



# focus

March/April 2017

Volume 22, Issue 4

Website: [www.fhps.net](http://www.fhps.net)



special edition

Enhancement Millage Election is Tuesday, May 2, 2017

## A Message from the Superintendent

# Vote: Strong Schools, Strong Communities

Dear Forest Hills Families and Community,



Superintendent Behm

On May 2, 2017, voters in Forest Hills and throughout Kent Intermediate School District will go to the polls to decide on our region's first ever enhancement millage. An enhancement millage is an additional local contribution to school

operations that would support programs and services for all students. If approved, it would benefit all 20 public school districts within Kent ISD, including Forest Hills Public Schools.

The enhancement millage proposal, called Strong Schools, Strong Communities, would help address funding needed to maintain current programs, meet the community's desire for higher academic achievement, and provide students with more exposure to college and career opportunities. This community-wide enhancement millage is the only option for public school districts to request operational funding from the public beyond funding provided by the state. If approved, Forest Hills Public Schools would receive approximately \$2.1 million annually for the next 10 years beginning with the 2017-18 school year. The ISD would not

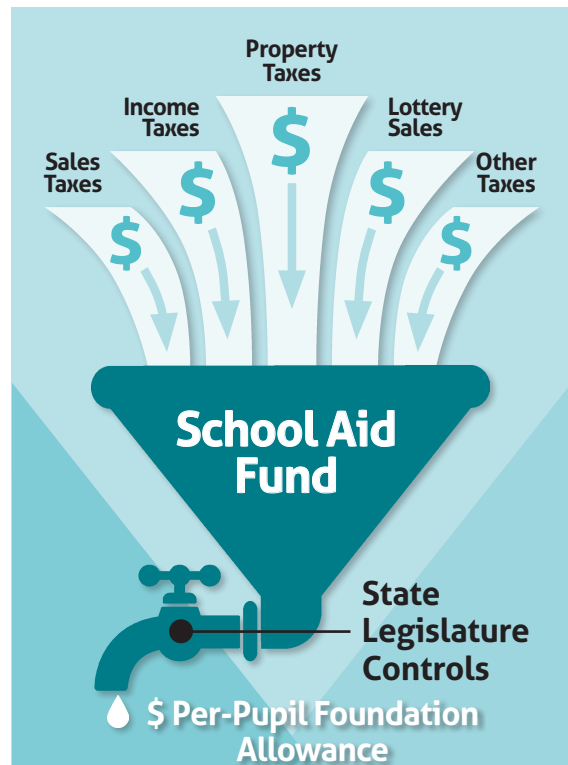
## STRONG Schools STRONG Communities

receive any money from this proposal—not even administrative fees. Law states that 100 percent of the monies collected from a community-wide enhancement millage must be given to the school districts.

Public schools are facing many budget challenges. The first is inadequate funding received from its largest source—the School Aid Fund. This fund is made up of money generated from state sales tax, income tax, property tax, lottery sales and other taxes. School Aid Fund monies vary every year and are dependent upon the economy and budget priorities at the state level. Public school districts, like Forest Hills, have no control over how much the state decides to give to public education each year. With state revenue sources eroding, financial cuts to school budgets are no longer feasible nor sustainable. In fact, FHPS receives less in our per-pupil Foundation Allowance than we did in 2007.

Another budget challenge that all public schools face in Michigan is the rate of inflation is increasing faster than the rate of the per-pupil revenue increase from the state.

(continued on page 2, column 1)



Forest Hills Public Schools is receiving \$8,229 per pupil in 2016-2017 from the School Aid Fund. This is less than it was 10 years ago. A school's per-pupil allowance is determined each year at the state level. This allowance has failed to keep up with the rate of inflation.

# Vote: Strong Schools, Strong Communities on May 2, 2017

(continued from page 1)

The rate of inflation outpaces our rate of revenue increase and the gap is widening.

