

MERIDIAN MATTERS

SCHOOL LEVY INFORMATION

by Burton Dickerson



Election Date: April 27, 2004

WHAT IS A SCHOOL LEVY?

In Washington, public school funding is provided by a system that combines basic state support with local school levies known as Maintenance and Operation (M&O) Levies. This system has been in place since Washington became a state and is authorized in the State Constitution (Article VII, Section 2). A school levy means that school district residents vote to provide funding for the local school system through a portion of the property tax.

SCHOOL LEVY TO REPLACE EXPIRING LEVY

On April 27, the Meridian School District will ask voters to approve a four-year school levy. *THIS IS NOT A NEW TAX.* When one levy expires, citizens must vote, as they have over the years, to *continue* providing local school support through the levy. The current school levy will expire at the end of 2004. The levy on the April 27 ballot will *replace* the expiring levy and will provide school funding for the next four years (2005-2008).

LEVY PROVIDES DOLLARS FOR MANY SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Levy dollars make up the difference between what the State pays and what it actually costs to operate our public schools. State allocations and federal funding provide only a portion of the total amount needed to operate public schools. Local funding through school levies makes up the difference. In Meridian, this is approximately 14.5% of our total general fund budget each year. **Levy dollars support the following programs/activities, and these programs could be cut or substantially reduced if the levy fails a second time:**

- Classroom Teaching Positions to Provide Elective Courses and to Keep Class Sizes Smaller
- Specialist Teaching and School Support Positions such as Elementary and Middle School Music Teachers, Computer Teachers at Elementary Level, School Nurse, Drug/Alcohol Prevention Specialist, Information Systems Manager, School Counselors
- School Bus Transportation for Students
- New Textbooks, Teaching Supplies and Staff Training
- Principals and Assistant Principal
- Librarians, Paraeducators, Student Monitors, Clerical Staff and Custodians
- Computer Technology Support Budget
- Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment and Support Staff (responsible for meeting state and federal academic standards and for obtaining and managing over \$700,000 in grants)
- Extra Transportation — Field Trips and Co-curricular Trips
- Co-curricular Student Activity Programs (Includes all Sports Programs for Middle School and High School, Band, Choir, Chess Club, Drama, Honor Society, Knowledge Bowl, Math Team, Mock Trial, Class Advisors, Key Club, Yearbook, Outdoor Education for Grade 6, Math Olympiad, Odyssey of the Mind, History Day, Science Olympiad)
- Utilities and Maintenance
- Special Education Programs and Services

TAX STATEMENT CLARIFICATION

In the itemized listing on property tax statements, the Meridian School Levy is listed as Meridian School #505 M&O. The present Meridian School Levy will expire at the end of December 2004.

INFORMATION ON TAX RATES

For school levies, the levy rate may fluctuate depending on changes in assessed valuation (including construction of new businesses and housing, etc.), but the approved levy amount collected does not change.

Examples:

- If the levy rate is \$3.26/\$1,000 of assessed property value, the yearly amount collected from the owner of a home valued at \$150,000 would be \$489.
- If the home in the previous example in-

creases in value to \$165,000 and other homes increase in value in the same proportion, the levy rate would drop to \$2.96/\$1,000 and owner would still pay \$489.

- If new construction (residential, commercial, industrial) adds to the total assessed value of property in the district, the levy rate would decrease, and the owner of the home mentioned previously would pay less than \$489.

We now know that the current 2004 tax rate for the levy has dropped to \$3.10, substantially lower than the rate previously approved by voters (\$3.46). The proposed levy will not go into effect until the current levy expires. When it does, the rate is projected to be \$3.26 per \$1,000 of assessed property valuation or less. (The actual rate is often lower than the estimated or projected rate approved by voters.)

The following table shows the estimated levy rate and actual levy amounts previously approved by voters for the levy that expires at the end of 2004 as well as the projected levy rate and proposed levy amounts for the current levy request that will provide funding for 2005-2008:

TAX YEAR	APPROVED TAX RATE	APPROVED LEVY AMOUNT
2003	\$3.46	\$1,625,000
2004	\$3.46	\$1,675,000
TAX YEAR	PRO- JECTED TAX RATE	PROPOSED LEVY AMOUNT
2005	\$3.26	\$1,820,000
2006	\$3.26	\$1,875,000
2007	\$3.26	\$1,930,000
2008	\$3.26	\$1,990,000

An increase in the levy amount is made possible while maintaining a relatively low levy rate because of growth in the total assessed value of property in the district. Sixty percent (60%) of recent substantial increases in the assessed property value within the district were the result of new construction.

Increases in the levy amount are necessary to keep pace with rising costs to maintain and operate current school programs.

LEVY EQUALIZATION

Levy Equalization is additional state funding that a “poorer” district receives to help equalize available resources. If the levy is approved, the district will receive about \$368,000 in State levy equalization funds each year. **This funding is lost if the levy is not passed.**

**CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SHAPES LEVY DECISIONS**

A Citizens Advisory Committee, including over twenty parents and community members, reviewed district financial needs and made recommendations to the School Board regarding the levy election. In addition, the district recently held a community forum to receive input on the levy.

BENEFITS OF A FOUR-YEAR LEVY

School districts have the option of presenting levy proposals for 1, 2, 3 or 4 year terms. The

Citizens Advisory Committee has recommended a four-year levy due to the following advantages:

- Reduced election costs
- Improved stability of funding
- Reduced time and effort on levy work
- Alignment with other area districts

SENIOR CITIZEN TAX EXEMPTION

You may be eligible for an exemption. Senior Citizens (61 years or older) pay no special levy costs if their gross household income is less than \$30,000. Senior Citizens must apply for an exemption at the Whatcom County Assessor’s Office. Call 676-6790 for more information on this exemption.

POLLING PLACES

The polling places for Meridian voters shown below are as follows: For more information, contact the Elections Department by calling 676-6740.

PRECINCT	POLLING PLACE
Bellingham 92, 131	Birchwood Presbyterian Church, 400 Meadowbrook Court
Ferndale Twp 1, 7	Laurel Community Baptist Church, 162 W. Laurel Road
Ten Mile 2, 3	New Life Fellowship, 810 E. Pole Road
Van Wyck 2	Irene Reither Primary School, 954 E. Hemmi Road