

Vital Questions and Answers on Preserving the Quality of Our Schools and Protecting Our Quality of Life.

Visit our website @ www.sarasotacbs.com

1. Does the school district still need the 1 mill?

The 1 mill voters renewed in 2006 has allowed the district to retain and recruit high-quality teachers. To continue our commitment to quality schools, the 1 mill is needed now more than ever. The state's financial support for

schools has been reduced by more than \$80 million over the past two years and is expected to decrease further in the next two years.

2. Is there a commitment by the school district to protect teaching jobs and salaries?

Yes, absolutely! It's because voters had the foresight in 2006 to continue the 1 mill that the district has been able to retain classroom integrity. Our teachers have not been faced with pay cuts and a large number of layoffs as in other Florida counties.

3. Students graduating from high school need computer skills and other modern technologies. Are classrooms keeping up?

The Sarasota County School District kept the promise of providing the best classroom technology to enhance learning. Students are better prepared to use 21st century technical work skills than ever before. The school district is continuing to close the achievement gap between high- and low-achieving students.

4. Can administration be cut to put more money in classrooms?

For years, the Sarasota County School District has had one of the lowest ratios of administrators-to-students in Florida. In the 2008-09 school year the principal/assistant principal-to-student ratio was one for every 380 students. The district administrator-to-pupil ratio was one to 855, ranking

Sarasota County 54th out of the 67 counties in district administrators to pupils.

5. Will continuing the 1 mill cost property owners more money?

No! Voting to continue the mill will not increase your taxes. Voting Yes will only continue funding at the current level. 1 mill = \$100 for a \$100,000 house. With a \$25,000 homestead exemption, the owner of a house valued at \$300,000 would pay \$275, or approximately 75 cents per day — less than a cup of coffee!

6. How much money has the district received from the voter-approved school millage?

For the first four years the millage brought in an average of \$36 million a year. In 2007-08, the millage produced \$60 million; but due to falling property values it declined to \$54 million in 2008-09, and is projected to fall to about \$47 million in 2009-10.

7. How much will continuing the 1 mill raise from 2010 to 2014?

The 1 mill is projected to raise \$40-\$50 million per year from 2010 to 2014.

8. How has the district spent the referendum dollars and what will it do with the funds if the 1 mill is renewed in 2010?

As in the past, the millage will be used to:

- attract and retain high quality teachers;
- fund professional development and training for teachers, counselors and other instructional staff;
- enhance programs for art, music and career education;
- keep class sizes low in subjects that are not covered by the state's class size amendment;
- continue the district's dedication to our children's educational excellence.

9. How can citizens be sure the district will continue to spend the money wisely?

The Financial Oversight Committee, consisting of community business leaders, regularly reviews expenditures and has reported that the district spends our money exactly as promised. The district has the highest bond ratings of any school district in the State of Florida, and continues exemplary audits conducted by independent CPA firms and the State Auditor General's office.

10. What will happen if the vote to continue the 1 mill fails?

The district will do its best to protect the classroom; however, without continuation of the 1 mill

there will be severe budget cuts and many of the excellent programs that exceed minimum state requirements will be on the chopping block. This may include:

- increasing class size;
- cutting courses and specialized programs such as music, art, dual enrollment and advanced placement courses, summer school and dropout prevention programs;
- reducing or eliminating technology programs;
- instituting fees and reducing or eliminating extracurricular activities such as athletics, band and clubs;
- teacher pay cuts of at least 13%.

11. How can class size increase, considering the passage of the class size amendment?

The requirements under the class size amendment only deal with core subjects such as reading and math. Elective classes, arts and physical education, will increase substantially, if the referendum does not pass.

12. Doesn't the state of Florida send school districts enough money to cover their needs?

The state of Florida funds only 3.3% of the costs for our schools through sales taxes. The rest of school funding must come from local revenue. According to the National Education Association, Florida ranks 41st in funding per student

among the 50 states. If the people of Sarasota County want better than an average Florida education, in a state that already ranks below average, we must pay for it ourselves.

13. Where does Sarasota County rank in comparison to what other counties in Florida pay in school taxes?

Taxpayers in 51 out of the 67 counties in Florida paid a higher millage rate for schools in 2007-08 than Sarasota County taxpayers, and that includes the extra 1 mill.

14. What is the current average spending per student in Sarasota County?

In Sarasota County the 2007-2008 average was \$8,707 per-pupil. Per pupil expenditures are derived from the operating budget, which pays for salaries, transportation, supplies and services necessary to operate the schools.

Source: Florida Department of Education

15. How does that rate against national and state averages?

The most recent year for comparative national data, the average per-student spending nationwide was \$9,963. In Sarasota County the average was \$8,707, and for Florida as a whole, the average was \$7,183.

Source: National Education Association

16. Can the state reduce the funding to Sarasota County schools if the citizens continue the millage?

No. All the money collected through this referendum remains in Sarasota County for our schools. By law, the amount the district receives from the state cannot be reduced as a result of a voter-approved millage.