To manage the small increases in per-pupil revenue, Forest Hills has cut \$20 million in expenses over the last 10 years. We aren't alone. Like many of our neighboring districts, we have had to dip into our fund reserves. We have made reductions as far from the classroom as possible. However, it is getting harder to squeeze any more out of our budget without impacting students.

Recognizing a revenue shortfall and wanting to do what is best for students, all 20 public school districts served by the Kent ISD each passed a board resolution. Collectively, these resolutions called upon Kent ISD to ask for voter consideration of a community-wide enhancement millage in the amount of 0.9 mills to provide the resources needed to help support students in our county. The Kent ISD board unanimously



Throughout the FHPS district, high school students work with elementary students. These partnerships help high schoolers enhance their communication, teamwork, collaboration, presentation, and listening skills while helping younger students learn and master new concepts in a fun, interactive way.

approved this proposal and is therefore bringing the request forward to voters on May 2, 2017.

The last time Forest Hills voters went to the polls for a school proposal was in November 2013. This was a bond election where Forest Hills residents approved funding to address technology, security, and building improvements. Bond funds cannot be used as operating dollars. They are a mechanism for individual school districts to be able to address needs related to technology hardware, facility improvements (such as roofs and parking lots) and equipment replacement (such as boilers and water heaters), and cannot be used for operations. We are nearing the end of these bond funds. Either in the fall of 2017 or the spring of 2018, Forest Hills will be looking at another bond

proposal. If approved, this would continue to fund our building and classroom improvements, new buses, and technology upgrades. Due to the retirement of previous bonds and the strong property values in our community, if another bond proposal is approved, the tax rate paid by property owners is not expected to increase.

Our strong schools exist because of our strong community. We take pride in our schools and educational staff who help all of our children succeed, find their passions, become lifelong learners, and contribute positively to the world around them. Highlighted throughout this publication are facts and figures pertaining to the Forest Hills Public Schools' budget and information on the upcoming community-wide enhancement millage, Strong Schools, Strong Communities. Please take time to familiarize yourself with this information and learn more about your local school district. We encourage you to visit our website [www.fhps.net](http://www.fhps.net) for information, or call our administrative office, 616-493-8800, if you have additional questions.

In the coming weeks, you'll hear more about the community-wide enhancement millage and how it would impact all students attending the 20 public schools in our area. Thank you for working together to ensure all learners achieve their individual potential.

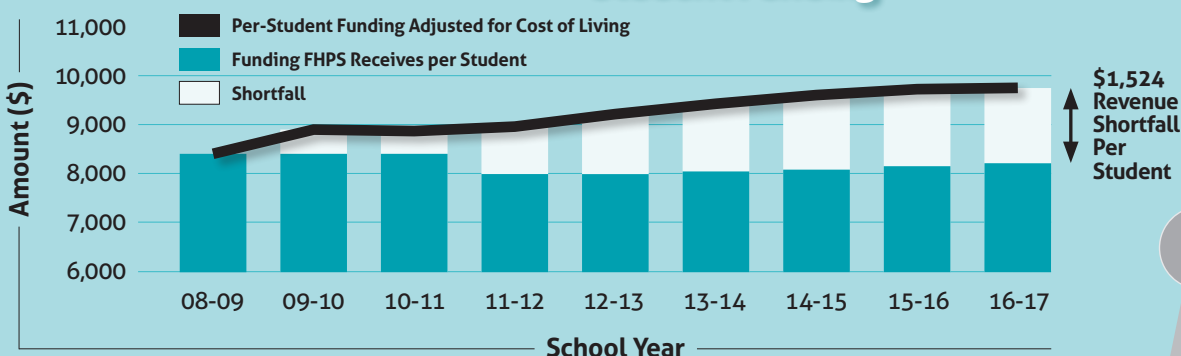
Warm regards,

Dan Behm, Superintendent

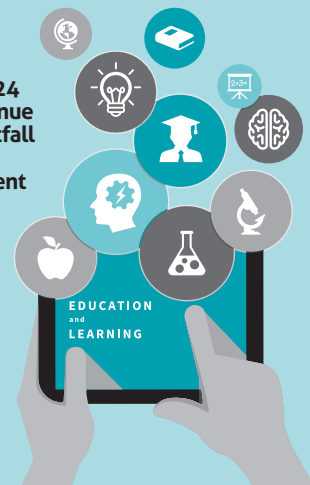


Students in Forest Hills continue to help the greater community and world by doing many service projects in school. Students pictured here help build Chlorine Producing Units which were shipped to villages in Africa to help provide safe drinking water.

