

EDUCATION

Levy approval no sure thing for North Mason, South Kitsap school districts

Both school districts are seeking renewal of four-year educational programs and operation levies during the Feb. 11 special election.



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The North Mason and South Kitsap school districts may be destined for close calls when voters decide the fate of funding measures in the Feb. 11 special election.

Both districts are seeking renewal of four-year educational programs and operations (EP&O) levies set to expire at the end of 2025. Levies supplement the state's basic education allotment to operate and maintain schools and help districts pay for classroom support, special education, counseling, transportation, food service, arts, athletics and activities, security and utilities.

North Mason is aiming to collect up to \$22.3 million over four years (\$5,577,446 each year from 2026-29). For property owners, the estimated levy tax rate would be \$1.32 per \$1,000 of assessed value annually. Superintendent Dana Rosenbach told the Kitsap Sun in January that her district relies on levy dollars cover roughly 10 percent of its operating budget, which was just over \$44 million for the 2024-25 school year.

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South Kitsap's levy seeks to collect up to \$133 million over four years: \$30,990,823 in 2026, \$32,313,252 in 2027, \$33,950,830 in 2028 and \$35,690,540 in 2029. The estimated tax rate would be \$1.94 per \$1,000 of assessed value each year. South Kitsap School District spokesperson Amy Miller told the Kitsap Sun in November that levy funding makes up roughly 16% of the district's budget, which was \$189 million for 2024-25.

School levies require 50% plus one vote for approval. That threshold isn't as difficult to achieve as the 60% needed for school bonds, which typically involve more money and

are utilized for major construction projects, but convincing voters to approve levies isn't always a given.

In 2013, North Mason voters approved a \$49 million bond to build a new high school, modernize the old high school in order to transition it to become Hawkins Middle School, and pay for major improvements at both of the district's elementary schools. Seven years later, in 2020, North Mason experienced two EP&O levy failures. Without funding in 2021, the district trimmed its budget by nearly \$4 million and cut 18 teaching positions.

North Mason voters approved the current EP&O levy in 2021, but the measure barely passed at 50.3% (2,626 voters supporting it and 2,591 voters opposing it).

South Kitsap's current EP&O levy passed in 2021 with 51.4% approval. In 2023, the school district saw a \$271 million bond measure receive just 50.7% support, falling well below the 60% needed. It marked the ninth consecutive bond failure in South Kitsap, which last passed a bond measure in 1988.