

## A Message from Superintendent Kirby

Dear Forest Hills Public Schools Community:



Ben Kirby

At the February meeting of the Forest Hills Public Schools' Board of Education, the board approved placing an operating millage renewal proposal on the May 6, 2025, ballot. Our current operating

millage has been in place for 10 years and expires in 2025.

The proposal that will appear on the May 6, 2025, ballot includes:

- A renewal of the current 18.1297 mills, and
- An authorization for an additional .50 mill for Headlee Amendment restoration, if needed.

This operating millage (non-homestead) is essential to secure full funding for our students and represents approximately \$24 million annually. It does not impact primary residences, and this millage has been in place since the implementation of Proposal A in 1994. The Proposal A formula requires that school districts collect a portion of their

Foundation Allowance by levying 18 mills on non-homestead properties. Without this required millage in place, the state will not fund FHPS the full Foundation Allowance, and the district will lose revenue that supports day-to-day operations.

It is important that you are informed about the facts of this ballot initiative as we move forward as a district. Therefore, we have prepared this newsletter to answer commonly asked questions about the millage renewal and other election information.

We will continue to provide information through our website and other printed materials as we move through this election cycle.

Should you have immediate questions, please don't hesitate to email Julie Davis, assistant superintendent for finance and operations, at [jdavis@fhps.net](mailto:jdavis@fhps.net), or me at [bkirby@fhps.net](mailto:bkirby@fhps.net), or call the administration office at 616-493-8800.

Thank you for your attention to this important information, and remember to vote.

Warm regards,

Ben Kirby, Superintendent

### Operating Millage Renewal Overview

- On May 6, 2025, Forest Hills Public Schools will have an operating millage (non-homestead) proposal on the ballot.
- The proposal asks voters whether to renew the 18.1297 mills and authorize an additional .50 mill for the Headlee Amendment restoration, if necessary.
- This millage would **NOT** impact property taxes on a primary residence.
- This millage has been in place since 1994, when Proposal A was initially implemented.
- This millage is necessary to secure full funding for our students.

**VOTE** by May 6, 2025



# Operating Millage Renewal: Questions/Answers

## What does “non-homestead” mean?

Non-homestead represents second homes, industrial, commercial, and some agricultural properties. This does not include a family’s primary residence.

## I thought schools no longer received funding through property taxes, so why are they talking about a millage?

Funding for school districts changed significantly in 1993-1994 when Michigan voters passed Proposal A. Under Proposal A, the state pays most of the cost, but to receive full funding, schools must levy 18 mills on non-homestead property in their district.

## Is this a new tax?

No. The operating millage has been in place since the passing of Proposal A.

## Didn't we just vote on this?

In 2023, in addition to approving the \$340 million bond proposal, the community also approved a .5 mill increase (\$.50 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation), a tax levied on non-homestead properties to restore the operational millage amount to the full 18 mills. The state of Michigan assumes all school districts are levying 18 mills. When, in fact, Forest Hills was not. This is because of the Headlee Amendment, which says that when property tax values rise faster than the rate of inflation, the levy amount decreases accordingly. A reduction in mills being levied results in lost revenue, which means a district does not get full per-pupil funding. In 2023, voters agreed to approve a .5 mill increase to ensure the district receives full per-pupil funding by levying the full 18 mills in 2024 and 2025.

## Will my residential school taxes increase?

No. This tax is on non-homestead property and does not apply to your primary place of residence.

## What if the millage is voted down?

The revenue generated from the 18 mills totals approximately \$24 million annually, greater than 18% of the school district’s revenue. If this millage does not pass, the state will not replace the funding and FHPS will be forced to reduce or cut programs to offset the loss in revenue.

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## Can the district use bond money to cover the loss?

By law, funds received from bond issues are restricted to bond projects and cannot be used for general operating expenditures.

## Does the district incur a cost for the May 6, 2025, election?

Yes, there will be a cost for the May 6, 2025, election. The cost is shared by other entities who have questions on the ballot for our voting precincts, if any.

## Why doesn't the district wait to put this on the November 2026 ballot so there wouldn't be a cost?


The authorization for the operating millage expires with the 2025 levy. If the district waits, it will lose approximately \$24 million in funding for the 2026-2027 school year.