## Revenue Shortfall Compared to Cost of Living Increases Since 2008-09 Student Funding



If state aid had kept up with cost of living increases, FHPS would have received an additional \$15 million in 2016-17.





# Enhancement Millage: Frequently Asked Questions

## Q. What is an enhancement millage?

**A.** When the legislature drafted a new funding formula for public schools, passed by voters as Proposal A in 1994, concerns existed that, over time, the new funding plan could fall short of revenue needs and expectations in certain communities. To compensate for the potential need for additional revenues, Proposal A included a provision allowing Intermediate School Districts, or ISDs, to levy up to 3 mills for 20 years or less, to be distributed 100 percent on a per-pupil basis to every constituent K-12 school district within that ISD.

## Q. How is the enhancement millage proposal placed on the ballot?

**A.** The FHPS board of education, along with the other 19 school boards within Kent ISD, passed a resolution asking the Kent ISD board to place the proposal on the May 2, 2017, ballot. Law prohibits FHPS from independently asking its voters for additional operating revenue.

## Q. How much are districts asking for and what would it mean for FHPS?

**A.** Districts asked Kent ISD's school board to call for an election asking voter approval of 0.9 mills for 10 years. This 0.9 mills will provide an estimated \$20 million in additional revenue for Kent County school districts in the first year of the levy, which amounts to approximately \$211 per pupil. If approved, FHPS would receive approximately \$2.1 million annually for the next 10 years.

## Q. How is an enhancement millage different from a bond issue?

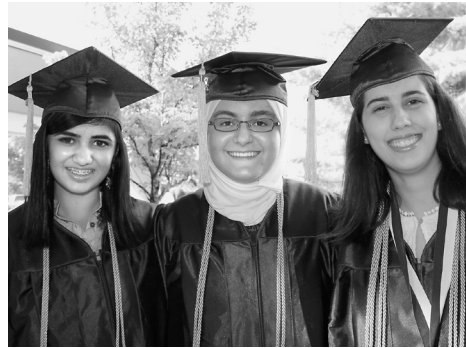
**A.** An enhancement millage would be an additional local contribution to school operations that would support programs and services for kids. A bond issue is a mechanism for individual school districts to raise capital funds for technology hardware, facility improvements (such as roofs and parking lots) and equipment replacement (such as boilers and water heaters).

## Q. How will FHPS use the funds it receives?

**A.** FHPS will dedicate 100 percent of the dollars raised from the enhancement millage to support K-12 academic achievement, attract and retain quality staff, and maintain quality programs that prepare students for college and careers.

## Q. What has FHPS done to keep costs down?

**A.** The district has cut more than \$20 million in expenses over the last 10 years. We have also had to dip into our fund reserves. As we have made reductions, we have maintained and even increased the percentage of our expenses dedicated to student instruction. Some budget adjustments FHPS has made since 2006 include reductions in costs associated with staffing and operations as well as transportation.



FHPS graduates are the epitome of academic success. Nine of the top 10 states in achievement spend more on education than Michigan does.

## Q. Why do schools need more money?

**A.** All public school districts have seen their state revenue decline over the past decade. A report from the House Fiscal Agency in January 2016 found school revenues, adjusted for inflation, are 6 percent less today than in 2000.

Because district revenue has declined, districts have cut millions in operating expenses but struggle to maintain the core educational services necessary for all students to succeed. A recent study commissioned by the Michigan Legislature found every district should receive \$8,667 per pupil, which is well above what most districts currently receive in state funding. FHPS per-student funding is \$154 less today than what it was in 2007-08, nearly a decade ago. Expenses have increased and per-pupil revenue from the state has fallen.

