



If you reside in Spokane School District #81, you will have the opportunity to vote on the February 9 school levy. You should receive your ballots by January 22.



At the County GOP Board meeting on January 5, the Board voted to oppose the levy. A press release will be sent to the Spokane media explaining our reasons. The information that the media will receive is included in this email

While you many not live within the Spokane School District boundaries, you are encouraged to send this information to friends and family that do. However, it is better to copy and paste the information into a new email. If you forward our email and your friends hit unsubscribe, we think it unsubscribes you from future emails rather than them.

Brian Steele, Chair
Spokane County GOP

[January 12, 2021] **Spokane County GOP Board Opposes the Proposed Spokane School District No. 81 Levy**

One of the foundational principles of any just and lawful Republic is quality education. **We as a party have always valued education and its goals to strengthen and support our nation's children.** We typically support levies and funding for our schools. In this case, however, we oppose the proposed February 9, Spokane School District levy. Ballots will arrive by January 22, 2021. Spokane School District #81 has lost our confidence in its request for increased funding for the **following reasons which are expanded in the "More details" section, for those interested in further information:**



1) Sadly, the Spokane School District has chosen to be deceptive in how it is promoting the levy by calling this just a “**replacement levy**” and saying that the rate is lower than taxes paid in 2018, while ignoring the much lower rates the residents have paid in 2019, 2020, and 2021. Because of their misleading statements, many people believe that the levy over the next three years will not raise their taxes. But the proposed levy will DEFINITELY raise property taxes for most residents and businesses.

2) The School District has been fiscally irresponsible. In 2018 the Spokane School District #81 Board of Directors bargained a 13.3% salary increase for educators when they knew that would create a future financial problem for the district. To add to the problem, the three-year bargaining agreement between the Spokane School District Board and the Spokane Education Association (SEA) in 2019, provided for additional salary increases for each of the following three years. The annual salary of a teacher with a Master’s Degree (MA) now ranges from \$58,260 for a beginning teacher to \$95,955 with 16 years of experience when the average salary for all workers in Spokane is around \$58,471. View salaries and benefits of teachers in Washington State: <https://data.kitsapsun.com/projects/wa-school/district/32081/>.



3) With the financial and other struggles many families and businesses in our community are facing, the timing of the District to ask for an increase in the rate and amount we will pay in taxes is disappointing and unacceptable.

4) Affordable housing is already a concern. Higher property taxes will mean increased costs to home owners, landlords and, ultimately, renters that are already struggling to pay bills and find housing they can afford.

5) Many parents in District 81 boundaries think that the Spokane School District has failed to satisfactorily respond to the needs of their children, in areas such as opening schools and advocating for the removal of state restrictions on Charter Schools.

6) Many are asking, “With the schools only open on a limited basis, if at all, how can you possibly need more money?”

These concerns and others have led us to a place where we must oppose this levy. It is time for the Spokane School District to be responsive to all of their community and be responsible and accountable for their spending and budgetary failures. They should be clear that this levy would increase taxes for most property owners and decide that the rate they are asking is ill-timed and untenable for the struggling citizens of the district.



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More details on the previous 6 points:

1) First and most disappointing is that the Spokane School District is misleading the public because they are giving the impression that the new levy will not raise our property taxes. This is just not true for most residents and businesses. The District keeps pointing out that the “total estimated tax rate for schools will be less than in 2018.” When they should be comparing the rate to the last three years of this current levy, which has been \$1.50-\$1.60 per \$1,000 of assessed value. If the levy passes, the rate will increase to \$2.40, \$2.45 and \$2.50 per \$1,000 during the next three years. Even though a second school tax (referred to as SD081 Spokane B&I on your online County property tax statement or as Debt Service Levy by the District), will be reduced, the new rate for the two combined local school property taxes will still be higher than it currently is. And if property values continue to increase as they have for the last several years, many could see a further sizeable property tax increase. Moreover, with the two state school property taxes and the two Spokane School District property taxes, currently about 57% of our property taxes are for public schools. That should be enough.



2) This Spokane School District has a proven history of mismanaging finances. When the legislature finally reached a funding resolution to satisfy the State Supreme Court, the Spokane School District Board of Directors responded almost immediately by raising certificated employees’ wages by 13.3% for the 2018-19 school year, knowing that it would create a financial problem in future years. When a school board member was asked why the Board bargained such a high increase knowing that it was not sustainable, the response was that the Directors thought the Washington State Legislature would come to their rescue. Additionally, through bargaining with the Spokane Education Association, a 1% salary increase was included for 2019-20 school year, 1.8% this year, and 2% for 2021-22. While the average salary in Spokane is roughly \$58,471 (according to ZipRecruiter), a beginning teacher with an MA in Spokane earns \$58,260 while those near the top of the salary scale (16 years with an MA) earn 95,955; educators with 90 more credits would have a salary of \$101,482. In addition to salaries, employees also receive insurance and other mandatory benefits. Bargaining Agreement can be viewed online at https://www.spokaneea.org/file_viewer.php?id=25326. So the Spokane Community is being asked to pay higher taxes to help finance District shortfalls because the School Board granted salaries that are already higher than the average Spokane wage earner.

3) While educators are still fortunate to have employment with generous salaries, many of our friends and neighbors are struggling to pay rent, bills or mortgages due to COVID job losses. Far too many of our beloved businesses, small and large, have been shuttered. The timing of this School Board to ask the suffering tax payers to pay more now is in poor taste and is tone-deaf to the devastating economic reality being faced in our community.



4) In our area there is an affordable housing crisis. As taxes rise and costs to landlords increase, that will lead to higher rents. In addition, increased costs in property taxes to businesses will undoubtedly be passed on to consumers. So people will struggle even more to be able to pay for adequate housing.

5) This District has too often failed to respond satisfactorily to the wishes of a great number of parents in the District 81 boundaries.

- We are concerned that this School Board has failed to meet the needs of our children during the COVID crisis. They seem to give priority to the demands of the teachers' union instead of providing the students with a strong, consistent education program. They have failed to follow the science indicating that the vast majority of children are not at risk. Many parents have asked this Board to open the schools for those families who wish to send their children to school, while accommodating those who do not feel safe attending school during COVID. Now with a levy approaching, they say that will happen in March. But will it?
- There is also concern about the sex education curriculum which many believe is too explicit and definitely not consistently age appropriate.
- In addition, many parents and other community members have expressed their concern and anger at Board Member Jenny Slagle, who took an oath to uphold the Constitution and then on Facebook stated she believes we should "abolish the Constitution" of the United States. It was clearly not taken out of context as she later stated. Moreover, this Board has still failed to censure Ms. Slagle or respond in a serious way to her failure to uphold her oath of office.
- While we are pleased that the District has formed three Charter Schools, we understand and are concerned that levy funds cannot be spent currently for the benefit of Charter Schools. Families deserve a choice in how public funds are expensed in public education. We endorse the expansion of Charter Schools in Spokane and ask that District 81 advocate for the removal of restrictions by the State for the expansion of Charter Schools in our area. For more information regarding Charter Schools go to <https://wacharters.org/>.



6) Finally, many of us ask, "With the schools only open on a limited basis, if at all, how can you possibly need more money?" "What are you doing with all of the funding you are now getting when there is no music, there are no sports, and there are no students in the middle schools or high schools?"

If you would like to help us share this information on the levy and other issues through mailers, ads and other media, please consider a donation. Every dollar helps.