

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 24, 2007

Memorandum

TO: All Employees
FROM: John P. Welch

John's Journal *Reflections from the Superintendent*

Dear Colleagues:

It has been an unusually eventful season in terms of weather, and we are only a month into winter! I want to thank you for your patience and flexibility as we have delayed or canceled school because of weather and road conditions. Let's hope the weather has turned from wild to mild from here on out!

As you know, Highline will have a replacement educational programs and operations levy on the March 13 ballot. I want to share with you some information about the levy. I know that as staff members, you are likely to be asked about the levy by parents, friends, and neighbors. Survey after survey shows that as people who work in schools, you are the most trusted source of information about our school system, so I consider you ambassadors to our community.

The levy is the source of about one out of every five dollars in our general fund budget. Years ago, local levies were conceived as a way to pay for "extras." But today, the state does not fully fund the costs of basic education, and we have come to depend on levy funding to fill that gap.

Eighty percent of the levy pays for people. The levy funds 95 teaching positions and 170 support staff positions.

Another way to break down levy dollars is by function:

- 71% pays for basic education teacher and staff salaries & benefits.
- 12% pays for special education (staff and other costs).
- 11% pays for instructional materials.
- 6% pays for bus transportation (staff and other costs).

People may ask you what will happen if the levy should fail. If the levy is not approved by voters, we will need to cut the district budget by 18%. I cannot predict at this point precisely where those cuts might be. However, we would certainly be forced to lay off some staff members and make some program cuts. I don't want to sound alarmist, but that is a reality and I don't want to sugar-coat it.

Here are some other important issues you may be asked about.

- This is a four-year levy. Collections would start in 2007. The levy would expire in December 2011.
- This is a replacement levy, not a new tax. It replaces the current levy that expires at the end of December. Homeowners would pay a bit more under the new levy: For the owner of a \$200,000 home, the annual increase would be \$32 the first year, \$12 the second year, \$10 the third, and \$10 the fourth.
- The levy is different from the bond passed last March. The *levy* pays for the education of students: teachers, books, support staff, bus transportation, and other operating costs. By law, our *bond* dollars can only be used for school construction and capital improvements. They cannot be used for educating children.

It is also important for you to know that as staff members, the law prohibits you from engaging in activities either for or against levy passage on paid time. You can and should provide factual information while on the job, but you may not urge people to vote one way or another. Of course, it is your right to work on any campaign or political issue on your own time. But during work hours, please restrict your activities and conversations to "just the facts." You will find informational materials on the district home page that you can download if you wish.

I want to thank you for your efforts to inform our community about the March 13 election. If you have any questions, please contact our communication office at x2331 or communication@hsd401.org.