

# North Mason to re-run school support levy in April

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NORTH MASON — Following the [failure of its school support levy on Feb. 11](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2020/02/11/bremerton-school-funding-measures-passing-preliminary-results/4729731002/) ([/story/news/local/2020/02/11/bremerton-school-funding-measures-passing-preliminary-results/4729731002/](https://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2020/02/11/bremerton-school-funding-measures-passing-preliminary-results/4729731002/)), North Mason School District will go back to voters with a similar proposal on April 28.

The school board on Feb. 20 approved a measure to collect \$5,650,615 per year for four years — for a total of \$22.6 million — beginning in 2021. The estimated property tax rate is \$2.16 per \$1,000 of assessed value in each year of the levy.

School districts use local levies to supplement the state's basic education apportionment. Districts are allowed to run up to two levy measures per calendar year. Superintendent Dana Rosenbach said if the second levy fails, the district is in for a reduction in force.

"If we don't have a levy in 2021, we have very significant staffing cuts that will have to be made," Rosenbach said. "We do need the money. McCleary (the court case that resulted in an increase in the state's basic education funding) didn't fund public schools in any way."



Dana Rosenbach is the superintendent of the North Mason School District (Photo: Contributed)

The local levy makes up more than 16% of North Mason's budget, according to its website. The levy would help pay for items like school safety, teachers' coaching, paraeducators, early childhood education, extracurricular activities, school counselors and nurses. North Mason's website states that local levy funds also make up for shortfalls in transportation and special education funding.

The levy that failed would have generated \$25.8 million over four years beginning in 2021. Annual collection amounts would have ranged from just less than \$6 million in 2021 to \$6.93 million in the last year of the levy.

The estimated rate for the measure that failed Feb. 11 was \$2.36 per \$1,000. The school board heard from district residents who voted "no" that the rate was too high, according to Rosenbach. The board considered several scenarios before approving the collection amount that would result in \$2.16 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

In 2019, districts were restricted by the state to a local levy rate of no more than \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value. The Legislature, responding to some districts' complaints, raised the levy cap to \$2.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value or \$2,500 per student (plus an annual adjustment for inflation), whichever results in the lowest

total collection amount.

North Mason School District has about 2,400 students and an annual budget this school year of \$34.5 million.

Rosenbach says even if the school support levy passes, the district will need to manage resources carefully. A significant new expense involves a restructured state school employee benefits system that the district must pay into even for employees who opt out of benefits, Rosenbach said. The estimated cost to the district of the new benefits plan is \$1 million per year.

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"It's going to be tight because (the levy) doesn't cover all the new expenses," Rosenbach said. "We're going to have to look at our planning and figure out how we can serve the needs of all our students while tightening our belts."

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