Good Afternoon,

Those of you who are going out for levies in February face an entirely new set of variables to consider in the communication strategies you develop related to those ballot measures. ESD 189 recently convened a group of superintendents in that region to work collaboratively on their levy communication strategies. As part of that session WASA was asked to support the cost of a communications specialist to help advise the group. We agreed, based on the assumption that any information created would be useful for superintendents across the state who are facing the same challenge.

To provide this support we contracted with Arlene Hulten and Mary Waggoner, two experienced PIO’s who have recently retired. They created the attached presentation to help provide guidance to the ESD 189 superintendents. If you’re running a levy in February, this information may be useful for you as well.

In addition to this attachment, we also sent superintendents a white paper recently from Jim McNeill at the Foster Pepper law firm. That paper addresses the latitude districts should have under this new law in creating acceptable ballot language. If you missed that email you can access the document on our website through the following link:


Good luck and have a safe Halloween.

Bill

Dr. Bill Keim
Executive Director | WASA | 825 Fifth Avenue SE, Olympia 98501
tel 360.489.3651 | fax 360.352.2043 | bkeim@wasa-oly.org | wasa-oly.org
Enrichment levy convening
October 23, 2017
Who we are

Arlene Hulten, former Lake Stevens Director of Communications

Mary Waggoner, former Wenatchee, Snohomish, Issaquah and Everett Director of Communications

What’s today’s goal?

Clear, honest, uniform messages for school district communities about:

• 2017 Legislative work in progress to amply fund K-12 schools
• Why school districts need Educational Program and Operations levies

In other words, how can we negotiate the ambiguity of school funding in flux at the same time we secure local funding to continue existing programs?
Today’s landscape

- **Last-minute**, July school funding decision increased state school tax and reduced local levy authority.

- **Property tax shift** created to lower local school tax burden and “shift” that burden to the state.

- **Public may be surprised** at increased state school tax. *(Advisory vote on Nov. ballot)*

- **Public may expect** reduced local school tax.

- **McCleary Decision** not widely followed or understood by general public.

July action driven by Supreme Court order to “amply” fund K-12 schools – *The McCleary Decision*
What we know

• **Legislative best efforts** fell short:
  • Property tax shift came with restrictions that reduce local control. Restrictions hamper district’s ability to use local money to continue meeting unique, local needs.
  • Two “formulas” to calculate local Educational Program and Operations’ levies have an unintended consequence – wide funding gaps from one district to another – funding inequity.
  • **2018 session** MIGHT change some aspects of July decision. In the meantime, school is in session; communities’ students deserve and expect quality education, existing levies will expire, levy resolution deadline looms.
What we know; why local levies needed

• How the new state budget plan fell short:
  • **Does not** pay 100% of cost to meet special education students’ educational needs.
  • **Does not** pay to honor existing local agreements made in good faith with school staff.
  • **Does not** pay the full cost to transport students safely to and from school.
  • **Does not** pay to build new classrooms to reduce class size.
  • **Does not** pay for technology students must use to become responsible, successful, productive citizens of tomorrow.
  • **Does not** pay for teacher training days.
  • **Does not** pay for (insert what resonates with your district.)
  • **Restricts** local control of local money, preventing districts’ use of local money for unique, local needs.
What we can do

• Call levy **Replacement Educational Programs and Operations Levy**
  • The requirement to use “Enrichment Levy” is not for 2018.

• **Clarify for community** what levy funds (will buy) to ensure district’s quality education programs continue in safe, well maintained and clean schools

(What resonates with your stakeholders?)

“Although EHB 2242 uses the term “enrichment,” permitted expenditures include programs and services that have historically been funded by general fund levies.”

~Jim McNeill, Foster Pepper
What we can do: Explain use of funds

Our levy will:

• Pay for transporting students safely to and from school *(backfilling what state does not cover)*
• Pay for qualified substitute teachers
• Pay for educational help for students with special needs *(backfilling what state and federal funding does not cover)*
• Pay for educational technology students need today to succeed tomorrow
• Pay for added extended days and more days of school
• Pay for extra curricular programs
• Pay for keeping schools and grounds safe, functional and clean *(Maintenance today reduces costs tomorrow)*
• Pay for staff training *(or professional development)*
• Pay for *(insert what resonates with your district)*
Good news, cautions, suggestions

From the 2017 PiperJaffray Washington Education Survey

• **Voter mood is upbeat** (Going in right direction. 2002-2017, 92% of state school levies passed!)

• **Grades for district performance** and specific activities are at all-time highs. *(More public approval of public schools)*

• **Voters are aware** of funding issues; consider education funding as top priority. *(Does that mean willingness to pay more?)*

• **Support for generic funding measures** is stronger than expected. *(Will that translate to levies?)*

• **No single source of info** is enough. 50% get info from district and school controlled sources; 50% elsewhere.

