



BIGFORK PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT 38

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Home of the
VIKES
and
VALS

April 14, 2020

Bigfork Community Members,

The Board of Trustees have decided to follow through with the levy requests for both the high school and elementary school in keeping with a commitment made to the teachers of the district almost one year ago. At that time, the board and the teachers recognized that teachers' salaries were inordinately low compared to salaries of teachers in other local districts. Passage of the levies will allow us to narrow, although not completely eliminate, the significant disparity in wages between our teachers and those in other local districts.

The Bigfork Elementary district is seeking \$331,625 with an annual tax impact of around \$29.20 per 200K of property market value. The Bigfork High School district is seeking \$259,828 with an annual tax impact of around \$18.30 per 200K of property market value. Although the annual tax is significantly lower than what is projected in other districts, we recognize any amount right now is tough to ask for. We are continually appreciative of the volunteer time, effort, care and financial support our community provides our schools. Likewise, we are impressed by the effort and professionalism of our staff, as they educate and care for our kids.

As a board we have historically taken a fiscally conservative approach in managing all school funds. It is important to us to continue to provide an excellent education for our students, while doing our best to keep costs down for our tax paying community members. The state closures have forced changes to our educational environment but exposed the deep commitment our staff has to our students. We are proud Bigfork Schools have been the model for other K-12 and higher education institutions across Montana. We have also witnessed the strength that comes from a collaborative relationship with parents and the community. Many parents have partnered with us to assist in educating their child. It is a humbling reminder of how connected we really are.

It seems there is never a good time to ask for renewed funding, but times like this are more challenging. The upcoming school levies are our only option for providing funding for our staff salaries and benefits. Over the past 13 years, we have held off on running a levy to maintain funding. In that time, we have passed two bonds to address our facilities. At a basic level, bonds are for "buildings" and levies are for "learning". State and federal funding laws do not allow any mixing of funds. It is our hope you understand the realities of this request. Regardless of the results of the levy elections, Bigfork Schools will continue to do everything we can to support our students and families. Our history for caring for each other and commitment for excellence will remain our common bond.

Paul Sandry, Board Chair
Zack Anderson, Board Vice Chair
Aaron Parish, Trustee
Christina Relyea, Trustee Jessica Martinz, Trustee

Dana Whitney, Trustee
Dan Elwell, Trustee
Jessica Martinz, Trustee