

Measure 26-207

Ballot Title: Levy Renewal to Maintain Teaching Positions and Classroom Supports

Question: Shall district maintain teaching positions, classroom supports; renew levy of \$1.99 per \$1,000 assessed value for five years beginning 2020? This measure renews local option taxes.

Financial Impact: Taxpayers would continue to pay \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed property value, the same as they have been paying for the 2014 levy, which will expire. For a home with an assessed value of \$250,000, the annual tax would be \$497.50 for this levy.

The levy would produce an estimated \$99.9 million in 2020-2021, increasing each year to \$111.9 million in 2024-2025.

Probable Result of a “Yes” Vote: If this measure passes, Portland Public Schools would be able to continue funding the teaching positions that have been in place since the current five-year period began in 2015. The number of positions funded each year averaged 825 positions during this time period. These positions would be funded for the next five years if the levy is approved. The rate per \$1,000 of a property’s assessed value would remain the same at \$1.99.

Probable Result of a “No” Vote: During the current five-year period an average of 825 positions were funded per year as a result of the 2015 levy. If this levy is rejected by voters, PPS is likely to lose some or all of the 825 positions. Also, if the levy fails, the rate of \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation will no longer be charged to property owners.

Background: This levy is a renewal of an existing five-year local option levy which provides funding for teaching positions in the Portland Public Schools. The existing levy was passed in 2014 by 72 percent of voters. That levy was a renewal of a 2011 levy. The Community Budget Review Committee for 2018-2019 found that all levy funds were being spent as approved by voters. That is, the added teaching positions were improving class sizes, helping schools meet core requirements, allowing elementary teachers more planning time, and providing enrichment programs for students. The committee provided data showing that 835 of 2,858 teachers in district schools were funded by the levy in 2017-18. The committee recommended renewal of the levy.

Portland Public Schools serves a large and diverse population of more than 49,000 students, with 43 percent nonwhite, 22 percent eligible for free meals, and 15 percent who receive special education services.

In 2019 the Oregon legislature passed the Student Success Act, which allocates \$1 billion per year to the state’s schools. The funds will be divided:

- 50 percent to a grant program to meet students’ mental and behavioral health needs and increase academic achievement and reduce academic disparities.

- 30 percent to statewide education initiatives in many areas, including high school success, nutrition, safety, success for students of color, and summer school for Title I schools.
- 20 percent to fund early intervention and early childhood education initiatives.

While these programs could fund teaching positions, they are not specifically dedicated to that purpose. The levy, on the other hand, can only fund salaries and benefits for teachers and classroom support staff. Almost one-third of the teaching positions in district schools are funded by this levy.

Summary: This measure would renew the levy passed by voters in 2014 at the same rate as the 2014 levy, \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The levy funds could only be used for salaries and benefits for teachers and classroom support staff, such as reading specialists. It would continue to fund an average of 825 teaching positions, or almost one-third of the teachers in district schools.

Funds would be placed in a separate account, and an independent citizen oversight committee would review the expenditures to verify that funds are used as approved by voters. No levy funds would be spent for administration.

Supporters Say:

- The levy supports one-third of all teaching positions in Portland Public Schools. These positions provide class sizes allowing individual attention for children and provide funding for diverse instructional programs that would not exist without this support.
- This levy is a renewal of an existing levy and maintains the current rate per thousand of taxable property valuation.
- This program has broad support from students who are the direct beneficiaries of the funded programs.

Opponents Say:

- PPS has not demonstrated sufficient accountability for funds previously approved by voters, particularly for the 2017 bond measure.
- A State audit, published in January 2019, found that PPS is "spending proportionately less on instruction and more on support services than many of its peers." The district should reallocate funds from other areas to teaching, instead of asking for extra funding from taxpayers.
- The State audit and the Oregon Department of Education District Profiles show that PPS spends more per student than other nearby districts. Other area schools do about as well or better with less money.