

W. Aurora survey shows referendum support

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AURORA - West Aurora school leaders will have to educate the public more if they hope to pass a tax-increase referendum.

Of the 1,250 district residents who recently replied to an online survey, 46 percent said they would support a 45- to 50-cent rate increase in the district's operational rate to maintain current programs and services. Of those answering "yes," 56 percent were parents, 35 percent were not parents and 81 percent were part of the district's staff.

Teacher and staff salaries composed the majority of the district's operating expenses, which also included food services and transportation costs.

The district is considering a tax-increase referendum to increase the district's operational rate. The district projected an almost \$1.9 million deficit for its 2006-07 fiscal year. Board members approved the budget in June.

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, district officials said.

A second question asked whether respondents would support an additional 5-cent increase to support the district's new teaching and learning initiative. On that question, 39 percent said "yes," and 17 percent said "don't know."

Wisconsin-based School Perceptions conducted the survey.

According to a study conducted by the Northern Illinois University's Regional Development Institute, 69,160 people reside within West Aurora School District's borders. That number was expected to grow to 77,889 by 2010.

Despite the low number of respondents compared with the district's size, Pat Quinn of School Perceptions said the "survey results will provide the ... district with a good data set from which to begin analyzing alternatives and setting priorities for future planning."

The majority of those who responded live in Aurora - 775 residents, or 62 percent. In addition, the survey had 384 respondents from North Aurora, 41 from Sugar Grove, and 24 from Montgomery.

Still, West Aurora school board member Neal Ormond was pleased with the survey results.

"I am impressed that the results are as positive as they are without having any real campaign to educate the public," Ormond said.

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.

In addition to the tax-rate increase, board members are considering whether to have a building bond referendum to construct a new middle school or elementary school, or construct additions to other schools.

Want to read the survey results?

Go to www.sd129.org