

Pride In Olmsted Schools Levy Committee

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Note: These questions were generated by your friends, neighbors and colleagues at a public meeting held on August 18, 2009.

Please visit our website at www.yes4ofschools.org or on Facebook at Pride in Olmsted Schools. When you visit our website or Facebook page you can email us any additional questions you may have. We are committed to helping you make an informed choice.

Taxation

❑ **Is the community aware of the homestead exemption?**

The homestead exemption is promoted each year to residents 65 or over by the County Auditor.

❑ **How does our millage compare to other communities?**

It is challenging for most people to understand how millage works. Rather, they just want to know how their taxes compare to residents in other communities. Please review the following chart to see how the annual property taxes compare on a \$150,000 home in school communities throughout Cuyahoga County:

| | | Property Tax per \$150,000 Home Market Value |
|----|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Shaker Heights City SD | 4,680 |
| 2 | Cleveland Hts-Univ Hts City SD | 4,380 / 4,395 |
| 3 | Fairview Park City SD | 3,900 |
| 4 | Garfield Heights City SD | 3,900 |
| 5 | South Euclid-Lyndhurst City SD | 3,810 / 3,735 |
| 6 | Lakewood City SD | 3,780 |
| 7 | Bay Village City SD | 3,675 |
| 8 | Chagrin Falls Ex Vill SD | 3,510 / 3,135 (Township) |
| 9 | North Olmsted City SD | 3,480 |
| 10 | Warrensville Heights City SD | 3,420 |
| 11 | Rocky River City SD | 3,360 |
| 12 | Olmsted Falls City SD | 3,360 / 3,405 (Township) |
| 13 | Maple Heights City SD | 3,315 |
| 14 | Euclid City SD | 3,300 |
| 15 | East Cleveland City SD | 3,255 |
| 16 | Berea City SD | 3,225 |
| 17 | Mayfield City SD | 3,105 / 2,835 (Village) |
| 18 | Richmond Heights Local SD | 3,090 |
| 19 | Brecksville-Broadview Hts SD | 3,075 / 2,985 |
| 20 | Orange City SD | 3,060 |
| 21 | Strongsville City SD | 3,060 |
| 22 | Cleveland Municipal SD | 2,970 |
| 23 | Parma City SD | 2,970 |
| 24 | Solon City SD | 2,910 |

| | | |
|----|---------------------------|-------|
| 25 | Bedford City SD | 2,895 |
| 26 | Westlake City SD | 2,805 |
| 27 | Brooklyn City SD | 2,805 |
| 28 | North Royalton City SD | 2,790 |
| 29 | Beachwood City SD | 2,745 |
| 30 | Independence Local SD | 2,460 |
| 31 | Cuyahoga Heights Local SD | 2,220 |

Source: Cuyahoga County Treasurer – 2008 Community Tax Rates

❑ **Do lower property assessments mean levy will cost homeowners less?**

No. It means it will take more mills to raise the same dollars. This means it will cost each homeowner more to raise the same dollar amount.

❑ **If we had passed a 9.9 mill levy in February 2009, would the “extra” money have been wasted?**

There would not have been “extra money.” The planning assumptions for the operating levy have changed since the first levy was put before voters last November. Due to the cost savings and cuts already in place, the dollars needed to support district operations have declined. Therefore the dollars needed (mills requested) are also reduced.

Additionally, the 9.9 mills in the earlier levy would have allowed the District to operate for five years. The current levy proposal on the November 2009 ballot will last a minimum of three years.

Levy Structure

❑ **Is this a permanent or renewal levy?**

The levy on the November 2009 ballot is a continuous levy. It will become part of the permanent local revenue that our school district relies upon.

❑ **Why all the different levy millage numbers?**

Mills are a rate of taxation that is determined based upon the overall valuation of property in a community. Developed land is more valuable than undeveloped land.

Between last February’s levy failure and the decision to put on a new levy this November, the Board of Education and Administration were evaluating differing revenue requirements to meet the operating needs of the District. The various millage rates reflected the options needed to raise the dollars. In the end, the District approved a levy for 6.4 mills because it enabled the District to restore high school busing and not make deeper cuts in other programs. This levy is expected to last a minimum of three years.

❑ **Why is the 6.4 mill levy the right amount/good deal?**

The 6.4 mill levy is a balance between the long-term educational needs of the community and the financial needs of the District to meet the communities’ expectations. Passage of the levy will restore high school busing and prevent deeper more devastating cuts to K-8 busing, extracurriculars, and sports.

