



2018 GFPS OPERATIONAL LEVY ASKED AND ANSWERED

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1. Where can I get more information about this levy?

You have found this “*Asked and Answered*” document on the GFPS webpage about the levy: <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/2018-operational-levy-information/>. Besides this document, you can find slides from community presentations, a brochure with succinct information, a calculator to figure out the exact cost for your residence, property tax relief information and a sample ballot (when it becomes available).

You can also come to one of two COMMUNITY INFORMATION meetings:

*Monday, April 16
Noon OR 6:00 pm
Paris Gibson Education Center Cafeteria
2400 Central Ave.*

2. How much will the operational levy cost me?

The increase in taxes for the proposed operational levy of \$1,349,048 on a \$100,000 “market valued” home is estimated at *approximately* \$13.28/year or \$1.11/month. Each property owner can calculate the amount for their own property by using the property tax calculator that can be found at this link: <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/2018-levy-calculator/>. The link includes directions on how to use the calculator. These are approximate costs because the mill value of the district changes every year in August.

3. How does a large community business improvement, such as the recent work at Calumet or the addition of a new Walmart, impact the school district budget and local taxpayers?

Taxable Valuation and the operational budgets for the school district are two separate and distinct items. An increase in a district’s Taxable Valuation does not increase or decrease the school district budgets. New major businesses and/or business improvements, given that all other changes in the year remain the same, increase the district’s Taxable Valuation. The Taxable Valuation of the district determines the value of the mill. When the mill value increases, less mills are needed to generate the same amount of money. Since the amount of the school budget is a set dollar amount, an increase in the Taxable Valuation will slightly reduce the burden on all other taxpayers.

4. Doesn’t the school district automatically get more money when my taxes go up...on a percentage basis?

No. When voters authorize funding for schools via a vote of the people, they authorize a set dollar amount, not a percentage of taxes paid by property owners. Over the years, Great Falls voters have approved \$12,661,026 in levies between elementary and high school districts. That is the same dollar amount GFPS has received from local taxpayers for the general fund since 2014 when the last levy passed for \$1,644,158. The “over base” property tax dollar amount stays the same unless the people vote to increase it.

5. I’m on a fixed and low income, but I know schools are important. How can I afford new taxes?

The District understands this dilemma that many community members face. This age old quandary was most likely present for certain people throughout the ages. We thank those taxpayers of yesteryear for sacrificing the way they did. Luckily today, there is help for low income and elderly taxpayers. The Property Tax Relief Application and the Elderly Homeowner/Renter Credit Application are both available to those who qualify. The applications and qualifications can be found here: <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/property-tax-relief-info/#post-44936>.

6. Great Falls just voted for a bond levy of \$98.8 million. Isn't that enough? Why are you asking for more money?

In October, 2016, 62% of the voters who cast a ballot voted for a facility bond levy of \$98.8 million. You can see all of the details about the facility bond planning and results at this link: <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/facility-action/>. GFPS appreciates this investment in our community's school buildings very much! The key word in that sentence is "buildings"...**bonds are for buildings**. In contrast, **operational levies are for learning**. The \$1,349,048 is used for the instructional and operational costs of the activities that happen inside the buildings we are renovating, enhancing and improving.

By law, the bond proceeds cannot be used for the general operations of the district. Montana Code Annotated (MCA) sets forth very specific requirements for money raised via bond levies. MCA makes it very clear that bond levy proceeds can only be used for capital spending projects like the building of new schools and the repair of existing schools. Bond proceeds cannot be used for staffing, supplies and other types of general education expenditures. It is not possible, for example, to use bond proceeds to expand music or art programs. The very specific bond levy laws start here: <http://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/20/9/20-9-402.htm>. Click on "Next Section" at the top. MCA 20-9-402 through MCA 20-9-446 governs bonding.

7. Why do you keep asking for levies?

As with any enterprise, the cost of doing our work is increasing. 85% of our budget is spent on staff who do the work of educating and supporting the education of our youngest citizens, our students. In order to recruit and retain good people, we provide small cost of living and longevity increases to staff which increases the bottom line as well. Operational levies are, by design of the Montana legislature, the vehicle in order to pay for the increasing costs of doing business.

In actuality, GFPS has not asked for an increase to its general fund since 2014. That request was approved by voters in the amount of \$1,644,158 for the 2014-2015 school year. There have been no requests for an operational levy for the general fund in 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018. In 2016 the bond levy passed (which cannot be used for operations...see #5 above) and a technology levy failed (which could only have been used for technology purchases not salaries) in 2017.

In the last ten years, the only other operational levy that was supported by voters was in 2010. During that same period of time, GFPS has made spending reductions of \$8.89 million.

8. Don't you get millions of dollars from the federal government for the MAFB students?

GFPS receives Impact Aid in lieu of property taxes which are not paid by the federal government for the federally owned properties. Each year, GFPS conducts a census of military families and their students. The census numbers are sent to the federal government which allots payments in lieu of property taxes. The annual amount has been averaging at approximately \$750,000 per year and payments are received annually for the census numbers of two years ago. GFPS has directed spending of the Impact Aid proceeds on the schools that serve a high population of military students. In years prior to 2008, GFPS was able to set aside a good share of that money into a reserve which exists today. Having this reserve is a good thing to have to mitigate emergencies and unforeseen but necessary expenditures. Having this reserve was also key in receiving an A+ bond rating by S&P, as noted in their summary documents, which resulted in a favorable interest rate on the bond sales.

9. Why don't you cut sports to make ends meet?

Expenditures for coaches and travel for all extra-curricular activities (athletics, music, drama, speech/debate, journalism, etc.) is 1.99% of the general fund budget. Countless students, parents, community members, teachers and administrators concur that the benefits of these programs for students are worth the expense of the program. You can view the presentation slides from the first Community Budget meeting held in January that detailed general fund revenue and expenditures at this link: <https://gfps.k12.mt.us/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/1-23-18%20Community%20Budget%20Meeting%20Presentation.pdf>.

10. What else will be on the ballot on May 8?

A trustee election will also be on the ballot. Two seats are open. One is a two-year term originally held by Don Ryan who resigned which resulted in Kim Skornogoski being appointed to the seat. She has to be elected to continue Mr. Ryan's term and she has filed to do so. The other is a three-year term currently held by Bob Moretti. He has not indicated intent to run for re-election. As of March 28, 2018, there is one candidate that has filed for that seat. The filing deadline to be on the ballot is March 29.

The City of Great Falls is also asking voters to consider creating a "park district" which will provide funds for the City Commission to allocate for the parks. A law change in the 2017 legislature made it a requirement that a municipality must run an election like this in conjunction with the school election.

11. How can I make sure I can vote in the levy, trustee and park district election?

- If you didn't vote in the last federal election you are not considered an active voter and you will not receive a ballot by mail. Thousands of voters have been purged from the voter rolls because they didn't vote in the presidential election in 2016.
- You can check your registration status at: <https://app.mt.gov/voterinfo/>
- To register or to become active again, you must fill out a registration application form: <http://sos.mt.gov/portals/142/Elections/documents/Officials/Voter-Registration-Application.pdf> . You need to fill it out, print it and either mail it or drop it off at the Cascade County Elections Office.
- The regular registration deadline is TUESDAY, APRIL 3, 2018 but you can register to vote through May 8 via the late registration process. Contact the Cascade County Elections Office at 454-6803 for more information.
- Jury pools are no longer selected by using voter lists.