

State Question 801

QUICK FACTS

SUMMARY:

State Question 801 would amend the state constitution, which currently prohibits the use of school district building funds for most recurring operational costs like teacher pay. It originated from Senate Joint Resolution 70 authored by Sen. Stephanie Bice and Rep. Elise Hall and was then placed on the ballot by the state Legislature.

WHAT IT WOULD DO:

Perhaps more important than what this state question is what it *wouldn't* do. Passage of this measure would give districts more discretion in spending existing building fund revenue, but it would not create any new revenue for schools. Voters in every Oklahoma district have already increased general operations and building fund property taxes to the maximum 44 total mills (\$44 for every \$1,000) allowed under state law.

AREAS OF CONCERN:

- Many school districts already have shifted as many operational costs as currently allowed to the building fund to free up as much money as possible for classroom-related spending, including teacher salaries. This means many districts pay for property insurance, utilities and salaries of maintenance workers from the building fund.
- Shifting the responsibility of funding teacher pay from state to local districts is concerning policy, particularly at a time when local funding is already comprising an increasing share of school budgets.
- The change could open up building fund money for employee salary negotiations, which could result in some districts having less money available to meet capital needs.
- Oklahoma school districts don't have excess building fund money going unused. In fact, most districts have unmet capital improvement needs.
- Oklahoma's education funding challenges aren't a result of restricted capital improvement dollars, and this change won't create an increase in the amount of money available to schools.
- Oklahoma is one of only four states that doesn't have state-dedicated funding for buildings so districts are heavily reliant on local funds for infrastructure maintenance and improvements.

