

Community Update

WINTER 2024 EDITION



ROCHESTER
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

PRIDE IN EXCELLENCE

Non-homestead operating millage proposal on Feb. 27 ballot

The Rochester Community School District Board of Education passed a resolution to submit a proposal on the ballot for the Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2024, election.

If approved, the proposal would allow the school district to continue to levy the statutory rate of 18 mills on non-homestead property, in order for the school district to receive its full per-pupil funding and restore millage lost as a result of the Headlee Amendment.

If this millage does not pass, RCS per-pupil revenue would fall from \$9,608 to \$8,060, which equates to a loss of approximately \$24.5 million per year in district funding.



Owned primary residences do not pay the 18-mills tax (\$0 per year).

The operating millage is a levy on non-homestead properties that are not an owned primary residence or qualified agricultural property, such as a business, vacation home, investment and rental property.

This is not a new tax. It was first levied in 1994 with the passage of Proposal A, and RCS voters have periodically voted for renewals and restorations of that tax over the years.

RCS voters last approved a levy for 19.9307 mills on non-homestead property in 2014. Since then, the millage

has been eroded by the Headlee Amendment and now stands at 18.5004 mills.

Approval of the millage would not cause tax rates to increase.

The total proposed millage is less than what voters approved in 2014.

The district is proposing a renewal of 18.5004 mills and a restoration of 0.5000 mills, even though at no time can the district levy more than 18 mills. If approved, the total 1.0004 mills above 18 mills would be used to offset potential future Headlee erosion, which can reduce the millage rate to adjust for inflation. If the millage rate falls below 18 mills due to the Headlee erosion, the district will not receive its full foundation allowance.

The Headlee Amendment, which includes provisions related to state and local tax, was approved by voters in 1978 to amend the Michigan Constitution. The Headlee Amendment automatically rolls back a millage rate – the rate at which taxes are levied on property – to ensure taxes do not increase more than the rate of inflation. For example, if a tax base for a local unit increased from \$1 million to \$1.1 million in excess of the rate of inflation and the tax rate was one mill, the millage would have to be reduced from 1.0 mill to 0.909 mills, so that total revenue would be the same, \$1,000, as originally generated.

The state-funded portion of a school district's per pupil foundation allowance is calculated presuming a school district is levying a full 18 mills to provide the locally funded portion of that foundation allowance. When there is Headlee erosion, the state-funded portion of the foundation allowance is not increased to offset that erosion in the local contribution. Because of that, if the operating millage is eroded below 18 mills by the Headlee Amendment and is not restored, the school district does not receive its full foundation allowance.

To learn more about the non-homestead operating millage; how Michigan school districts are funded; or voter information, please visit the Rochester Community School District website at www.rochester.k12.mi.us.

POINTS OF RCS PRIDE

29 Advanced Placement courses 	34 Career and Technical Education courses (business, engineering, finance, marketing and computer science)
100+ Student clubs and STEAM opportunities	Awarded Best Community for Music Education for eight consecutive years 
AP Capstone Diploma program and Seal of Biliteracy 	160 High school electives 
72 Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) varsity teams	120 sub-varsity teams 
Honored for excellence in school budget presentation	



What every taxpayer should know about the operating millage proposal

- All Michigan school districts must levy 18 mills on non-homestead property to receive their full foundation allowance – the major source of funding for Michigan schools.
- The 18-mill levy costs the primary residence homeowner zero dollars (\$0 per year). Owned primary residences do not pay the 18-mill tax.
- If approved, the operating millage proposal would renew the existing levy on non-homestead properties, which include businesses, vacation homes, investment and rental properties.
- If the operating millage proposal does not pass, RCS per-pupil revenue would fall from \$9,608 to \$8,060, which equates to a loss of \$24.5 million in district funding.
- The district is proposing a renewal of 18.5004 mills and restoration of 0.5000 mills, even though the district cannot levy more than 18 mills. If approved, the 1.0004 mills above 18 mills would be used to protect against future Headlee erosion, which can lower the millage rate to adjust for inflation. If the RCS millage rate falls below 18 mills, the district will not receive its full foundation allowance.

Strategic planning helps RCS identify priorities and create a unified sense of purpose

Rochester Community Schools has a rich history of excellence that has been strengthened over time through the strategic planning process.



To ensure RCS continues to provide high-quality education and innovative learning opportunities for all students, the Board of Education selected G&D Associates to serve as the facilitator for the next iteration of the strategic plan.

G&D continues to collaborate with all stakeholders to provide a roadmap for ongoing success. The process includes community engagement; data synthesis; vision development; strategic planning; implementation and adjustment as the system evolves.



Community engagement provides a voice for all stakeholders. Opportunities are leveraged through a community survey; focus groups; and a community forum.

To date, more than 6,000 RCS students, staff, family and community partners have already participated in this segment of the strategic planning process.

