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## **Ballots are out; vote yes on school levies.**

HERE'S a task for today: Sift beneath the stack of magazines, newspapers and assorted mail and pull out the envelope containing the Feb. 9 special-election ballot.

Ballots went out more than a week ago for levy elections in 164 school districts around the state, including the Puget Sound region: Seattle, Bellevue, Issaquah, Federal Way, Kent, Lake Washington, Mercer Island, Northshore, Riverview, Shoreline, Tahoma, Snoqualmie Valley and Tukwila.

Voters should approve these money measures. Most replace expiring levies, assuring schools of continued educational programming.

The need is straightforward. The Washington Constitution requires the state to fund basic education needs but the Legislature's definition of basic has long amounted to giving districts about 80 percent of what they truly need. Citizens generously fill the funding gap.

Operating levies pay for everything from textbooks and classroom supplies to music and foreign-language teachers. Capital levies pay for building maintenance, making the difference between a structurally sound school and an unsafe one.

Voters should support these needs. A levy failure does irreparable harm to school budgets.

While citizens do their part approving levies, lawmakers do theirs by approving bills designed to support schools. One bill would raise the levy lid, enabling districts to collect more in voter-approved measures. Currently, even if voters approve a higher amount, districts cannot collect above a preset ceiling. An important part must be equalization funding to poorer districts.

A second bill renews an expiring law that holds levies harmless when state and federal funding is cut – levy rates are based on a district's level of funding. Otherwise, districts face a double whammy of reduced budgets and reduced levy collections.

An all-mail election presents challenges that include voters' forgetfulness in getting ballots in. Time to mark "yes" for school levies and drop the ballot in the mail.