

Regional school millage sought

Call growing for regional school millage in Macomb

Call growing from districts for MISD to seek levy

By Nicole Tuttle For MediaNews Group

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Students board buses outside of Chippewa Valley Seneca Middle School in Macomb Township Thursday. The district is one of four so far that has called for a regional tax to augment what educators say is inadequate funding for schools.

David Angell--For The Macomb Daily



Buses pull out of Seneca Middle School in Macomb Township Thursday afternoon. Some Macomb County districts are calling for a regional millage to support busing and other educational needs.

David Angell--For The Macomb Daily

Fed up with a lack of state funding from Lansing, some Macomb County public school districts are requesting the Macomb Intermediate School District pursue a regional enhancement millage question for the 2020 ballot.

The Chippewa Valley Schools board unanimously adopted a resolution Sept. 23 requesting the MISD submit a question of levying a regional enhancement millage at a rate of 1.9 mills for 10 years, specifically calendar years 2020-29. If the question makes it to the ballot, voters in MISD districts would consider the measure next March.

The district joins Utica Community Schools, L'Anse Creuse Public Schools and Mount Clemens Community Schools in calling for a levy.

“This resolution really comes out of frustration with the state of Michigan. They have given us this problem. They gave us Proposal A, they sold us this bill of goods. And then they have not kept their bargain. They have raided the school aid fund, they have given it to universities and colleges and then they expect us, year after year after year, to assemble together some kind of a program which meets our kids needs for jobs of the future. It just isn't going to work,” Chippewa Valley Superintendent Ron Roberts said.

“Michigan currently ranks 50th in education funding increases. The district currently receives the lowest per pupil foundation allowance in the state of Michigan. One third of students in the state of Michigan receive additional per-pupil funding from the enhancement millage including the students in neighboring Wayne County, Michigan,” board President Elizabeth Pyden said. “The revenues from a regional enhancement millage are distributed entirely to the ISD's local public schools on a pro-rata basis.”

Pyden added the revenues from the millage would be unrestricted general funds. Districts would be able to use such revenues to sustain its current level of programming by helping to offset the increasing cost of education, which is outstripping increases in the per-pupil foundation allowance in the state.

Proposed ballot language attached to the resolution indicates the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property in the MISD be increased by 1.9 mill, which would equate to \$1.90 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation for 10 years.

The resolution indicates Section 705 of the Revised School Code authorizes an ISD to levy a regional enhancement millage at a rate not to exceed three mills for a term not to exceed 20 years, in order to enhance other state and local funding for school district operations if approved by a majority of ISD electors voting.

The resolution also indicates that in order for the question of a regional enhancement millage to be submitted to voters, constituent school boards representing a majority of the combined student enrollment within an ISD must adopt resolutions within a 180-day period requesting the question be submitted to voters.

Pursuant to state law, revenue raised by any proposed millage would be collected by the MISD and distributed to its constituent districts based on pupil membership count.

The topic of the enhancement millage has been under discussion among school boards and administrators across the county for some time, especially in the last six months, according to Roberts.

“And our resolution this evening is, it would need to be a number of resolutions passed across the county in order for this to be put on the ballot,” said Roberts, who believes his school system is the fourth district in the county to approve the resolution.

The measure is a product of the current state of school funding.

“The state has had any number of reports, and some may have even requested themselves to study schools and school funding and to make recommendations,” Roberts said. “And we fall, still continue to fall, short of all recommendations in all reports.”

Roberts cited a recent report which called for the funding level of \$9,450 per student plus categorical recognitions of special services, English learners and at risk students.

“So what that report tried to do was to differentiate and say that equal funding is just, is not fair. It needs to be equitable,” Roberts said. “So it costs more money to educate a special education student, an English learner and a

student who is at risk. And that needs to be recognized by the state of Michigan in our funding model. That is what the current governor asked that the legislature do and it was done, in the budget that they just completed, in a very minimal way. A very minimal way. We will receive a \$240 increase per student.”

Roberts said that Chippewa Valley Schools received \$7,871 this past year per student and with a \$240 increase the district would still fall about \$1,500 short of what reports indicate it should have.

“We have always talked in Chippewa Valley of what we are able to accomplish on less. But it is not, what we do is not intended to be a model for the state because we can't continue to go on this way,” Roberts said.

MISD Superintendent Michael DeVault issued a statement to the Macomb Daily on Sept. 24 indicating several studies have addressed the inadequate funding of Michigan K-12 education.

“With the insufficient funding for a variety of K-12 school services across Macomb County, including special education, career and technical education, and many other needs, school districts are continuously considering a variety of options to obtain additional resources to address our students’ needs, including possibly asking Macomb voters to consider a future countywide enhancement millage,” DeVault said. “Chippewa Valley represents one of our 21 districts and we will work with all local districts to see what kind of proposals would have broad support among our districts.”