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SUPERINTENDENT’S MESSAGE

QUALITY EDUCATION SUPPORTS THE SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS AND BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES.

Recruiting and retaining quality staff is an important part of the positive learning experiences we provide students.

In December, the Board of Education approved the placement of a no tax rate increase ballot item - a levy transfer - on the April 4, 2023 ballot. A levy transfer would allow the district to increase staff salaries in LSR7 in an effort to keep our community competitive with other districts seeking talented employees.

Levy transfers are commonly-used, no tax rate increase approaches to generate additional revenue for district goals without increasing the overall tax rate.

Lee’s Summit R-7 Schools property tax dollars support the operating fund, for salaries, supplies and equipment, and the debt service fund, for paying down debt on voter-approved bond projects. In placing a levy transfer on the ballot, the district is asking voter permission to shift 20 cents of the tax contributions currently supporting the debt service fund to the operating fund — without changing the overall tax rate.

Even though this ballot item has no net impact on the district tax rate, LSR7 is required to go to voters with this reallocation of funds.

As inflation has increased and state educational funding remains stagnant, neighboring communities in the Kansas City metro — including Blue Springs, North Kansas City, Belton, Fort Osage and Ray-Pec — have approved levy transfers as a no tax rate increase approach to investing in teacher and staff salaries. LSR7 has fallen from No. 1 to No. 7 in the metro for starting pay for teachers, and starting pay for other positions are in the bottom third when compared to metro school districts.

Providing clear and accurate information about the ballot item is important. This issue of Our Schools aims to provide voters with educational information about the proposed levy transfer and its impacts. More resources can be found at lsr7.org/ballot.

All registered LSR7 voters will have the opportunity to participate in the election process on Tuesday, April 4, 2023. The deadline to register to vote is March 8, 2023.

With much appreciation,

DAVID BUCK, Ed. D
SUPERINTENDENT
Lee’s Summit West senior Amaya Barnes is involved in a number of activities on campus, including debate, forensics, DECA, NHS, Titan Ambassadors, Black Student Union, Leadership Council and the varsity basketball team.

I feel like I’m in a different dimension when I’m playing basketball. I feel all of those things within the game, it kind of hits back on life skills, and just everything about basketball just excites me.

I’m very athletically inclined. I stay in the gym. I love to run. That physical side of me has an emotional impact on me. It’s just not a way of relieving stress, because I know there’s a lot of reasons why people are in the gym and all that.

I want to have my own basketball organization. I want to get into coaching and everything just stems off from there. I just want to set people up for success. There’s no secret to this stuff. It’s just having the preparation that you need for success.

Speech and debate is a big thing that I’ve put my all in. I can talk about whatever I want to talk about. Every weekend we’re doing something and that’s a big motivation for me.

With my studies, I’m going to go into business administration, and then go into a sports agency. But I want to go a little bit further with my sports agency and go into law. I’ll probably take law further to be a full-time lawyer when I’m older.

I would tell my past self to not get discouraged. I always set high standards for myself, but sometimes it brought me down because I was too hard on myself. So just never get discouraged.

If you can’t do something, find another way to get it. You can always get what you want. You always have this one destination you have in mind. But at the end of the day, it may not be the path that you want to take. So if you can’t take that path, take the other path.

Amaya was the student speaker at the Lee’s Summit Educational Foundation breakfast in September 2022.
During my time in college, I worked Before and After School Services one summer when I went back home to Blue Springs. I was in charge of third, fourth and fifth grade kids and it was pretty awesome.

I never thought I would want to do Elementary. I always thought I was gonna do high school. This is where I landed and I love it!

I would not say I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I just always knew I loved school. I love learning and I love the environment of school.

On what makes LSR7 unique: I think the emphasis on the idea that a child is more than just their reading and math data and they’re not just a statistic on a spreadsheet. We want to be cultivating lifelong learners and kids who are passionate about certain things. I feel like our schools are a great place for kids to discover what they’re passionate about and what they’re interested in.

I feel like my harder experiences with math is what drew me into wanting to help kids be able to access math in a way that is a little bit more fun and enjoyable and make them feel like they can be successful with it.

I never want my students that go through my classroom to feel like math is a gatekeeper for them. That doesn’t mean they’re going to go and be mathematicians or engineers. They may not want to do that, but I want them to have the option.

I love going to see kids do stuff outside of school or coming to their performances. I’ve gotten to see kids dance on the Nutcracker ballet, I’ve gotten to watch their soccer, football, basketball games, and their piano recitals. I like seeing the things that they get really excited about—the things that they come into the school sharing with me.

I tell my kids a lot. I am responsible for your teaching, I can’t be responsible for your learning. I will try my best to give you as many opportunities as I can to help you learn. If the first thing doesn’t work, I’ll think of something different to come back to the drawing board. But ultimately, it’s your decision whether or not you are going to be a learner.

If you set a goal for yourself, there’s no one that’s going to stop you. I’ll help you with that. I think that’s such an important mindset to build in ourselves.
LEE’S SUMMIT R-7 SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION PLACES DEBT SERVICE LEVY TRANSFER ON APRIL 4 BALLOT

The no tax rate increase ballot item asks voters to allow the district to shift dollars to the operating fund to support efforts to recruit and retain quality staff.
The Lee’s Summit R-7 Board of Education approved placement of a debt service levy transfer on the April 4, 2023 ballot by a 7-0 vote at the Dec. 15 regular monthly meeting.