Financially, this levy will provide the revenue to meet expected needs for a minimum of three years.

❑ **What does passing this levy do for me as a homeowner?**

Each home is different, but independent studies show communities with a reputation for good schools help to keep home values strong. As our economy improves, the level of home appreciation will be helped by a community's reputation for good schools.

❑ **Explain the difference between an operating levy and a bond issue.**

An *operating levy* can only be used to pay for *utilities, employee compensation, textbooks, computers, and busing*. A *bond issue* is used for construction of facilities with an expected life of greater than five years. By law, funds raised by each respective levy type cannot be used for other purposes.

❑ **If the levy passes, how long will it last? How long until the next levy?**

The Board of Education and Administration have pledged to make the new revenue from the levy last for a minimum of three years.

❑ **Where does the money from the levy go?**

An operating levy can only be used to pay for utilities, employee compensation, textbooks, computers, and busing. Over time, the purchasing power from the levy funds is reduced by inflation and increased costs due to rising enrollment.

District Finances

❑ **What happened to the funding raised through the levy in 2007?**

This was not an operating levy but a bond issue. Funds generated from the passage of a 2 Mill Bond Issue in May 2007 were used to build the new Intermediate School on Bagley Road in order to alleviate severe overcrowding issues at the Pre-K to 5 grade levels. A *bond issue* is used for construction of facilities with an expected life of greater than five years. By law, funds raised by a bond issue cannot be used for operating funds (like busing, utilities and employee compensation). This is why we need the proposed operating levy this November.

❑ **Where will money be spent? Services/Staffing**

The new revenue will be used for utilities, employee compensation, textbooks, computers, busing and other day-to-day operating expenses. It will be used to meet the increase in costs associated with a 28% increase in enrollment since the last operating levy was passed in February 1999.

❑ **Is there a breakdown of current expenses available?**

Yes, please visit www.yes4ofschools.org and click on the link for *9/2 Levy Presentation*.

❑ **Where is the surplus of dollars from years ago?**

The nature of school funding is that when a levy is passed, a surplus in funds is created. Over the life of the levy, the surplus is drawn down, to cover increased costs due to inflation and growing enrollment. Eventually, even with cost containment measures in place, the costs exceed the revenue, and a deficit is created. **By State law, a school district can not operate in a deficit.** Therefore the two choices are to raise new funds from a new levy or cut people, programs and services to reduce the cost and deficit. This is why a new operating levy is needed.

❑ **Why should I support a tax increase for migrant families?**

There is a very small migrant population in the District. While there are some families who move in and out of our community, most residents put down roots in our community for years. Good schools protect everyone's property valuation and appreciation. A vote for strong schools is a vote to keep homes in our community attractive for sale and/or for increase in home equity used by many homeowners to finance home improvement loans.

❑ **Is it important to compare Olmsted Falls School District's cost per pupil compared to other districts?**

Yes. Olmsted Falls School District has the 4th lowest cost per pupil ratio of all 31 school districts in the County (see www.yes4ofschools.org District Financial Comparisons link for details). Our decade-long record of outstanding academic results is also among the longest in the State.

❑ **Can the budget process become more transparent showing how dollars are spent?**

The Treasurer of the District makes monthly reports during Board of Education meetings. At that time the budget is presented. These meetings are open to the public. Additionally, the Ohio Department of Education displays 5-year financial forecasts and other financial data on their website (www.ode.state.oh.us) for every school district in the State of Ohio.

Property Values

❑ **How does the levy impact property values? How will property values be affected by a levy when they have already decreased during reassessment?**

The levy itself has no impact on reassessment or home value. One factor influencing home values is the quality of local schools. To the extent our schools are both academically and financially strong will help our property values improve. Therefore, continuation of quality educational and extracurricular programming plus the recent passage of a school levy will make our community more attractive to home buyers which in turn will be part of the positive factors helping our area to recover home value sooner.

❑ **Explain how the reduction in home values will affect homeowner's taxes and ultimately District income.**

Overall, property valuation in a community is at the heart of school funding in Ohio. As overall valuation of property in a school district decreases, it means a school district will have to increase millage and therefore homeowner costs to raise the same revenue. The alternative is to ask for the school district to request less money and reduce educational and extra-curricular opportunities and/or have the levy last a shorter period of time. This is the dilemma we are currently facing in the Olmsted Falls School District.

