

West to residents: Up for a tax hike?

- Citizen input: District to send out survey on referendum, class size, programs, buildings

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Staff writer

AURORA — The West Aurora School District will ask residents soon whether they would support a 45- to 55-cent tax hike to raise money for the district's dwindling operating budget.

School officials will send out about 23,000 letters to area households in the next few weeks, directing parents and community members to fill out a confidential online survey.

Survey results will help the School Board determine whether to go after an operational fund referendum, which likely would appear on the November 2006 or April 2007 ballots, said school district spokesman Mike Chapin.

Without a referendum, school officials expect the operating budget, which mainly goes to pay teachers' salaries and benefits, to fall millions of dollars into deficit.

And if student enrollment continues to grow by about 200 to 250 pupils per year, a trend that requires more teachers every year, "we'll never have enough money to pay our bills," Chapin said.

In 2005, West Aurora had one of the lowest operational tax rates in the area, \$3.027. Voters in the district have not approved an increase in the operational rate since 1988.

According to school officials, a 45- to 50-cent tax hike, which would cost the owner of a \$200,000 home between \$300 and \$333 more per year, would allow the district to maintain current programs and services.

An additional 5-cent hike — above the 45- to 50-cent hike — would bring the tax increase to between \$333 and \$367 for the owner of a \$200,000 home and would allow the district to implement new programs, such as early childhood education, a longer school day and advanced courses.

The survey also asks residents how much they value qualities like small class sizes or programs like career education courses, and how they feel about school facilities.

Depending on the results of the survey, the School Board also may consider a construction referendum to help pay for building renovations, Chapin said. Several of the schools are more than 100 years old and many have problems like cracks, leaks and inadequate ventilation.

•**1988:** PASSED 50-cent increase in education fund rate

•**1995:** PASSED \$49 million construction bond issue FAILED 30-cent increase in education fund rate

•**2001:** FAILED \$66 million construction bond issue FAILED 30-cent increase in education fund rate

•**2002:** PASSED \$59 million construction bond issue

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