Ballot language proposes the increase of the district’s operating tax levy by 20 cents (per $100 of assessed valuation) and a decrease to the debt service tax levy by 20 cents to ensure no net impact to the district’s overall tax rate.

Reallocating additional revenue to the operating fund will allow the district to increase staff compensation as part of the district’s goal of recruiting and retaining quality staff.

The Board of Education’s decision follows the review of salary data from surrounding school districts, in addition to input from stakeholder groups including the Citizens’ Advisory Committee, Business Roundtable, Team Lee’s Summit and district staff.

The levy transfer is designed as a no tax rate increase approach to ensure the school district can offer competitive staff compensation during a time of high inflation and stagnant state funding for PreK-12 education. In recent years, neighboring districts have taken voter-approved actions such as levy transfers and increases to invest in salary schedules, and LSR7 has fallen behind in starting pay for staff.

The district’s current overall property tax rate of $5.31 per $100 of assessed valuation includes the operating tax levy and the debt service tax levy. The current operating tax levy ($4.24) funds operational expenses, such as teacher and staff salaries, supplies and equipment. Current debt service tax levy ($1.07) funds are used to pay interest and principal payments for general obligation bonds issued for voter-approved bond projects.

Shifting $2.00 from the debt service levy to the operating levy is a budget reallocation that redirects approximately $5.4 million to the general operating fund on an annual basis without changing the overall tax rate.

While a levy transfer impacts the district’s future bonding capacity — how much the district can borrow in the future for bond projects — assessed valuation and growth projections indicate that LSR7 is in a strong position to cover its anticipated facility needs with a lower debt service tax levy. Voter approval of a levy transfer does not change the terms or rates associated with previously issued debt.

Because of responsible long-range debt planning, the district has adequate funds to cover its existing debt and will maintain its high AA+ bond rating.

The April 2023 levy transfer will require a simple majority from voters for approval. The deadline to register to vote for the April election is March 8, 2023.

Information about the no tax rate increase levy transfer is available on the district’s webpage at lsr7.org/ballot.
LEVY TRANSFER 101
WHAT’S HAPPENING?
On Thursday, Dec. 15, the Board of Education voted to place a no tax rate increase levy transfer for voter consideration on the April 4, 2023 ballot. The purpose of the levy transfer is to fund staff salary increases.

WHAT DOES THE BALLOT LANGUAGE PROPOSE?
The ballot language proposes increasing the district’s operating tax levy by 20 cents (per $100 of assessed valuation) and decreasing the debt service tax levy by 20 cents. This ensures no net impact to the district’s overall tax rate.

SO WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
• LSR7 is funded in part by property taxes.
• Our overall tax levy supports two important district funds: the general operating fund (for salaries, benefits, supplies, equipment) and the debt service fund (for paying down debt for voter-approved bond projects.)
  • The district is asking voters permission to shift tax dollars that are supporting the debt service fund to the general operating fund instead.
  • Increasing the dollars supporting one fund and decreasing the dollars supporting the other ensures zero net impact to the overall property tax rate.

HOW ELSE CAN I DESCRIBE THIS LEVY TRANSFER?
• The district isn’t asking taxpayers for more tax contributions, but permission to move existing tax contributions from one fund to another.

WHY IS THE BOARD OF EDUCATION CONSIDERING SALARY INCREASES?
• Investing in staff salaries is part of our commitment to recruiting and retaining quality staff.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTION
The next Lee’s Summit R-7 School District election is a School Board election on April 4, 2023. Candidates will run for three open seats. The filing period for School Board candidates was held from Dec. 6 - Dec. 27.

The names of the candidates will appear on the ballot as follows:
• William “Billy” Peterson
• Regina Garrett
• Erica Dolores Miller
• Kamile Johnson
• Stacy Cronhardt
• David Grady
• Kathryn “Kathy” Campbell
LSR7’s Summit Up podcast is centering students and staff to tell unique stories from across the district.

The podcast, which launched in 2021, records in the Digital Media studio at Summit Technology Academy on the Missouri Innovation Campus. Episodes are often produced by students with the support of instructor Shawn Harrel.

Topics already covered by the podcast are:

- **Belonging in our Buildings**: Facilities Director Kyle Correll sits down with four LSR7 high schoolers to shed light on how LSR7 works to ensure each of its renovation or construction projects extend students’ feeling of belonging while in class.

- **Special Services**: Special Services Executive Director Dr. Staci Mathes and members of her team break down how the department interacts with the entire district.

- **Leading and Belonging Groups**: Hazel Grove Elementary teachers and students sit down to talk about the school’s new LAB groups, which encourage leadership and belonging within the school.

- **PLMS Teacher Academy**: Teacher Jenny Moreno and her student discuss the Lee’s Summit Teacher Academy and how every student, not just students who want to be teachers, can benefit from participating in the club.

You can hear a new episode every other week on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.
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Students enjoy the playground at Hawthorn Hill Elementary.
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