

Community Operating Levy Survey Results

Bemidji Area School District

Spring 2021

Results of the Community Referendum Survey Regarding the Need for an Operating Levy

Dear ISD 31 Stakeholders,

In 2014, Bemidji Area School District voters approved a \$180 per pupil, 10-year operating levy to support the District's day-to-day operations, including staffing, educational programming, and student services. Unfortunately, due to inflation, increasing expenses, and the state funding formula (as described on page 3), this additional funding has still left the District with a significant budget shortfall in recent years.

Over the past few years, the District has **cut over \$4 million from the budget**, including:

- Reducing administrative, teaching and support staff positions
- Increasing class sizes
- Reducing department and building budgets
- Delaying curriculum purchases and eliminating technology upgrades
- Delaying bus replacement
- Increasing student fees
- Closing Central Elementary School beginning with the 2021-22 school year
- Closing the Community Education building and moving programming to other schools
- Ending the lease where the Alternative Program is held and moving it into District-owned property

Even with all of these reductions,

**The District is forecasting a budget shortfall averaging
\$2.5 million per year.**

Therefore, the District is exploring asking voters to support District operations through an increase in the operating levy.

Cost Saving Options

If voters do not support a new operating levy, the District will need to make further cuts to balance the budget. While the District does not endorse any of the following, they must consider all options to reduce expenses.

Class Size: The School Board recently increased the class size targets (number of students per class, based on grade level) to save money.

Curriculum: Our curriculum renewal cycle calls for updating curricular areas every six years to ensure current content and use of best teaching practices. This practice has been delayed in recent years to save money.

College Credit and Elective Courses: Currently, the high school offers concurrent courses that allow students to receive college credit while in high school. In addition, elective classes such as music (band, orchestra, and choir), art, business, computer science, family and consumer science, technical education, world languages, and other offerings are available for middle and high school students. The District could reduce or eliminate some of these offerings.

Close One or More Schools: The District has already decided to close Central Elementary and the Community Education building beginning in the 2021-22 school year to save money. The District could close one or more additional schools, requiring them to reconfigure grade levels at the schools and adjust attendance boundaries.

Athletic/Activities Fees: The District has already raised athletic and activity fees for middle and high school students.

Athletic/Activity Offerings: The District offers a wide variety of athletic and co-curricular offerings to enhance the learning experience, including show choir, marching band, the musical, middle school athletics, high school athletics, robotics, and others. The District could reduce the number of athletic and activity offerings for students.

Support Staff: Secretaries, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, and custodians all play a critical role in helping our schools function efficiently and allow us to best meet the needs of students.

Bus Replacement: The District typically buys two new buses each year as part of a bus replacement cycle. The purchase of new buses has been postponed due to the budget shortfall.

Bus Fees: The District currently provides transportation for all students free-of-charge who live outside the ½-mile walk zone. The District could increase the walk zone and/or charge a transportation fee for students wanting busing who live within the expanded walk zone.

Technology: Our technology plan's goal is to ensure student access to technology to enhance student learning. The plan calls for maintaining the server infrastructure and wireless access as well as replacing computers that have exceeded their useful life.