Governmental School Funding

❑ **When will school funding be fixed at the State level?**

Back in the 1990's, the current method of school funding was ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court (*The DeRolph Case*). Since then, the Court has backed away from enforcing this decision and each year the State Legislature ignores the mandate to fix funding. Olmsted Falls School District has been a long-term active supporter of State Funding Reform. There is no cavalry riding over the hill with a solution in the foreseeable future.

- ❑ **What steps are needed to pressure City and Township to further commercial development?**

Though we meet formally with the elected officials of both communities on a regular basis, the schools have no direct connection to economic development in our area.

Zoning laws and tax abatement are two tools the City and Township are using to attract new business or to provide incentives to existing businesses to expand. The expansion of the Vita Mix Plant on Usher Road and the Joint Economic Development District on Bagley Road are two examples of economic development activities.

- ❑ **Explain how school funding issues will not be “fixed” in the near future.**

Public pressure on legislators is needed to create change in school funding. Our local PTA is one of many organizations who support the District’s efforts to organize letter writing campaigns and host legislative forums. Back in 1994, the current method of school funding was ruled unconstitutional. Each year, the Legislature ignores the mandate to fix funding. Olmsted Falls School District has been a long-term active supporter of State Funding Reform.

- ❑ **What will happen if the State takes over control of the Olmsted Falls School District?**

Based upon past practice, the State’s actions would match almost exactly what Olmsted Falls School District is doing now - put a levy on the ballot, cut student programs and services (busing, extracurriculars, and curriculum). In addition, the State will take out a loan to be repaid by the new levy receipts and mount a levy campaign. Passing a levy, whether in November or in the future, is the key to keeping our schools strong and filled with opportunities for all students.

Community/Educational Impact

- ❑ **What happens if the levy does not pass? What cutbacks if the levy does not pass?**

The first change will be that busing for students in grades K-8 will be reduced the State Minimum Requirements of a two mile walk zone for each school building. This means, beginning January 2010, if your child lives less than two miles from the school he/she currently attends (measured by road) they will have to walk to and from school (or be driven). Reduction of busing services to State Minimum Requirements also means the elimination of all Alternate Transportation Requests. In addition, spring middle school sports will be eliminated.

When the levy is placed on the ballot again in February, it will be more costly due to a lost year of collections. Additionally, further cuts are at stake including the elimination of all middle school and high school athletic and extracurricular activities. Complete details are available at www.yes4ofschools.org under the *Levy Impact: The Path We Choose* link.

- ❑ **As a non-school parent, what is the benefit for me to vote for the levy? (i.e. property values)**

Studies show home values decrease in sub-standard school districts and increase in above average school districts. Good schools attract home buyers.

- **What is the impact of a no vote? Increase of kids on the street, etc....**
 - No after school programs, more unsupervised kids on street
 - Less places for community groups to meet
 - More traffic as more parents/grandparents have to transport children to and from school in grades K-8.
 - Empty stands, no cheering, on Friday night without football, basketball, or volleyball games; silence at choir and band podiums, no opening nights...
- **What is gained or lost economically as a taxpayer, homeowner, renter?**
 - Studies show home values decrease in sub-standard school districts and increase in above average school districts.
 - Our schools have become more than just a place for our children's education. They offer a variety of entertainment options, a common venue for gatherings and a source of revenue for local business and dining establishments. The school district is the largest employer in the community. The school district is a large part of the economic engine that attracts new business, families, and visitors to our community.

Transportation

- **At the transportation meeting, Dr Hoadley stated high school busing will not return. It is stated differently on the handout. Which is it?**

The discussion at the transportation meeting last spring included mention of how other local districts have opted not to reinstate high school busing once it has been cut. In the Olmsted Falls School District, the decision has been made to resume high school transportation (for both public and non public school students) if the levy passes in November. This return of high school busing is included in the *Levy Impact: The Path We Choose* document approved by the Board of Education. This document is available at www.yes4ofschools.org.

