BGR Media Release

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Contact: Amy L. Glovinsky, *President & CEO*
(504) 525-4152, ext. 107
aglovinsky@bgr.org

BGR Examines Jefferson Parish School Tax Proposition

Today, the Bureau of Governmental Research (BGR) releases *On the Ballot: Jefferson Parish School Tax Proposal, May 4, 2019*. The report analyzes a May 4 tax proposition in Jefferson Parish to fund pay raises for teachers and other employees of the Jefferson Parish Public School System.

The new property tax would be levied parishwide at a rate of 7.9 mills for 10 years, beginning in 2019. It is expected to generate $28.8 million in the first year. If voters approve the tax, the Jefferson Parish School Board would implement a new pay plan for School System employees that it approved earlier this year. The pay plan would direct 73% of revenue from the tax to teacher pay raises and incentive stipends. The remaining 27% would fund a portion of support staff pay raises. The School System would supplement the new tax revenue with $4.5 million from current revenues that it will make available through new budgeting efficiencies. The additional money would fund the remaining support staff pay raises, as well as raises and stipends for school and district leaders.

The School Board proposed the tax because it views its current pay scales as inadequate to attract and retain high-quality employees to support students' academic growth. BGR's *On the Ballot* report finds that the new pay plan would boost early-career teacher salaries to regionally competitive levels. At the same time it would limit raises for later-career teachers whose current salaries are more competitive with those of other area districts. The new pay plan would supplement the teacher salary increases with incentive stipends intended to encourage high performance and address employment gaps in schools and content areas of greatest demonstrated need. The new support staff salary schedules would distribute revenue to pay all support staff above poverty-level wages and retain qualified employees. The pay raises are part of a comprehensive strategic plan that commits the School System to rapidly improving student achievement.

BGR's analysis found that the proposed tax could help the School System attract and retain more effective teachers. In addition, the tax-funded pay raises will go hand in hand with strategic plan initiatives to enhance teacher support and professional culture, thus increasing the chances for the tax revenue to make a positive impact on student achievement.

Therefore, BGR takes the following position on the tax proposition:

> **FOR.** The Jefferson Parish Public School System has returned to voters with a more well-developed pay raise proposal than the one voters rejected in 2017. Revenue from the proposed tax would allow the School System to boost teacher pay to levels that are competitive with other area districts. More competitive salaries would help the School System overcome high teacher turnover and recurring shortages that negatively impact student achievement and drive up costs. The tax would enable the School System to implement a new pay plan that directs revenue to high-priority needs identified through its analysis of staffing trends. While the School System acknowledges that the support staff raises are not necessary to fill positions, they would eliminate existing compensation inequalities and ensure that all employees earn above poverty line wages. In addition, they would help the School System attract and keep superior employees. Although it has sought budget efficiencies, the size of raises necessary to sufficiently increase competitiveness requires additional revenue. The School Board has maximized the potential impact of higher salaries by adopting a comprehensive strategic plan that commits the School System to significant growth in student achievement by 2024.
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> If voters approve the tax, BGR recommends that the School System regularly review the effectiveness of the pay raises and incentive stipends in attracting and retaining high-quality employees.

Read the full report and two-page summary on BGR's website, www.bgr.org.

This report is the latest in BGR's *On the Ballot* series, which provides voters with objective, nonpartisan analysis of significant ballot propositions in the New Orleans metropolitan area. In producing *On the Ballot* reports, BGR recommends positions consistent with its mission of promoting informed public policy and the effective use of public resources for the improvement of local government. *On the Ballot* reports bring to light the strengths and weaknesses of ballot propositions and assess the potential for government expenditures or actions to efficiently achieve beneficial outcomes for citizens.

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