## Why is the district asking for a six-year funding period?

By seeking a six-year funding period, the next renewal question would tie into the November 2030 Michigan gubernatorial election. When there is a state election on the ballot, the district is charged a minimal fee to have a proposal on the ballot.

## How are Michigan school districts funded?

Districts receive most of their funding on a per-pupil basis. The amount a school district receives per pupil is called the Foundation Allowance. The per-pupil Foundation Allowance for Forest Hills Public Schools is currently \$9,608. This represents the major portion of Forest Hills Public Schools’ revenue and is funded from two sources: 1) Local Revenue – 18 mills collected on non-homestead property for operating millage, and 2) State Revenue. The Foundation Allowance funding calculation is as follows:

	
Student Count:	Number of Students = 8,850
Per-Pupil Foundation Allowance:	Per Student x \$9,608
Total Foundation Allowance:	\$85,030,000
-0- Mills Collected on Primary Residence:	+ \$0
18 Mills State Assumes FHPS Collects on Non-Homestead Properties* (Local Revenue):	(\$23,900,000)
Amount Paid by the State:	\$61,130,000

\* By law, to obtain the total Foundation Allowance, Forest Hills Public Schools must collect a local non-homestead millage for this portion of its budget. The state reduces its obligation to districts by this amount and only pays the balance. Therefore, it is critical to continue to collect 18 mills on non-homestead properties to attain full funding.



# Ballot Language

## Forest Hills Public Schools Operating Millage Proposal

This proposal will allow the school district to continue to levy the statutory rate of not to exceed 18 mills on all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, required for the school district to receive its full revenue per pupil Foundation Allowance and restores millage lost as a result of the reduction required by the Michigan Constitution of 1963.

Shall the currently authorized millage rate limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property, except principal residence and other property exempted by law, in Forest Hills Public Schools, Kent County, Michigan, be renewed by 18.1297 mills (\$18.1297 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 6 years, 2026 to 2031, inclusive, and also be increased by .5 mill (\$.50 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 6 years, 2026 to 2031, inclusive, to provide funds for operating purposes; the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and 18 mills are levied in 2026 is approximately \$24,000,000 (this is a renewal of millage that will expire with the 2025 levy and the addition of millage which will be levied only to the extent necessary to restore millage lost as a result of the reduction required by the "Headlee" amendment to the Michigan Constitution of 1963)?

## FHPS Awarded for 26th Year for Outstanding Financial Reporting

Every year, the district is audited by an independent auditor, Maner Costerisan, and every year to date, our report comes back with an "unmodified opinion," which means it was a clean audit and is the highest opinion a school district can receive. No material weaknesses or significant deficiencies were identified for the financial statements and federal awards. Once the district receives its audited financials back from the certified public accountants, the district submits the audited financial statements to the Association of School Business Officials International for its Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. The 2022-2023 fiscal year marked the 26th year in a row that FHPS has received the association's Certificate of Excellence award for financial reporting. There are nearly 900 local school districts, charter schools, and intermediate school districts that are eligible for this award in Michigan, and only 17 received the award in 2022-2023. What is even more impressive is that FHPS is only one of seven districts in Michigan to receive this prestigious award 26 years in a row and the only public school on the West side of Michigan. FHPS has submitted its 2023-2024 financial audit again for this award.

## Public Schools in Kent County with Operating Millage Proposals on the May 6 Ballot

(at press time)

- Caledonia Community Schools
- Forest Hills Public Schools
- Kelloggsville Public School District
- Kentwood Public Schools
- Lakeview Community Schools
- Sparta Area Schools