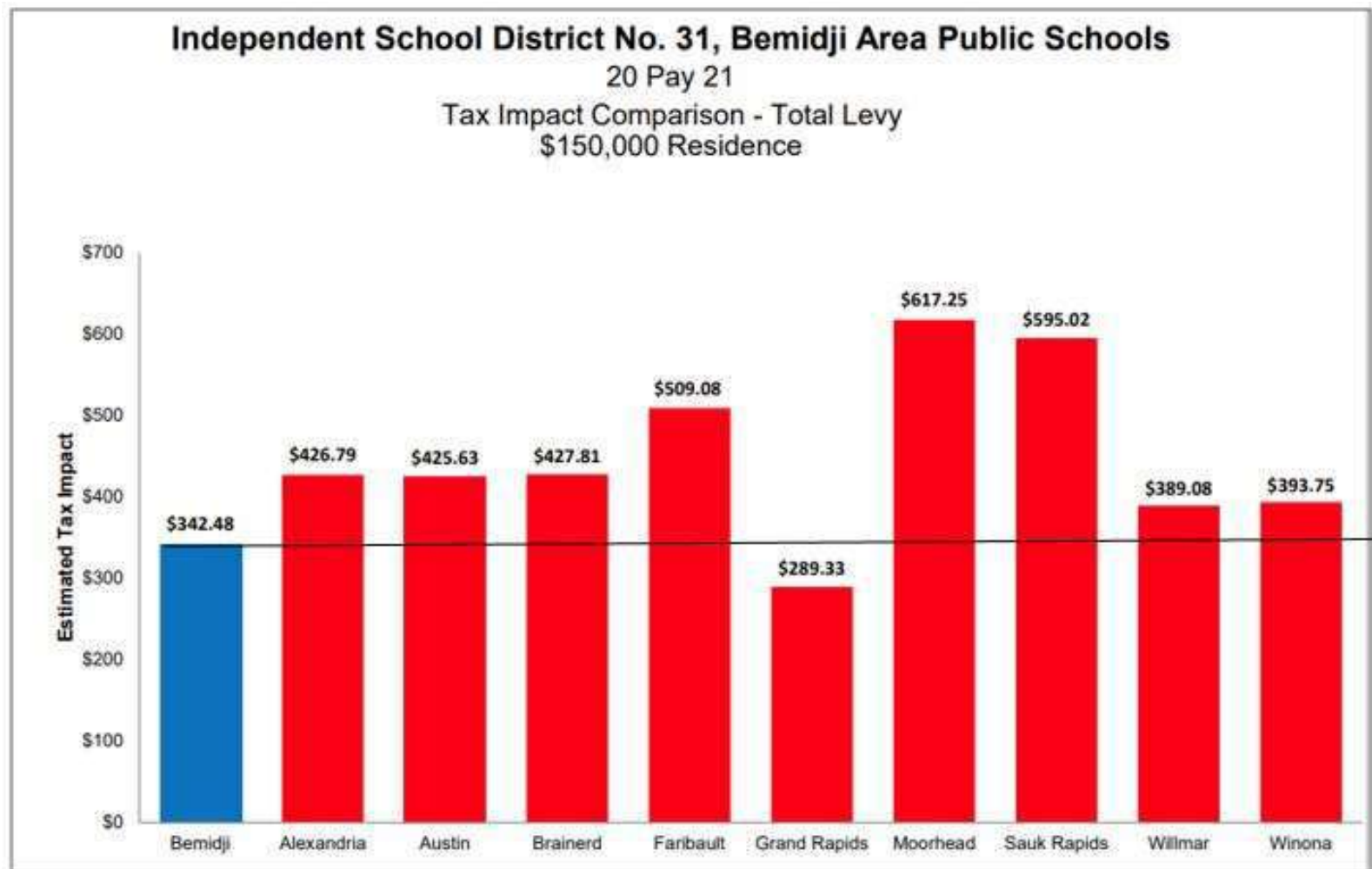
Please check your response to each of the following:

Yes (10), No (1)

Item	All Residents	Staff Residents	Parent Residents (Non-Staff)	Non-Parent Residents (Non-Staff)
Should the District further delay purchasing replacement buses?	7.09	7.27	7.03	7.07
Should curriculum updates be further delayed to save money?	5.31	6.19	4.44	5.73
Should the District charge even higher fees for student participation?	5.60	5.80	5.41	5.68
Should the District change busing policies and add fees?	5.14	5.41	4.87	5.28
Should the District reduce college credit and/or elective courses to save money?	3.97	3.63	3.24	4.79
Should the District reduce the number of athletic/activity offerings?	4.02	4.16	3.23	4.67
Should the District close one or more schools to save money?	3.91	3.82	3.26	4.55
Should the technology budget be reduced to save money?	4.11	4.13	3.85	4.31
Should the District further increase class sizes to reduce costs?	2.94	1.82	2.34	4.00
Should the District reduce support staff to save money?	3.00	2.54	2.39	3.76

