



# STRONG SCHOOLS... STRONG COMMUNITIES.

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PALM BEACH COUNTY'S PROPOSED 1 MILL REFERENDUM

The November 2018 ballot asks the community to continue funding the existing 650 Art, Music, PE, Choice and Career teachers and requests additional funding to:

- Hire more School Police Officers
- Purchase more safety equipment to better secure schools
- Provide mental health professionals in all schools
- Improve pay to help retain experienced teachers



## Editorial: Don't like raising school taxes? Blame Florida Legislature

OPINION By The Palm Beach Post Editorial Board Posted: 8:27 a.m. Sunday, July 15, 2018

Any citizen unhappy that the Palm Beach County School District might ask voters to approve a boost in property taxes should take their complaint to the Florida Legislature.

That's because lawmakers — in particular, House Republicans — have taken their anti-tax ideology to an extreme. Not only have they refused to raise any taxes on what we'll generously call principle, they also have refused to allow the state's school districts to tax property at the same, already-existing rate while property values have risen since the Great Recession. By the solons' twisted logic, the increase in proceeds would constitute a detested "tax increase."

So, although Palm Beach County has become more prosperous and real estate values have surged, its public schools are going begging. For three straight years, the legislature has rolled back the schools' millage rate, from \$5.003 in fiscal 2016 to \$4.078 for fiscal 2019. (That's per \$1,000 assessed valuation.)

As a result, the heroic tax-cutters of Tallahassee have lavished an owner of a \$300,000 property with a savings of \$277 in fiscal 2019. But they have deprived the Palm Beach County School District of \$178 million.

Note that cities and counties aren't handicapped by similar rollbacks. Just last week, Palm Beach County commissioners exercised their right to keep the county's property tax rate as is — the very thing the school district can't do. Now county government is looking forward to a \$52 million windfall because of rising property values.

This is more than just a Palm Beach County problem. Statewide, funding for Florida kindergarten through 12th grade education has tumbled from the so-so to the godawful. Back in 2006, Florida ranked 36th among the states in per-pupil spending. Now we're down to 44th (that's for fiscal year 2016, the most recent data available).



### What is a Millage?

The mill levy is the "tax rate" that is applied to the assessed value of a property. One mill is one dollar per \$1,000 of assessed value. The mill levy is the assessed property tax rate used by local governments and other jurisdictions to raise revenue in order to cover annual expenses.



### What about the lottery money?

Most of the Florida Lottery funds go to the Bright Futures Scholarships for graduating seniors and higher education.

The District receives enough lottery money each year to fund two days of operational expenses.



### Funding

For 2018-19, state lawmakers have only increased basic education funding by \$0.47 per student.

## What is the need?

The District is committed to placing a certified law enforcement officer in every school. Funds from the approved mill will also be utilized to outfit Police Officers and Schools with the most up-to-date safety equipment.

## Development

Additional mental health counselors and school counselors will support the social and emotional development of students.

## Achievement

By improving pay for experienced teachers, schools will be able to improve upon academic achievements and keep their best teachers. Students directly benefit from having an experienced teacher in their classroom.



## Dealing with unmet needs

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Teachers are grossly underpaid. In inflation-adjusted dollars, average teacher salaries in Florida fell 5.5 percent from 2010 to 2016, according to Education Resource Strategies. Not only is teacher pay \$8,387 lower in Florida than the national average of \$57,379, it's 14 percent lower than the family living wage.

Demands to strengthen school security have soared since the horrendous bloodshed at Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School — but our school district is well shy of the money it needs to satisfy the new state law requiring at least one armed guard in every school building. It's no more capable of placing at least one mental-health professional in each school, an increasingly glaring imperative.

Simply put, the school district can't do these important things — bolster its police force, hire mental-health counselors and psychologists, pay teachers a respectable salary — without more money. That money won't be coming from the tight-fisted state. It can't be squeezed out of supposed fat in the budget; there simply isn't enough excess for that. It must come from the community.

That's why the Post Editorial Board will support the school board if it decides on Wednesday, as expected, to move forward with a proposal to increase property taxes by \$1 per \$1,000 in taxable value. If voters approve in November, the measure would raise about \$200 million per year.

The timing is unfortunate, given that voters just two years ago approved a 1-cent hike in the sales tax to fund capital projects for schools, cities and county government. That money was for buildings, vehicles, technology, equipment and infrastructure — not salaries or staffing.

## How is this different from the penny sales tax voters approved in 2016?

District schools receive half of the penny sales tax approved by voters in November 2016 for local government infrastructure capital needs. The sales tax proceeds can only be used for school repairs, renovations, classroom technology, IT infrastructure, school buses and support vehicles. Sales tax dollars **by law** cannot be used for teacher salaries or other operating costs.



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This levy would replace a 25-cent (per \$1,000) tax that pays for 650 teachers for art, music, physical education and choice programs. That tax passed in 2010 with 66 percent of the vote; its renewal passed in 2014 with an overwhelming 79 percent.

If voters agree that was money well spent and approve the \$1 (per \$1,000) hike in November, they'll continue to say "yes" to \$50 million per year, for four years, to keep those 650 electives teachers and to hire more.

They'll be saying "yes" to \$50 million for the additional security officers and mental health counselors the district needs to fully cover its schools.

And they'll be saying "yes" to \$100 million to supplement teacher salaries; instructors will get an extra \$1,000 to \$10,000 per year, depending on length of service.

This is not asking for the moon. This is simply asking to restore what an ideologically driven state government has taken away.

The school board has a responsibility to pick up that burden, and yes, weather the criticism that comes from asking people to dig into their pockets for education.

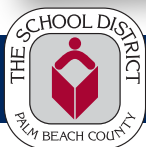
We trust that voters will see that it's in their own best interest to ensure that the public schools are well-enough funded to attract and retain good teachers — and, most importantly, to keep our children safe.

## How will the money be spent?

Revenue generated by the levy will be dedicated to the following critical needs:

### Professionals

1. Continue paying for over 650 fine arts, music, physical education, and career education teachers. Of the 1.0 mill levy, 0.25 mill or approximately \$50 million will continue to be dedicated to funding these teacher positions and further expansion of District choice programs.
2. Dedicate 0.25 mill or approximately \$50 million to bolstering school safety through both enhanced security measures and student mental health services by increasing the number of School Police Officers and Mental Health Professionals across all District operated schools.
3. Dedicate 0.50 mill or approximately \$100 million to keeping experienced teachers in the classroom by improving their pay through retention supplements.



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