

Ridgefield schools ask voters to OK replacement 3-year levy

District seeks \$1.50 per \$1,000 to support its operations needs



(The Columbian files)

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School funding is once again on the ballot in Ridgefield, just two-plus months after a [\\$77 million bond vote failed to reach the 60 percent supermajority](#).

This time it wouldn't be new tax money coming into the Ridgefield School District but instead a replacement three-year operations levy. As part of the new state funding model for education, local levies are capped at \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, and that's what the district is seeking. If approved, the levy would be collected starting in 2020.

"(Levy money) touches all aspects of the district," Superintendent Nathan McCann said. "It goes to special education to cover the difference between what the state funds and what is required, additional support staff, extracurriculars, outdoor school, professional development for staff and technology."

The levy, which is on the ballot in the April 23 election, only requires a simple majority of 50 percent plus one vote to pass. Ridgefield's bond in February received 58 percent approval, which wasn't enough to pass with the required 60 percent supermajority.

While the money helps the district, the levy cap has also made things more difficult. Previously, levy dollars funded about 20 percent of the budget, McCann said. This year, the first with the new cap, that number is at about 14 percent.

When the cap passed, the district was already in the middle of a voter-approved levy. The 2019 levy approved by Ridgefield voters was intended to generate \$7.57 million at an estimated rate of \$2.62 per \$1,000 of assessed property value.

"The 2020 levy we are requesting from the voters is for \$6,144,310," McCann said. "I'm not sure \$1.50 per \$1,000 of assessed value will actually raise that amount."

The district's [continued rapid growth](#) is also complicating its finances. The most recent projection has Ridgefield with 4,562 students for the 2022-2023 school year. That's up a little more than 1,400 from where the district is currently, and about 1,450 from where Ridgefield started the current school year.

McCann said there is still a need for more space. The bond would have gone toward a new K-4 elementary school, more expansion at Ridgefield High School, heating and cooling upgrades at South Ridge Elementary School and Union Ridge Elementary School, and safety and security updates throughout the district.

The district's Capital Facilities Advisory Committee will reconvene in May, McCann said, adding he anticipates the district will run another bond vote as soon as February 2020.

"The need has not gone away," he said.

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