Financial Background (Info Only)

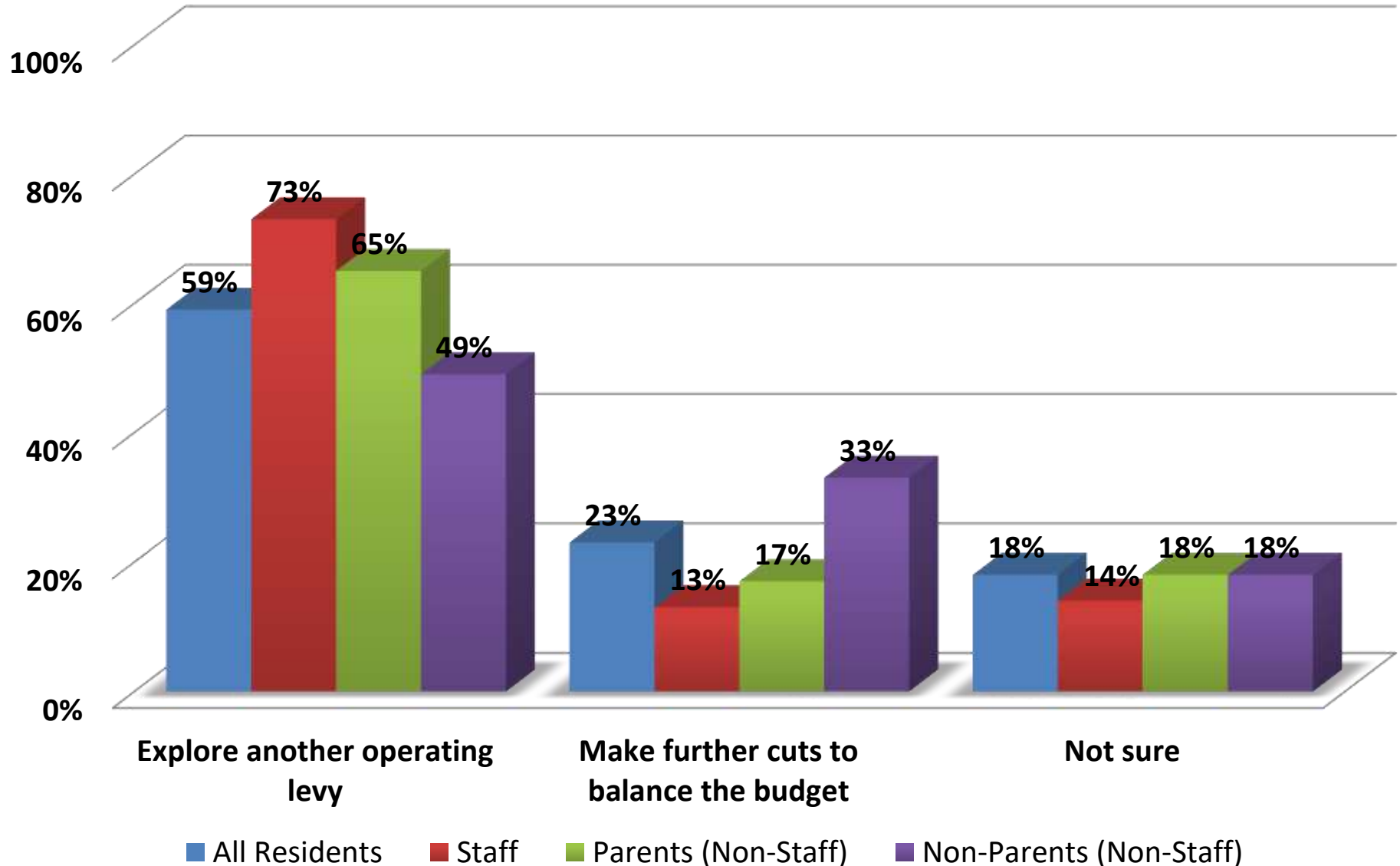
The District works hard to be good stewards of taxpayers' dollars. The Bemidji Area School District is a low taxing District, as demonstrated in the chart below of this year's school taxes for a \$150,000 home.



