SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | POSITION 8

COUNCILMEMBER TIM BURGESS

MEMORANDUM

To: City Council Members
From: Tim Burgess
Date: June 12, 2017
Subject: **Diverting Families & Education Levy Dollars**

This memorandum summarizes my opposition to CB 118994 which amends the Families and Education Levy Implementation and Evaluation Plan and diverts dollars from their intended purpose to pay for school bus transportation services. The proposed ordinance also takes funds from the City's School Safety Traffic and Pedestrian Improvement Fund and provides them to the School District for school crossing guards.

We are scheduled to vote on this legislation this afternoon.

I acknowledge that the School District's desire to switch to a two-bell system is laudable and that many, but not all, parents support this change.

Families & Education Levy: Closing the Academic Opportunity Gap

The Families & Education Levy was first adopted by Seattle voters in 1990. It was renewed in 1997, 2004, and 2011. It will be up for renewal again in 2018, as will the Seattle Preschool Program Levy. The current Levy, adopted by Seattle voters in 2011, restricts the allowable use of Levy funds to improving academic achievement, most especially for students struggling academically.

The ordinance placing the 2011 Levy measure on the ballot (Ordinance 123567) included this purpose statement in its title:

> ". . . authorize the City to levy additional taxes for up to seven years for the purpose of providing Seattle School District No. 1 public school students, Seattle children, and their families education-support services designed to <u>improve academic achievement</u> . . ." (Emphasis mine.)

Section 2 of Ordinance 123567 prioritized the first four areas eligible for Levy funding as "(1) Children at risk, including English Language Learners, (2) Children, birth to age 5, likely to attend low performing schools, (3) Students with the highest level of academic need, and (4) Schools with the highest level of academic need."

Section 6 of Ordinance 123567 identified what types of programs and services could be funded by the Levy:

> "Education-Support Services funded by Proceeds are intended to promote school readiness and learning, support academic achievement and reduce the academic achievement gap, and prepare graduates for college and the career of their choice." (Emphasis mine.)

Section 6 of Ordinance 123567 listed the education services that could be funded using Levy dollars, including school readiness and early learning, academic achievement in elementary school, academic achievement and college/career preparation in middle school, academic achievement and college/career preparation in high school, student health, a community partnership fund, and research and evaluation.

Finally, Section 12 of Ordinance 123567 included the recommended ballot title that would appear on each voter's official ballot:

> "The City of Seattle's Proposition concerns renewing and enhancing Education-Support Services to improve academic achievement. This proposition would fund City services, including school readiness, academic achievement in elementary, middle and high school, college/career preparation, and student health and community partnerships . . ."[1] (Emphasis mine.)

The voter approved 2011 Families & Education Levy does not allow Levy dollars to be spent on bus transportation services. Passing the proposed legislation (CB 118994) would violate the intent of Seattle voters when they adopted the 2011 Levy.

Families & Education Levy: Diverting Dollars from Our Most Academically-At-Risk Children

The proposed legislation not only violates the clear intent of the voters of Seattle, it diverts funds away from our most academically-at-risk children, a policy choice that is morally wrong and inconsistent with the Levy's purpose and the clear intent of the citizen committee that originally crafted the Levy measure.

The 2011 Families & Education Levy is focused on Seattle children who need academic assistance. Using funds to pay for school bus transportation will not advance academic achievement and it certainly won't help our students who need this help the most. Who are these students? They are primarily children living in poverty and children of color.

Seattle Public Schools has Washington State's largest academic achievement gap between black and white students. In fact, we have the second-highest academic achievement gap in the entire country.[2] Just 41% of our city's black students met the 8th grade reading standard in

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[1] The City Attorney's office issues the final ballot title language and they adopted the ordinance language for the November 2011 general election. A copy is attached to this memo.

[2] Source: The Seattle Times, May 17, 2017. Miami has the nation's highest academic achievement gap between black and white students.

2016, compared to 80% of white students. Just 34% of black students met the 8th grade math standard, compared to 72% of white students.

Using Levy dollars for bus transportation contravenes many years of careful choices aimed at helping our most academically challenged children.

