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BGR Media Release

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BGR Analyzes Jefferson Parish School Tax on the December 7 Ballot

Today, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) releases a new report, [On the Ballot: Jefferson Parish School Tax, December 7, 2024](#). The report is intended to help Jefferson Parish voters make an informed decision on a proposed 10.89-mill property tax to increase pay and benefits for teachers and other employees of the Jefferson Parish Public School System. Early voting for the December 7 election begins tomorrow.

The School System would use the tax revenue to raise pay for all certified teachers by \$8,300 a year, a 16% increase to the starting salary – from \$51,800 to \$60,100. In addition, the revenue would fund proportionate pay increases for school and central office leadership positions, except the superintendent, and \$2,000 raises for all support positions. The School System is the largest elementary and secondary school district in Louisiana, with about 48,000 students and more than 6,000 employees.

BGR's report analyzes the School System's pay raise tax proposition based on three questions to assess whether it supports the efficient and effective use of public resources: (1) Has the School System carefully planned how it will spend the tax revenue and provide financial stewardship and accountability for the public dollars? (2) Is the tax an acceptable way to fund the planned expenditures in light of alternative funding options? (3) Is there evidence indicating the tax would result in effective outcomes for the public?

The report concludes with BGR's position in favor of the tax. [Click to read a mobile-friendly InBrief summary and download the full report.](#)

“The Jefferson Parish Public School System has taken prudent steps to fund pay raises through cost savings and create programming to recruit and retain teachers. But the School System found these steps are simply not enough to build the learning environment it seeks,” said Rebecca Mowbray, BGR's president and CEO. “Having a stable workforce in schools is essential for student success.”

Key findings from BGR's analysis include:

- The School System has identified improving teacher recruitment and retention as a critical need for boosting student performance. The School System has targeted its proposal to bring its starting certified teacher salary to the highest among area districts. More than 500 teachers have regularly left the School System each year since well before the pandemic, keeping the annual turnover rate between 15% and 24%. Finding replacements for departing teachers has become a greater challenge, leaving more classrooms without any designated teacher. In 2022, the School System's vacancy rate was 4.2%, the 13th highest among 61 reporting districts in Louisiana and well above the 1.5% average rate. Three-quarters of the estimated \$45.7 million annual cost of the pay raise plan would go to teachers, with the rest supporting the system's leadership positions and support staff.
- BGR estimates the tax would generate \$50.3 million in its first year, exceeding the School System's conservative estimate of \$45.8 million. However, the additional tax revenue would help cover a projected annual funding increase of between \$5.4 and \$6.3 million for its six charter schools (about \$900 to \$1,000 per student), which fall outside the system's pay raise plan. State law requires that charter schools receive a proportionate share (based on student enrollment) of the district's local sales and property tax revenue to support their personnel and other operating costs. So, a local tax increase would trigger an increase in funding for the charter schools' operations.
- School System officials acknowledge concerns that the proposed raises for support staff are insufficient. They say that the primary purpose of the tax proposal is to resolve persistent teacher shortages and that the School System will prioritize support staff salaries if any other funding sources become available.
- The School System has demonstrated strong stewardship and accountability for public dollars. It has invested one-time revenues in facility and technology needs, produced clean financial audits, and increased the public's access to spending data. The School System has also used cost savings from consolidating under-enrolled schools to help fund a recent pay raise, reducing the size of the tax proposed to voters.
- The School System lacks clear alternative funding options that could fully support the pay raises on an ongoing basis, or significantly reduce the size of the proposed tax. While relying on the School System's current revenue streams to fund the pay raises could save money for parish taxpayers, the system's budget outlook does not indicate sustained, sufficient surpluses to make this a viable alternative to the tax.
- The School System does not anticipate increases in existing property tax or sales tax revenues sufficient to support the pay raise plan. Increased State funding for schools is uncertain. In general, new State funding could help the School System and other districts statewide to make their pay scales more competitive with other sectors and schools outside Louisiana. However, it would not necessarily make

Jefferson teacher salaries more competitive with area districts in the same way as the proposed locally funded raises.

- Research has connected teaching experience with growth in student achievement and higher teacher turnover with poorer learning outcomes. Research also finds that pay is an important factor in recruiting and retaining teachers. Putting these findings together suggests that the teacher salary increase funded by the proposed tax would help boost Jefferson students' academic performance.
- The School System could increase the potential for these effective outcomes by also addressing non-compensation factors that discourage teachers from remaining in the classroom, such as growing workloads and reporting requirements.

Based on this analysis, BGR takes the following position on the tax proposition:

FOR. Like many school districts across the country, the Jefferson Parish Public School System has faced severe challenges attracting and retaining teachers. During the last five years, it has lost an average of 550 teachers annually and classroom vacancies have often surpassed 100. The constant churn means students often have new and inexperienced teachers who are learning the ropes of managing their classrooms and providing effective instruction. National research positively links teacher experience with student achievement and has found that higher teacher turnover reduces students' academic growth.

The salary increase funded by the proposed tax would make the School System's starting teacher pay the highest in southeast Louisiana and help it overcome hiring and retention disadvantages relative to other area districts. It would also boost competitiveness with opportunities in other sectors. While pay gaps alone are not responsible for the School System's teacher shortage, they are a significant driver. The pay raise has the potential to improve teacher attraction and retention, the effectiveness of the School System's teaching force and, ultimately, the system's lagging student achievement levels. The School System did not aim to comprehensively address support staff pay concerns with the tax proposal and plans to prioritize this issue if any other funding sources become available.

The 10.89-mill tax is a significant request of voters, but one that would support a core building block for the future success of the parish's families, economy and quality of life. Not addressing teacher pay now could worsen the situation and make it more difficult for the School System to achieve its education goals for students. The School System has worked to limit the request through cost savings in its operations and facilities, as well as careful financial management. If voters approve the proposition, the School System should continue to pursue opportunities to lighten local taxpayers' burden by levying a lower rate if future circumstances reduce the level of revenue needed.

And regardless of the outcome of the proposition, the School System should continue to seek operational efficiencies that allow it to redirect financial resources to students' greatest needs. In addition, it must commit to working with its teachers as well as State partners to develop solutions that address the non-financial issues that drive teachers from the classroom.

About BGR's *On the Ballot* Series

These reports are part of **BGR's *On the Ballot* series**, which provides voters with independent, nonpartisan analysis of significant ballot propositions in the New Orleans metropolitan area. In producing these reports, BGR recommends positions consistent with its mission of promoting informed public policy making and the effective use of public resources to improve local government. *On the Ballot* reports highlight the strengths and weaknesses of ballot propositions and assess the potential for government expenditures or actions to efficiently achieve beneficial outcomes for citizens.

On the Ballot reports often focus on tax or charter change proposals that would be difficult for even informed citizens to assess on their own. They may hear information only from advocates or critics of a proposal. BGR looks in depth at these important ballot items with the public in mind.

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BGR is a private, nonprofit, independent research organization. Since its founding in 1932, it has been dedicated to informed public policymaking and the effective use of public resources in the Greater New Orleans area. For more information, call (504) 525-4152 or visit BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

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