Funding Support

What advice would you give the District?

(Bemidji Area School District Residents Only)



Bemidji voters will need to approve a new increased operating levy or continue to make significant cuts to programs and services, based on survey feedback.

The following options have been developed for community input.

OPTION 1: Pursue an operating levy that provides \$2 million per year (\$360 per student) for each of the next 10 years, requiring the District to continue to make reductions every year.

OPTION 2: Pursue an operating levy that provides \$2.5 million per year (\$460 per student) for each of the next 10 years, allowing the District to strive to maintain the current level of programs and services.

OPTION 3: Pursue an operating levy that provides \$3.1 million per year (\$560 per student) for each of the next 10 years, allowing the District to explore reinstating some of the reductions that have been made.

The following table shows the tax increases for each option.

Annual Property Tax Increase Over the Current Level				
Per Student Levy Amount		OPTION 1 \$360 per student	OPTION 2 \$460 per student	OPTION 3 \$560 per student
Type of Property	Assessed Tax Value			
Residential Homestead, Apartments, and Commercial/Industrial Property	\$100,000	\$28.87 <i>(\$2.41/month)</i>	\$44.91 <i>(\$3.74/month)</i>	\$63.31 <i>(\$5.26/month)</i>
	\$150,000	\$43.30 <i>(\$3.61/month)</i>	\$67.36 <i>(\$5.61/month)</i>	\$94.97 <i>(\$7.91/month)</i>
	\$200,000	\$57.74 <i>(\$4.81/month)</i>	\$89.81 <i>(\$7.48/month)</i>	\$126.62 <i>(\$10.55/month)</i>
	\$300,000	\$86.61 <i>(\$7.22/month)</i>	\$134.72 <i>(\$11.23/month)</i>	\$189.94 <i>(\$15.83/month)</i>
	\$400,000	\$115.47 <i>(\$9.62/month)</i>	\$179.63 <i>(\$14.97/month)</i>	\$253.25 <i>(\$21.10/month)</i>
	\$500,000	\$144.34 <i>(\$12.03/month)</i>	\$224.53 <i>(\$18.71/month)</i>	\$316.56 <i>(\$26.38/month)</i>
	\$750,000	\$216.51 <i>(\$18.04/month)</i>	\$336.80 <i>(\$28.07/month)</i>	\$474.84 <i>(\$39.57/month)</i>

INFORMATION FOR AG. LAND OWNERS: For the purposes of an operating levy, **land taxed as agriculture is excluded from this referendum market value tax.** Only the market value of the house, garage, and one acre of agriculture land is taxed.

INFORMATION FOR SEASONAL/RECREATIONAL PROPERTY OWNERS: Property classified as seasonal/ recreational is exempt from operational levy taxation.

Based on the tax increases shown, which option would you support?

Item	All Residents	Staff Residents	Parent Residents (Non-Staff)	Non-Parent Residents (Non-Staff)
<u>OPTION 3</u> : \$560 per student; allowing the District to explore reinstating some of the reductions that have been made	36%	44%	42%	28%
<u>OPTION 2</u> : \$460 per student; strive to maintain the current level of programs and services	25%	31%	24%	23%
<u>OPTION 1</u> : \$360 per student; requiring the District to continue to make reductions every year	8%	7%	6%	10%
I would only support a levy that does not increase taxes	13%	6%	13%	15%
I would not support any levy	10%	5%	7%	15%
I'm not sure/need more information	8%	7%	8%	9%

Thank you!



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