

## Will survey say referendum?

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By ERIC SCHELKOPF

[eschelkopf@kcchronicle.com](mailto:eschelkopf@kcchronicle.com)

AURORA - West Aurora school leaders want to see whether residents would support a possible tax increase referendum in November to head off a looming deficit.

Residents will receive a letter from the district in the next few days that asks them to fill out an online survey.

District officials are examining the condition of the district's 20 buildings, some of which are more than 100 years old. Problems ranging from leaking roofs to inadequate ventilation have been discovered in some of the buildings.

Residents have not approved an increase in the district's operational rate since 1988. Among neighboring unit districts in Kane and DuPage counties, West Aurora had the second-lowest operational tax in 2005.

"Our first reason for the survey is to alert people to the budget and facilities issues we are facing," district spokesman Mike Chapin said.

The district projects a \$1.9 million deficit for its 2006-07 fiscal year.

"Without a voter-approved rate increase, that deficit will swell to approximately \$2.9 million by 2008 and go even higher in future years," school Superintendent James Rydland said in a letter to residents.

West Aurora's operational tax rate in 2005 was \$3.03 per \$100 of assessed valuation. East Aurora school district had a lower tax rate at \$2.91 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

In comparison, Batavia's tax rate in 2005 was \$4.17 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

The survey asks whether residents would support a 45- to 50-cent rate increase in order to maintain current programs and services. That would return the district's tax rate to where it was in 2001 and cost between \$150 and \$167 more per year in taxes per \$100,000 in home value, according to district officials.

The amount of money that West Aurora spent per student was the third lowest among neighboring districts during the 2003-04 school year.

West Aurora spent \$7,524 per student that year. In comparison, Kaneland school district spent \$9,038 per student the same year.

The state average in 2003-04 was \$8,786 per student.

At the same time, the district gains an average of 250 additional students per year, putting additional pressure on the district and driving the increasing deficit.

"This area is a popular place to live. It has been that way for well over a decade," Chapin said.