



SOUTH KITSAP
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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SKSD board ponders advancing special levy request

Measure could be on February ballot

By Bob Smith

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PORT ORCHARD — South Kitsap School District's board of directors is considering asking voters in February to approve a local levy that would replace an educational and operations measure they approved in 2017.



The school district did not announce a funding amount of the proposed levy at its virtual board meeting Wednesday. The levy passed in 2017 approved the collection of \$25,520,460 in 2021. In November 2018, South Kitsap voters approved a four-year capital levy, in which \$5,476,220 was approved for collection in 2021.

The proposed Educational Program and Operations Levy that directors are discussing would address funding deficits the school district says it is facing, particularly in the areas of special education instruction and hiring support staff.

Jennifer Farmer, SKSD's assistant superintendent of finance and operations, told the board that the district receives funding from the state to pay for just under two full-time school nurse positions. She said the district depends on the E&O levies to fund additional librarians and school counselors, as well as art and music program specialists. The assistant superintendent said the special levy would fund about 15 percent of the school district's educational and operations budget.

Without the financial help provided by a proposed levy, Farmer said SKSD will not be able to fully fund special education and support staff for programs such as music and art, and wouldn't be able to replace obsolete computer technology.

"Things like librarians and art are nearly completely funded by our local levy," she said. "Those funds are not provided by the state."

During the board meeting, members also certified the collection amount for the 2021 existing levy. Director John Berg said the updated collection amount for 2021, based on the Kitsap County Assessor's Office assessed value of properties in the district, came in at a couple of cents under the established rate of \$2.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

Berg proposed an amendment to reduce the levy's collection rate next year to \$23,300,000, which would reportedly shave about 20 cents from the \$2.50 per-thousand rate of collection. The board member said such a move would be an acknowledgment by the district of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the district and the community.

Berg said the district would be better positioned to ask voters to pass a levy measure next year if the board trimmed its existing levy amount in consideration of the pandemic's impact on district property owners and the school district.

Three other board members, however, disagreed that such a reduction would make good financial sense for the district and its students.

“I believe our district needs all the money that we can get. The voters have approved every levy in the past many years, and the majority supports education,” Liz Sebren said during the Zoom meeting.



Rebecca Diehl also weighed in. “I think we absolutely need [the full amount] — not less and not more,” she said. “And with the state possibly reducing its funding, the levy will be even more valuable to the district.”

After discussion, board members voted 3-2 in favor of collecting the full levy amount approved in 2017. Berg and board member Jeff Daily opposed the resolution.

Superintendent Tim Winter said that while a decision whether to place a new levy on the ballot early next year wasn’t on the meeting agenda, he said board members will need to decide at their Nov. 18 meeting whether to advance a Feb. 9 special levy in order to meet the state deadline of Dec. 11.

Board President Eric Gattenby said he agreed with moving forward with a special levy in February.

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