

# School levies don't increase taxes, deserve voter support

Yakima Herald-Republic Editorial Board  
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Last November's Yakima City Council garnered plenty of attention, and next November's presidential ballot promises to do the same. But those aren't the only elections of consequence; this week, about three-fifths of Yakima County's electorate will receive mailed ballots for a vote that is small in scale but extensive in its impact on the region's future.

Many Yakima County school districts are requesting replacement maintenance and operation levies — replacement means that they aren't new taxes but would replace expiring levies. The districts are both large and small, from Yakima to Union Gap. The Yakima County Auditor's Office this week will mail out more than 61,000 ballots.

The school districts are Yakima, Selah, Sunnyside, Zillah, Naches Valley, Mabton, Highland and Union Gap. In addition, those residing in the Naches Parks and Recreation District area will be asked to renew a levy that finances Naches' swimming pool and Appleton Park.

All of the levies entail property taxes; if the levies are approved, the projected rates per \$1,000 in assessed value would actually be lower in Yakima, Zillah, Highland and Union Gap. They would stay the same in Selah, Naches Valley and Mabton. Sunnyside would see an increase, but the rate would be the third-lowest figure in the county.

Washington state's school funding has come under acute scrutiny since the state Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that the state was not meeting its paramount duty of fully funding K-12 education. The state made progress in the past legislative session, but not enough to satisfy the court, which is holding the state in contempt ahead of a 2018 deadline to arrive at a solution. Legislative observers say a fix isn't likely in this year's short session, so local districts need to make do with the current system for now.

That system finds districts reliant on local levies; last year, Yakima derived 7 percent of its revenues from local levy dollars, and the figure jumps to 19 percent in the smaller Naches Valley district.

All the above levies require a simple majority to pass, and ballots must be mailed or dropped off on or before Feb. 9. The Yakima County Auditor's Office expects about 30 percent of ballots will be returned; in a low-turnout election, each individual vote has a greater impact.

The school districts aren't asking for anything new; they want to maintain the services that they have now, and they should be able to do so. Until the state figures out a

different approach to school funding, the districts will rely on local levies — and the foresight of local taxpayers — to keep our schools running effectively.

\* Members of the Yakima Herald-Republic editorial board are Sharon J. Prill, Bob Crider, Frank Purdy and Karen Troianello.