Finally, the Levy Oversight Committee, a citizen group charged with overseeing use of Levy funds to make certain they are spent in a manner consistent with the purposes of the voter-approval ballot measure, voted in the majority against using Levy funds for transportation services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you to vote against this proposed legislation. Instead of taking Levy funds away from the very programs and children the Levy was designed to serve, we should leave these funds in the Education Support-Services Fund to be used as approved by the voters of Seattle.

If, the Council wishes to provide one-time funding for transportation services to assist the School District with switching to a two-bell system, then we should direct that these funds come from the City's transportation department budget. Let's use transportation dollars to fund transportation services. In doing so, however, we should recognize there will likely be significant pressure to continue this funding beyond the first installment if the Legislature does not successfully address its obligation to fully fund basic education, which includes by definition transportation services.

Attachment: 2011 Families & Education Levy Ballot Title

King County Elections is not responsible for the validity or accuracy of the statements, arguments or rebuttals.

Proposition No. 1
Regular Tax Levy Including Families and Education

The City of Seattle's Proposition concerns renewing and enhancing Education-Support Services to improve academic achievement.

This proposition would fund City services, including school readiness, academic achievement in elementary, middle and high school, college/career preparation, and student health and community partnerships as provided in Ordinance 123567. It authorizes regular property taxes above RCW 84.55 limits, allowing additional 2012 collection of up to $32,101,000 (approximately $0.27/$1000 assessed value) and up to $231,562,000 over seven years. In 2012, total City taxes collected would not exceed $3.60 per $1,000 of assessed value.

Should this Levy be approved?

◯ LEVY, YES
◯ LEVY, NO

The complete text of this measure is available beginning on page 93.

Explanatory statement

Seattle Proposition 1 approves a property tax increase totaling $231,562,000 over seven years. The levy is limited so that the City shall not levy more than $32,101,000 in the first year and the levy amount cannot grow by more than 1% per year. The funding provided through Proposition 1 would be spent in seven major categories:

1. **School readiness and early learning.** Major program elements include preschool for low-income three and four year olds; access for low-income families to high quality childcare; professional development for early education providers; school readiness support for children in home day-care situations, including home visits; health screenings; and preschool to kindergarten transition services.

2. **Academic achievement in elementary school.** Major program elements include extended learning time, out-of-school time activities, and summer learning programs; and school- and community-based family support services.

3. **Academic achievement and college/career preparation in middle school.** Major program elements include extended learning time; out-of-school time activities; social, emotional, and behavioral supports; summer learning programs; and advising, guidance and related support for college readiness.

4. **Academic achievement and college/career preparation in high school.** Major program elements include extended learning time; social, emotional, and behavioral supports; summer learning programs; and advising, guidance and related support for college readiness.

5. **Student health.** Major program elements include school-based student health clinics and physical, mental and dental support services at clinic sites in middle and high schools; school-based health services at high-need elementary schools; and health services for high-risk middle and high school students in alternative school settings.

6. **Community partnership fund.** Major program elements include funding for community and school-based partnerships to achieve Levy goals.

7. **Research and Evaluation.** Major program elements include research and evaluation of the individual programs and services in the foregoing categories and of the overall outcomes of Education-Support Services funded by levy proceeds.

Each year the City Council and Mayor will decide on the particular services to be funded within these categories, consistent with an Implementation and Evaluation Plan approved by ordinance. Funding for the Seattle School District would be controlled by a Partnership Agreement approved by ordinance. There will be an oversight committee composed of the Mayor, the Chair of the City Council's Public Safety and Education Committee, the Superintendent of the School District, a member of the School Board, and eight community members. This committee will make recommendations on the above-referenced plan and review programs and advise the City Council on proposed levy expenditures and reallocations to be adopted in the City's annual budget.

In 1990, 1997, and in 2004 Seattle voters approved "Families and Education Levy" property tax increases. Funds from the levies supported programs for children and their families both in and out of school. The 1990 and 1997 levies each totaled $69,000,000 over seven years. The 2004 levy totaled $116,788,000 over seven years. The 2004 levy will expire by the end of 2011.

More information about this measure is available at: http://www.seattle.gov/edlevy