

Ridgway school measures worthy of voter support

Dear Editor:

In this upcoming election the voters in Ridgway School District will face two ballot questions asking for funding. First, question 4A is seeking a general fund override. Revenue received will accomplish attracting and retaining quality teachers, preserving small class sizes, expanding college and career readiness and improving access to mental health services. The need for this funding from local taxpayers for local benefit is driven primarily by state cuts in school funding. The state has decreased school funding as set forth and promised in the School Finance Act and Amendment 23. This has been enacted through a process called budget stabilization, also referred to as the negative factor. Through this process the state has decreased school funding for the last 12 years. The state initiated this decrease to balance the state budget. The effect on Ridgway School has been a funding decrease of over \$5 million. Absent a statewide vote to increase school funding, an effort that has failed at least twice in the past eight years, this trend will continue. We as voters are faced with the dilemma of waiting for the state to fix this problem while our children's education suffers or address this locally. This ballot question will sunset in 10 years anticipating some solution at the state level.

4B, the second ballot question, deals with improving old and outdated facilities, focusing primarily on the elementary school. The original building was built in 1972. The proceeds from 4B would be used for asbestos abatement, replacing outdated heating, electric, mechanical systems and improving safety and security. Ridgway School, to its credit, has completed an exhaustive facility and options analysis over the past three years. Although the ballot question begins with "Shall Ridgway School District R-2 debt be increased," taxpayers will not pay any more with the passage of 4B than they currently pay. This is possible because the bond that built the high school gym will be paid off next year. In addition, the School has been awarded a state BEST grant for facilities improvements at \$7.6 million contingent on voter approval of 4B. This bond issue is well thought out, needed and fiscally responsible. With the current bond being paid off and with the grant and with historically low interest rates, this is an opportunity that will likely not present itself again.

4A and 4B are worthy of voter support.

Don Batchelder
Ridgway