

Core Issues with School Funding

DRAFT FAQs FOR SCHOOLS FACING FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Making Budget Cuts After Passing a Levy (perhaps best answered reactively as part of a FAQ)

Q: Didn't we just pass a levy to provide funding for schools? Why are we now facing cuts?

A: Understandably, our community members may have questions about the recent passage of our local levy and the fact that our school district is now making adjustments to reduce the budget shortfall. The bottom line is that our levy is a separate, local enrichment funding source, intended for enrichment opportunities. Fully funding basic education is the constitutional responsibility of the state, but unfortunately, Washington is not fulfilling its duty to fund basic education.

- Voters approved our local levy this past [insert levy election month], and our district is very thankful for local support. While local tax measures are important, they are intended to fund things that “enrich” basic education, such as extracurriculars like sports, drama, and music programs.
- Local levy dollars are very important. The levy approved by our local voters is preserving the programs that our community values but that are not considered “basic education” and therefore not funded by the state.
- The state of Washington is supposed to fully fund “basic education,” but the state doesn't provide enough money to schools to cover their actual basic education expenses. As a result, local levies (a separate locally levied enrichment funding source) are increasingly tapped to pay for the rising costs of things that should be paid for by the state.
- **Opportunity to explain how schools get funding:** Schools get funding from a few primary sources - the state and federal government, locally approved funding measures (levies and bonds), and other miscellaneous sources like grants. These funds all exist in different “accounts” and support many different things.
 - State funds are allocated based on a funding allocation formula called the Prototypical School Funding Formula, which uses an “average school” and its needs to assign funding for things that qualify as “basic education.” Basic education does not include many of the “enrichment” programs that students and communities count on, like sports, drama, choir, and band, for example.
 - Local levies and bonds are brought forward as voting measures and must be approved by local communities in order to begin collecting money for schools. Levies support education services and resources outside of what the state considers essential “basic education”. Basic education does NOT include extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, band, drama), facility updates and new school buildings, updated technology, etc.

Reactive responses to suggestions to cut the school superintendent position.

Q: Why don't you just cut the superintendent position to make up for the funding shortfall?

A: While it's understandable that community members are looking for solutions to financial challenges, the elimination of the superintendent's position would not make up the funding shortfall and could make problems worse for the district.

- The superintendent's salary is only _____% of the overall budget, while the budget shortfall accounts for _____% of the overall budget. The budget challenges we face cannot be solved by eliminating one or even several positions.
- The superintendent serves as the "CEO" of the school system and eliminating a position that is central to many important functions could destabilize our district and compromise our ability to deliver high-quality education.
- The superintendent's role is integral to the smooth operation and strategic direction of the school district, and their expertise and leadership are essential, especially during times of financial hardship.
 - **Leadership Role:** The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the school district, responsible for implementing the policies set by the school board and overseeing the day-to-day operations of all schools within the district. This role is crucial for maintaining a consistent and effective educational environment across the district.
 - **Expertise and Experience:** Superintendents are highly qualified professionals with extensive experience in education and administration. Their expertise is vital in making informed decisions that impact the quality of education and the well-being of students and staff.
 - **Compliance and Legal Responsibilities:** Superintendents ensure that the district complies with all state and federal educational laws and regulations. This oversight is critical to avoid legal issues that could have significant financial and reputational consequences for the district.
 - **Financial Management:** One of the key roles of a superintendent is to oversee the district's budget, including resource allocation, financial planning, and ensuring fiscal responsibility. Their expertise is crucial in navigating financial challenges and ensuring that funds are used effectively to support educational goals.
 - **Long-term Consequences:** While cutting a high-salary position may offer short-term financial relief, it could have long-term detrimental effects on the district's ability to provide quality education. The absence of effective central leadership could lead to decreased performance, lower staff morale, and potential loss of public trust.

Reactive response to community feedback suggesting smaller cuts across the system.

Q: Why not make a bunch of smaller cuts across the district?

A: In an organization facing budget challenges the size of our school district, broad and widespread cuts are necessary to make an impact on the budget deficit. For example, that means things like the elimination of programs as a whole are needed rather than cuts to parts of a program.

Our community continues to hold our school district accountable for the ongoing delivery of quality education to our students. This important endeavor takes the same amount of work, even if there are fewer staff to do the work.