an engaging hour demonstrating principles of atmospheric science and helping students better understand how meteorologists gather data, interpret weather maps and make forecasts.

Complete stories at www.issaquah.wednet.edu



Issaquah School District community newsletter | January 2014 | Vol. 19 No. 2 | Learning locally, competing globally | www.issaquah.wednet.edu



Focus on the February 2014 School Levy Renewals

Three renewal levies provide essentials while maintaining stable tax rates for homeowners

Three renewal levies will go before voters in the Issaquah School District on the February 11, 2014 special election ballot. The measure is the result of many hours of careful consideration by a committee of parents, teachers, classified staff, business representatives, senior citizens, government, and at-large residents.

The committee met to collaboratively analyze the district's needs and develop a fiscally responsible levy package that would provide essentials for local children to

ensure optimal learning, safety, and facility maintenance.

After thoroughly evaluating the levy packages line by line and in consultation with experts, the committee produced a recommendation, approved by the Superintendent and the Issaquah School Board, for a Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Levy, School Bus Levy, and Capital Levy that will keep schools operating at current levels for the next four years while keeping local school taxes stable for residents.

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Each of the levies is a renewal, meaning it will take the place of a current levy that is expiring. If approved, the M&O Levy will provide 21 percent of the District's operating budget, the School Bus Levy will ensure the District's bus fleet meets the state's safety and efficiency standards, and the Capital Levy will fund all of the District's technology equipment and critical facility repairs for the next four years.

"People are often surprised to learn that things we consider as basic to providing an education today, such as computers and software, are not paid for by the State," said Superintendent Ron Thiele. "Levies are the mechanism that allows the community to invest in technology for our classrooms and to help purchase the curriculum and teaching materials needed to deliver a top-notch education in today's world."

Because of the District's growing tax base and carefully managed debt structure (earning it the highest bond rating of any Washington school district), the levies will keep residents' taxes stable while still accounting for growing student needs. Exact tax amounts will depend on the actual number of properties in the District and their value at the time of collection; however, financial experts estimate that over the next four years if all levies are renewed, it will mean about a 1.7% increase for an average homeowner.

ISD's Current Levies are Expiring

The levies on the February 11 ballot are not new taxes. Voters are being asked to renew existing levies that, without voter approval, will expire December of 2014. No new programs are being funded by these levies. If renewed, they will maintain the district's current program and operational needs.

Bonds or Levies What is the difference?

People often confuse bonds and levies. The easiest way to remember the difference is **B**onds are for **B**uildings and **L**evies are for **L**earning.

Washington State does not fund regular building or maintenance of public schools. Instead, local voters approve school bonds. Similar to a mortgage, bonds are paid for over about 20 years, helping to keep costs lower for taxpayers. State law mandates that bond dollars be used only for building and maintenance, not for classroom operations.

Levy dollars support the classroom operations and help districts close the gap between what the state pays for education and the actual cost—in Issaquah, that's 21 cents of every classroom dollar! Capital levies pay for technology—including hardware, software and infrastructure—and critical repairs to items such as HVAC systems and roofs and security systems. Transportation is another expense that is not fully funded by state dollars. School bus levies allow the district to collect state funding to offset the cost of bus purchases.

Fast Facts

- **Tax stability:** Over the next four years if all levies are renewed, it will mean about a 1.7% increase for an average homeowner.
- **Financial management:** The Issaquah School District has the highest bond rating (Aaa) of any public school district in Washington State on Moody's scale and has received exemplary audit reports for eleven consecutive years.
- **Levies and bonds:** State dollars do not fully fund basic education. Levy and bond measures are the sole funding mechanisms provided by law that enable the local community to directly invest in the quality of its schools and to overcome operational shortfalls.
- **State funding:** Under the state's definition of "basic education," no technology, school buses, or critical repairs are specifically funded. Public schools must purchase these items through levies. Otherwise those dollars meant for classroom support may be diverted for other purposes.

Levy 1

Renewal Maintenance and Classroom Operations (M&O) Levy—Classroom Learning

The Maintenance and Classroom 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.

Basic education isn't fully funded by the state. Therefore, school districts must ask voters in their community to bridge the gap between state funding and the cost of basic education with local school operations levies. The levy represents 21% of the Issaquah School District's total budget. The consequence of losing this funding would result in reductions in staff and programs.

If renewed, the Maintenance and Operations Levy will allow the District to collect between \$44 million and \$54 million per year from 2015 to 2018. Put in perspective, this levy will fund 21 cents of every classroom dollar. That is approximately equivalent to 485 classroom teachers or 575 classified positions (all non-teachers, such as bus drivers, secretaries and custodians).

Why School Levies?

There are three main sources fund public schools: the state government, the federal government, and local levies and bonds. Under the current funding model, Washington State does not fully pay for basic instructional needs such as textbooks and curriculum materials, or services for special needs students. Also, there is no specific funding for technology, transportation, 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 2 Renewal School Bus Levy—Health, Safety, and Efficiency

If renewed, the School Bus Levy will provide \$1.7 million in 2015 to purchase 71 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.

Property Value and Levies

School districts do not receive more or less money as property values increase or decrease. 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 total amount of local-school taxes. Conversely, if all property values decrease, individuals' tax rates will rise but they will still pay the same total amount of local-school taxes.

Levy 3

Renewal Capital Levy—Classroom Technology and Critical Repairs

The Capital Levy includes two components: \$41.8 million for educational technology and \$10.2 million for critical repairs across the District over the next four years.

The technology dollars in this levy will be used 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 and staff training; to upgrade wireless network and Internet access; to purchase safety and efficiency software for transportation operations; to develop online classes/educational opportunities; and to continue to upgrade District websites, emergency alert systems, and other e-communications.

“Technology is revolutionizing education and the world,” says 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 one 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, critical repairs, and safety and security upgrades.

For additional information about the Issaquah School District—including details about the Levy Development Committee and a tax estimator for the average homeowner—please visit the district website, www.issaquah.wednet.edu.