Extracurriculars

- **Regarding extracurricular activities, why is the pay-to-play program not an option? Or, what is the justification for cancelling pay-to-play sports? Or, why not have pay-to-play for sports, band, drama, choir, etc.? Or, is it possible to initiate pay-to-play sports instead of cancelling sports?**
 - At the September 2nd community meeting, many people let us know that they continue to value diversity of educational programs and extracurricular activities. Others at the meeting expressed a desire to reduce teaching staff and/or educational programs to preserve athletics and other activities. Others want to pay a user fee, a pay-to-participate fee to retain extracurriculars.
 - We as a Board of Education and Administration do understand the positive impact extracurricular activities have on student social, physical, and emotional development. However, at the end of the day, our belief in fairness and preserving core educational programs are our primary concerns. With a growing number of students (1 in 6) in our community facing poverty, we believe that **keeping unlimited and equal access for ALL students to education and extracurriculars is important.**

- Participation fees are a costly barrier preventing students from participating in activities. Education is our core mission. Quality teachers, with adequate resources and appropriate class sizes are essential to high quality teaching and learning for all children.

Staffing

- **With a win on November 3rd, will the District get a replacement of lost educators (band, German, etc.)?**
 - In the past year, 10.5 teaching positions were cut. Some of these were grade level teachers, other areas where reduced staffing occurred were: art, business, Industrial arts, German, library, music, and physical education.
 - As far as what staffing will be brought back, the best answer we can give is the financial assumptions that was created and used by the Board of Education and Administration to determine the need for 6.4 mills includes funding to enable the District to bring back four teaching positions over the next three years. (Two next school year, and one in each of the following two years). We have yet not determined what these teaching positions will specifically be.
 - Also, keep in mind that changes in State Law mean the District may be required to institute all-day every-day Kindergarten classes – without the benefit of additional State funding to support this new mandate. This would require six additional teachers. This would monopolize all four planned positions, as well as require two additional teachers to be funded from somewhere else.
- **Why is having 30 kids in a classroom bad?**
 - Helping every child reach their fullest potential is a core value of our District.
 - Larger class sizes erode our ability to achieve this core value.
 - Today's lessons require more interaction and individualized instruction for students. Larger class sizes inhibit this from happening because it means less time and opportunity for the teacher to focus on each child's individual needs. It means less time for everyone to participate in classroom lessons.
 - Larger class sizes mean overcrowding in classrooms. A struggling student will get lost in this environment, a bright student will not have the opportunity for challenging work and the average student will become a number and not an individual. Parent feedback will not be as specific or detailed.
 - Our teachers are the greatest asset in this District. Our test scores show our success is based upon reaching all students in the classroom. Larger class sizes erode the core value of our District.
 - Our workplaces have changed from the last century, so must our schools. Large classes organized in rows spewing general concepts no longer work to prepare students for a world of complex issues that require mastery of higher level problem solving and communication skills. Large class sizes hurt the ability of our District to prepare your child for their future.

- **Explain how faculty and administration are participating in the reduction of District expenses?**
 - All faculty, staff and administrators have taken a wage freeze and increased their contributions to healthcare premiums.
 - There are fewer administrators in this District today than there were ten years ago.
 - When the levy failed in February 2009, two administrative positions were eliminated.
 - A new building was opened without adding a single new administrator, or any additional custodial staff.
 - The District has the most pupils per administrator in Cuyahoga County, and ranks in the bottom six in the State.

- **Why have no administrative positions (District and school building level) been eliminated?**
 - When the levy failed in February 2009, two administrators were eliminated.

Voter Awareness

- **Why didn't parents come out to support the prior operating levies?**
 - This is a question that can only be answered by the individual voter.

- **Why vote "yes" now rather than later?**
 - Passing the levy today, will save you money in the long run. Failure of the levy this November means a higher cost levy next year, to make up for the lost year of tax collections. A levy passed this November begins generating revenue in January 2010. A levy passed after that (in February 2010 or May 2010) does not generate revenue until January 2011.
 - Voting now prevents further erosion and deeper cuts in transportation, extracurriculars, and employees. Do we need to experience a year without home football, basketball, volleyball, track, no concerts or debate teams, and other extracurriculars in order to motivate us to vote for a levy? We hope not.

- **How does the levy impact residents without kids?**
 - Continued levy failure, and the resulting continuation of cuts to the educational system, will erode the base of potential home buyers or keep your home value lower which limits equity growth needed to fund retirement, home improvements and other large projects.
 - If you are a young person without children, it means the schools your children go to will be less well-equipped to prepare your child for the competitive world they will face.

- **How do we think "outside the box" to get the "no" voter to become a "yes" voter?**
 - We have been meeting and engaging with community members to inform them about the choices they have for the future of our schools. We offer a variety of venues from Face Book to an informational website (www.yes4ofschools.org) for people to research additional information and have their questions answered.

- **What are we doing to register voters?**
 - We have a very aggressive campaign to register voters.