• **Create a plan** to reach your intended audiences with accurate, timely information. *Inoculate, inoculate, inoculate*

• **Use messages** relevant to your community.

• **Use social media**: it’s how parents, staff and students get info

• **Use student pictures**: eye-catching, BIG, heart-felt, heart strings, include performing arts
Some tools

- **Consistent, crafted messages** for print, e-news, web, social media (same language – PDC)

- **Graphics**

- **Q&A proactive AND responsive**

- **Local media**, including neighborhood blogs

- **Group contacts** – Bargaining units, all staff meetings, PTA, service clubs, city leaders, ministerial associations

- **Remember** – you are running a levy every day, every year; consistently tell your positive stories about students learning and success AND fiscal accountability

*Photos from Camas SD bond material*
Consistent message suggestions

About EHB 2242

• The state’s new funding model is a work in progress. It is a step in the right direction. As with all complicated legislation, it has rough spots and problem areas.

• It was intended to comply with the State Constitution and lower local school taxes by increasing state property taxes. (Create graph that depicts your district’s levy collection over past four years compared to new, proposed rate.)

Comparing State General Fund and Local Levy amounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018-19*</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-20</td>
<td>?%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Because in 2018 and 2019, levy and state funding will differ each year, each district should take a look at how they want to represent this.
Consistent message suggestions

About EHB 2242

• **Property tax shift came with restrictions** that reduce local control. Restrictions hamper district’s ability to use local money to continue meeting unique, local needs.

• **Tell your story, for example:** “Our school district will receive $2.4 million in new state money. However, we have local control of only $300,000 of that new state money. That leaves a gap of approximately $2.1 million. So, we are asking voters to renew *(or replace)* our local levy to continue meeting needs locally.”
Consistent message suggestions

About your Replacement Educational Programs & Operations Levy

• This is a replacement of the levy voters approved in 20XX.

• This continues funding for programs our community says are important for our students and schools. (List what resonates with your audience.)

• The proposed X-year levy asks voters to approve (less than; same amount as) they said “yes” to X years ago

• Our school board is committed to rolling back any levy dollars not used (as we have done (how many times?) in the past. That promise is written into the levy’s legal documents. (use if this applies)

• Showing a stable or “flat” or decreasing local tax rate gets positive voter support according to 2017 PiperJaffray Washington Education survey.
Proactive & responsive Q&A

“You are getting more money from the state. Why do you also need a local levy? OR Schools are fully funded now. The legislature fixed it. Why are you asking for a levy?”

School funding is a work in progress. In July, state legislators increased state property taxes with the intent of lowering local school taxes, not eliminating local school taxes. It’s a good concept and step in the right direction. But not perfect. Two reasons:

• The funding formulas in the new law create uneven gaps in how much different districts can ask voters to approve. This means some districts can ask voters for more money per student than others. Once again, this is not an equitable solution for all students and districts in the state.

• The state money must be spent in very specific ways. Those restrictions eliminate much of our local control for programs our community wants in schools.
“Teacher contracts are out of control. Too much levy money goes to salaries, especially TRI. The legislators took away TRI pay, right?”

The legislature expressed some concern about TRI pay. Districts asked for help and clear guidance from the legislature about TRI and about good faith bargaining with school staff.

That guidance did not come with the new law in July.

We have negotiated in good faith with our school staff. We must honor the commitments in existing employee contracts.

The new law lacks clarity about equitable pay district-to-district for those responsible for our community’s children.
Proactive & responsive Q&A

“My ballot asks whether I approve the new state property tax. I don’t; what does that mean for school funding?”

Advisory Vote Number 18 is just that – an “advisory” vote. In July, legislators increased state property taxes for schools. They intended this action to lower local school taxes. The “property tax shift” is one way the legislature hoped to meet the Supreme Court’s order to amply fund public schools.

State school funding is a work in progress. The legislature will continue working on solutions, and this Advisory Vote is a way to hear from the public about their work. The results of Advisory Votes are not binding.

In the meantime, our existing local levy will expire after next school year. We are asking voters to replace it, continuing the tradition of supporting student learning needs.
Create a tagline

• Levies – sustain high quality schools *(strong public awareness that good schools improve quality of life in community)*

• Levies – complete child’s whole education

• Levies – local support for our community’s children

• Levies – maintain tradition of local support of students

• Levies – continuing the tradition

• Levies – XXXX number of reasons to vote

• Levies are for learning; bond are for buildings
Combine words & pictures

8000 reasons to VOTE
Now …

• **Prep your Q&A (and add to it as questions emerge)** What are your community members, your staff, your legislators, your parents likely to ask?

• **Tune in to emerging news about EHB 2242:** i.e. Supreme Court decision and OSPI stance will create questions. What’s on social media? What’s the news from neighboring districts?

• **Craft your messages; stick to them** You may be tired of them, most haven’t even heard them

• **You know best; you know your community**