# FHPS' General Fund: Revenue Sources and Expenses

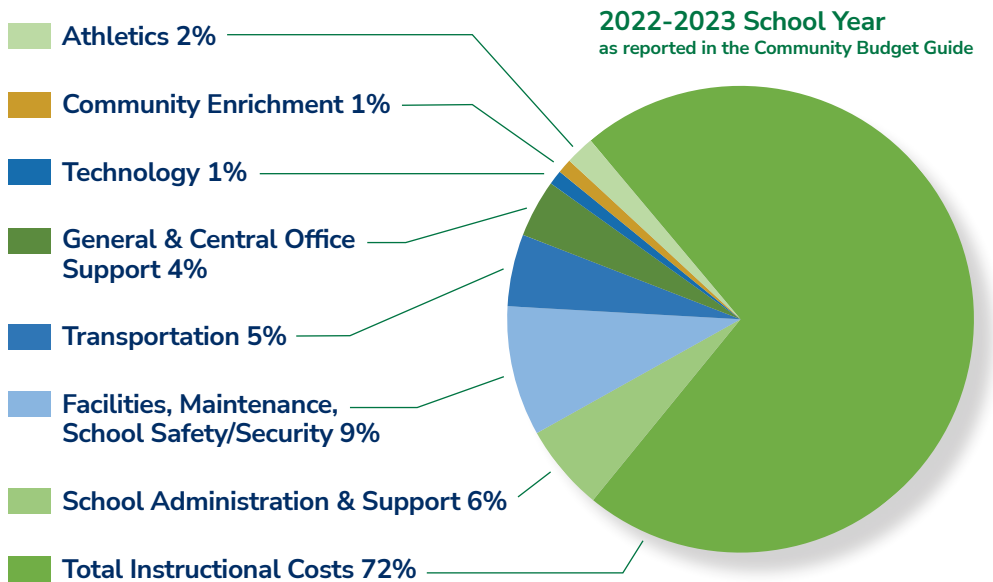
The general fund (operational fund) is where FHPS records costs associated with the day-to-day operations of our schools and other district buildings. The majority of funding for the general fund comes from the state of Michigan through the annual per-pupil Foundation Allowance. Operational expenses, such as employee salaries and benefits, school supplies, and textbooks, are funded annually through the state's Foundation Allowance received on a per-pupil basis.

Breaking down our funding sources further, state and local funding sources represent 88% of our revenue stream, followed by grants and other county special education funding and federal funding.

As for how the district spends its money, FHPS expenses go directly to people and services benefiting students. Our priority is to allocate resources directly to the classroom

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## Expenses for Forest Hills Public Schools



Without this required millage in place, the state will not fund FHPS the full Foundation Allowance, and the district will lose revenue that supports important student programs.

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Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
616-493-8800

## VOTE by Tuesday, May 6, 2025

### FHPS' General Fund

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and other educational opportunities for students. If this non-homestead operating millage is not approved, it would mean a loss of approximately \$24 million and the district would be forced to cut programs and/or staff.

Per board policy 3202, the district is required to maintain a minimum fund balance of 10% of our general fund expenditures.

To learn more about FHPS funding and expenses, visit the district's website, [www.fhps.net](http://www.fhps.net), and review the Community Budget Guide.

### Helpful Voting Reminders

- Register to vote by visiting the Michigan Voter Information Center to register to vote online. Individuals may also register in-person at their local clerk's office with the required documentation. For assistance in obtaining the address of your local clerk, visit [Michigan.gov/vote](http://Michigan.gov/vote).
- You can register to vote on Election Day at your city or township clerk's office. If you're registering another way, your voter registration application must be received or postmarked at least 15 days before the election.
- Tuesday, May 6, is Election Day, but absentee voting can occur leading up to that date. All registered voters may cast an absentee ballot by mail.
- Absentee voter ballots are available sometime in March. Contact your local township clerk with questions.
- Voters may also cast a ballot at the polling location established by their city/ township. If you have questions or do not

### Do You Have Additional Questions?



Millage Renewal Webpage

Please email Julie Davis, assistant superintendent for finance and operations, [jdavis@fhps.net](mailto:jdavis@fhps.net); Ben Kirby, superintendent, [bkirby@fhps.net](mailto:bkirby@fhps.net); or call the FHPS administration office, 616 493 8800.

To view additional resources, use your device to scan these QR codes or visit our website, [www.fhps.net](http://www.fhps.net).



Community Budget Guide



know where you vote, please contact your city/township office. For an online search of where you can vote based on your name and zip code or driver's license, visit this webpage, <https://mvic.sos.state.mi.us/voter/index>.

- Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, May 6, 2025.



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#### Publication information:

The Forest Hills Public Schools' "Focus" newsletter is published at least three times during the school year by the FHPS board of education. It is mailed to all residents within the FHPS district, and additional copies are sent to every district school for distribution to staff, new residents, and visitors. FHPS is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination of all its programs in relation to race, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, and genetic information. Questions and/or comments about this publication should be emailed to the editor at [contact@fhps.net](mailto:contact@fhps.net).

Paid for by Forest Hills Public Schools.