17. Can impact fees be used for operating expenses?

No. Impact fees cannot be used for operating schools; they can only be used for capital construction of new schools in the areas where the impact fees are generated.

18. I have no children in Sarasota County public schools. Why should I vote for the referendum?

For most of us, our homes represent the largest single investment we own. There is no community with failing schools that has stable or increasing property values. Additionally, the children who sit in classes today are the very people who will someday handle your medications, bank deposits and car repairs. The quality of their education will directly affect your quality of life. Someone chose to invest in education for each of us. We now have an obligation to the next generation.

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Supplemental Referendum Questions and Answers

1. How has the recent economic crisis affected the Sarasota County School District?
 - It's been a triple whammy of reduced state funding, reduced property tax income and declining enrollment
 - Reduction of \$70 million in two years
 - Loss of more than 1,000 students
 - Elimination of 500 staff positions

2. What has the district done to reduce expenses?
 - Will save \$87 million in construction projects over five years
 - Avoided more than \$5.2 million in energy costs through conservation
 - Saved \$5 million by adopting seven-period day
 - Reduced custodial costs by \$3 million while cleaning 600,000 more square feet
 - Reduced transportation costs by \$2 million a year
 - Reduced costs for background checks \$253,000 by having them done by a district police department employee, rather than the Department of Education.
 - Reduced food costs \$250,000

3. Has the district maintained quality services for students?
 - Graduation rate is at an all-time high.
 - Dropout rate is at an all-time low.
 - Among the top 10 districts in the state in FCAT reading and math scores
 - Improved student achievement
 - Narrowed the achievement gap
 - Schools are safe haven in an unstable environment

4. How has the district staff responded to the economic crisis?
 - Welfare and success of students is our highest priority
 - Maintained a safe haven and positive environment
 - Focused on learning and shielded students from distractions
 - Younger students unaware of economic crisis affecting schools
 - Staff supported one another in the transition
 - Opening of the school year was the smoothest ever

5. Is the district still using NeXt Generation Learning?
 - NGL is a complex array of best practices
 - It is the district instructional operating system.
 - Recognizes the digital learner
 - Advanced instructional technology is in place
 - Continues to support high-quality teachers and teachers and staff
 - High school reform continues through Small Learning Communities which are areas of career interest shared by the students
 - Career and technical education programs are growing
 - Has not been fully developed
 - Further expansion postponed

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6. What does the state's economic future look like?

- Projected budget deficits in excess of \$2 billion next year
- Deficits of more than \$5 billion are expected in 2011 and 2012 when federal stimulus funding expires.
- Constitutional caps on class size will be applied to every classroom next year
- (Sarasota will need 60 more teachers at a cost of about \$4.2 million.)

7. The district currently receives revenue from a voter-approved local millage. How important is that funding?

- About 12 percent of the district's total operating budget
- Expected to yield about \$38 million next year
- Provided cushion from much deeper cuts in 2008-2010 budgets
- Necessary to maintain programs, longer school day and competitive salaries

8. How has the voted millage funding been used?

- Maintaining competitive salaries to attract and retain best teachers
- Reduced ratio of students to counselors
- Supported class size reduction
- Funded 30-minute longer school day
- Literacy and data coaches
- Supported science, music and art teachers
- Supplemented inadequate state funding for charter schools

9. Is that funding still needed?

- Essential to continue current service levels
- Prevented deeper cuts in instructional staff
- Will keep worst effects of cuts further from classrooms
- Essential to maintain learning gains
- Some cuts will be necessary next year even if the referendum passes
- Cuts without the referendum will be devastating

10. How can the district justify asking for a continuation of a voted millage in such difficult economic times?

- Local demand for higher quality education than the state can fund.
- High-quality schools sustain property values.
- The school district is the largest employer in the county.
- All the money generated by the 1-mill stays in Sarasota County.
- Eighty percent of the district budget (More than \$300 million a year) is in salaries.
- Most salary money circulated in the local economy.
- Cost of millage for average homeowner about 38 cents a day
- Cutting another \$38 million from the district budget will delay workforce development and economic recovery.

How much will the mill cost the average home owner?

- Per the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's 2009 tax role, the average taxable value of a single family residential home is \$166,685. Deduct the \$25,000 homestead exemption and the taxable value is \$141,685. The 1-mill is equal to \$141.69 per year.

Divided by 365 days in a year and it comes out to 39 cents a day. Less than a half cup of coffee each day.

- Per the Sarasota County Property Appraiser's 2009 tax role, the average taxable value of a residential condominium is \$220,076. Deduct the \$25,000 homestead exemption and the taxable value is \$195,076. The 1-mill is equal to \$195.08 per year. Divided by 365 days in a year and it comes out to 53 cents a day. Less than a half cup of coffee each day.

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