

# Operational levies for voters are commonplace

Nearly three-fourths of state districts have them in place

**By Rachel Kubik**  
rkubik@echopress.com

The Alexandria School District is proposing an operating levy, with the question being put before voters on Nov. 5. The district went without one for the last five years, putting it in the minority among Minnesota school districts.

Previous years' elections resulted in 240 of the state's 331 school districts having a voter-approved operating levy this year, said Michael Schwartz, an education specialist from the Minnesota Department of Education. That amounts to 72.5% of the districts in the state that have gone to voters at the ballot

box for funds to help operate schools. That percentage is likely to grow. There are 27 other rural school districts asking for referendum increases this year, which is roughly 10% of all rural districts in Minnesota, said Fred Nolan, executive director of the Minnesota Rural

Education Association. "Alexandria is not alone this year," he said, when referring to rural districts asking voters for levies. Nolan, a retired superintendent of the Foley Public School District, said rural districts tend to be more frugal than their counterparts in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. "They tend to watch all their

pennies and try to get by with what they have," Nolan said. Metro districts aren't extravagant, but they do tend to have more programs, such as orchestra in elementary school, he said. The Alexandria school district is proposing a 10-year, voter-approved operating

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## FALL FISHING FUN



Nate Nikolaisen and his son Cayne took advantage of a sunny day last week to go fishing off the pier on Lake Victoria. Although the area received its first snowfall of the season last Friday, forecasts are for temperatures to rebound to around 60 by this Friday.

ALEXANDRIA CITY COUNCIL

## Smoother rides planned on 14 streets in Alexandria

**By Al Edenloff**  
aedenloff@echopress.com

Coming soon to a neighborhood near you — a street overlay project. At its meeting Monday, the Alexandria City Council approved a \$71,560 engineering agreement for 14 local street projects for next year. The overlays are important because they prevent the roads from getting in really bad shape, which would be more expensive to repair, according to City Engineer Tim Schoonhoven. "This is probably the least exciting but most important projects we do," Schoonhoven told the council. The projects include:

- Dewberry Lane from Agnes Boulevard to the east end of the road.
- Brendan Court from Amanda Lane to the east end of the road.
- Amanda Drive from Agnes Boulevard to Anderson Way.
- Anderson Way from Voyager Drive to Amanda Lane.

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## MANDATED TO REPORT

School officials don't judge, investigate possible child abuse

**By Celeste Edenloff**  
cedenloff@echopress.com

*(Editor's note: This is the second of a three-part series about child abuse. Part 3 will run in the Friday, Oct. 18, Echo Press.)*

Teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians, bus drivers, food service workers and school administrators are the eyes and ears for much of a child's life. Because of that, they are all mandated by the state to report any suspicion of child abuse. By doing so they are not making a judgment of the situation, but rather are looking at what is best for the child and making sure that the child is safe, said Michelle Bethke-Kaliher, Alexandria School District's director of Student Support Services. "It's not their job to make that call, to judge or investigate a situation. That is up to the courts and social workers," said Bethke-Kaliher. "If there are suspicions, they (school personnel) have to report everything."

Vicki Doetkott, a social worker for the district, agreed, saying that it is not the job of anyone who works in the district, including social workers, to investigate suspected cases of child abuse. Their only job is to report it to Douglas County Social Services or law enforcement. Within a school system, many people — from the school nurse or social worker to principal or other administrators — care about the social and emotional well-being of students, said Bethke-Kaliher. "It's a team and it is all of our jobs to care and make sure our students can participate in academics," she said. Anyone who is hired in the school district is trained on what goes into being a mandated reporter. They learn warning signs to look for and about things children say that might indicate something has happened. "As a social worker, I can't make the report unless I

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### Red flags

There are several general and specific signs to look for, depending on the type of child abuse.

### General signs include:

- Changes in behavior — aggression, anger, hostility or hyperactivity.
- Changes in school performance, frequent absences or reluctance to leave school activities because he/she doesn't want to go home.
- Self-harm or attempts at suicide.

- Depression, anxiety or unusual fears, or a sudden loss of self-confidence.
- Physical abuse signs include unexplained injuries such as bruises, fractures or burns, and/or injuries that don't match the given explanation.
- Sexual abuse signs or symptoms include sexual behavior or knowledge that is inappropriate for the child's age; statements that he or she was sexually abused; blood in a child's underwear; or inappropriate sexual contact with other children.

Symptoms for emotional abuse include delayed or inappropriate emotional development, social withdrawal or a loss of interest/enthusiasm, avoidance of certain situations or loss of previously acquired developmental skills. When a child is neglected there is often poor growth or weight gain, poor hygiene, lack of clothing, hiding food for later, taking food or money without permission, lack of appropriate attention for medical, dental or psychological problems and/or lack of necessary follow-up care.