In addition, a three-year study by the Michigan State University Policy Institute released in June 2016 found Michigan school districts face financial hardship based on factors almost entirely outside their control. Among those factors were inadequate state per-pupil funding, declining enrollment, and the increasing number of students with special needs.

## Q. How will the funds be distributed?

**A.** By law, funds will be collected by Kent ISD and 100 percent of the revenue collected will be distributed on an equal per-pupil amount to each of the 20 local public schools. Kent ISD will not receive any money from this millage. If approved, all millage dollars will be publicly reported on each school district's website and an independent audit will be conducted to ensure transparency and accountability.

## Q. How is an enhancement millage approved?

**A.** A county-wide millage must be passed by a majority of voters.

## Q. What is an Intermediate School District?

**A.** An Intermediate School District is structured as a separate educational unit to provide various administrative and instructional services to area schools. Kent ISD serves the broader Kent community and helps schools prepare nearly 120,000 students for school and life success. Some of the services they provide include early childhood services, career technical education, and oversight for special education services. They also assist schools with student auditing and accounting, and provide professional development for educators and school staff.

## FHPS Continues to Make Cuts ...

FHPS has cut over \$20 million in expenses over the last 10 years.



## ... And Spend Savings



Like all school districts in our area, FHPS has used its fund balance to help make up for inadequate state funding.



Forest Hills Public Schools

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# How Much Will the Enhancement Millage Cost Homeowners?

The proposal calls for a levy of 0.9 mills for 10 years. For the purpose of calculating a property tax increase, one mill is equal to one dollar per \$1,000 of the taxable value of a home. Because the enhancement millage proposal is for 0.9 mills, the proposal would be calculated based on 90 cents per \$1,000 taxable value.

## Examples of Annual and Monthly Increase in Taxes at Varying Property Values

<b>State Equalized Value</b>	\$150,000	\$200,000	\$250,000	\$300,000	\$400,000	\$500,000
<b>Taxable Value</b>	\$75,000	\$100,000	\$125,000	\$150,000	\$200,000	\$250,000
<b>Annual Increase in Taxes</b>	\$68	\$90	\$113	\$135	\$180	\$225
<b>Monthly Increase in Taxes</b>	\$5.63	\$7.50	\$9.38	\$11.25	\$15.00	\$18.75



FHPS teachers and staff work with every student to help them achieve their individual potential.



## On the Cover

FHPS serves almost 10,000 students within our community. Families play an integral role in students' education. Pictured (from left) are Kelly, Samantha, and Peter Garvin enjoying a school and community event focused on computer coding, the use of technology, and Google applications.

## Ballot Language

Pursuant to state law, the revenue raised by the proposed millage will be collected by the intermediate school district and distributed wholly and completely to local public school districts based on pupil membership count.

Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property in Kent Intermediate School District, Michigan, be increased by 0.9 mill (\$0.90 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 10 years, 2017 to 2026, inclusive, to provide operating funds to enhance other state and local funding for local school district operating purposes; the estimate of the revenue the intermediate school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2017 is approximately \$19,931,466, which funds will be disbursed wholly and completely as required by statute to the following school districts: Byron Center Public Schools, Caledonia Community Schools, Cedar Springs Public Schools, Comstock Park Public Schools, East Grand Rapids Public Schools, Forest Hills Public Schools, Godfrey-Lee Public Schools, Godwin Heights Public Schools, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Grandville Public Schools, Kelloggsville Public School District, Kenowa Hills Public Schools, Kent City Community Schools, Kentwood Public Schools, Lowell Area Schools, Northview Public Schools, Rockford Public Schools, Sparta Area Schools, Thornapple Kellogg Schools, and Wyoming Public Schools.

## Vote on Tuesday, May 2, 2017

For additional information, please call the FHPS administration office, 616-493-8800, or visit our website: [www.fhps.net](http://www.fhps.net).



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