“The main purpose of the survey was to identify themes from multiple perspectives,” said Scott Fuller, G&D Associates facilitator. “It’s important to remember that the information was a snapshot of perception and the data will be utilized as one of several inputs for the development of the district’s vision for the future and strategic plan.”



Data synthesis ensures common outcomes, expectations and actions during the development of the strategic plan to prioritize the work of the organization.

Vision development paints a picture of what the organization will look like in the near future and serves as an actionable document that articulates direction, mission and guiding principles.

The strategic plan is drawn from the vision and outlines prioritized goals and objectives, while detailing specific actions as to how the district would realize its vision in manageable and measurable ways.

Through a commonly understood path of action, strategic planning can create positive outcomes that ensure equitable practices, innovative work and engaged communities.

“We are excited to be fully engaged in the strategic planning process,” said Barb Anness, Board of Education vice president. “Through a shared vision and measurable goals and objectives, we will continue to build upon our world-class educational system at Rochester Community Schools.”

Strategic Planning

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Opportunities are leveraged through:

- Community survey
- Focus groups
- Community forum



DATA SYNTHESIS

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VISION DEVELOPMENT

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STRATEGIC PLANNING

The strategic plan outlines prioritized goals and objectives, while detailing specific actions as to how the district will realize its vision in manageable and measurable ways.



STRATEGIC PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION

Through a commonly understood path of action, strategic planning can create positive outcomes that ensure equitable practices, innovative work and engaged communities.



The RCS mission is to provide a quality education in a caring atmosphere for students to attain the necessary skills and knowledge to become lifelong learners and contribute to a diverse, interdependent and changing world.

RCS begins the process of searching for a new superintendent

“The superintendent plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of our community. We aim to find an individual who not only possesses the necessary skills and qualifications but also embodies the values that make our district exceptional,” said Michelle Bueltel, Board of Education president.

On Nov. 6, 2023, during a special meeting, the RCS Board of Education selected Ray & Associates to assist with the process of searching for the district’s next superintendent.

The process for searching for a new superintendent includes board in-

put and preparation, along with opportunities for stakeholder engagement, which are followed by a position posting, selection of applicants, interviews, and ultimately the selection of the best person to lead Rochester Community Schools into the future.

John Silveri is serving as the interim superintendent through June 2024.

The goal will be to begin the 2024-25 school year with long-term leadership in place at the superintendent level.

For more information, please visit the district website at: <https://www.rochester.k12.mi.us/about-us/board-of-education>.

New curriculum brings mathematical reasoning to life for young learners

"It's easier to learn math when I can see it, instead of just imagining it in my head," said fifth-graders at Hugger Elementary. Their teacher, Deborah Grimes, agrees.

While calculating the area of rectangles and squares, elementary students use base ten blocks to physically build shapes. "I'm multiplying length times height, and I know how to do that," one student said. "But the blocks are visual, so I can actually see what that means. It's helpful."



Manipulatives let students represent and interpret numbers, shapes and patterns to make sense of math. This is a key element of the district's newly adopted Bridges in Mathematics curriculum, an inquiry-based and student-centered framework that

helps young learners develop mathematical reasoning that is relatable to the world around them.

In talking about parts of the whole, RCS educators make lessons tangible and applicable. They teach fractions, decimals and percentages in terms of money. For example, half of a dollar is 50 cents; 20 percent of a hundred dollars is \$20; and so on.

"Using make-believe coins and cardboard bills brings the lesson to life so we can understand," one student said. "It makes sense to us."

"The clock is also a useful teaching tool for fractions," Grimes said. "Students can understand that 30/60 is half an hour and 15/60 is the same as 15 minutes. They have also gotten really good at multiples of 60 when calculating how long until recess."

Across grade levels, the curriculum department continues to strengthen mathematics education, using calendar grids, Number Corner, challenge games, visual models and group activities that share multiple strategies for problem-solving.

Curriculum consultants, instructional coaches and interventionists emphasize that learning math is both an individual and social activity. Students often work in pairs and small groups to gather evidence,

share results and explain their thinking.

"We are building fluency for each child and we support productive struggle in learning mathematics," said Mike Gittner, district math coach. "Our growth mindset is at work."



During a recent professional development workshop, elementary special education teachers partnered with general education colleagues to deepen learning about Bridges intervention resources to offer support and meet the needs of all students.

Kim Mroczek, district math coach said, "We are encouraging students and educators to pose purposeful questions and facilitate meaningful mathematical discourse to become better problem-solvers."

AP Capstone

Highly motivated Rochester Community Schools scholars in the AP Capstone Diploma™ Program are developing critical thinking and research skills to prepare them for success in their academic careers and beyond.



RCS senior Caroline Bull had a perfect score on the AP Research exam—an honor achieved by only 357 students across the globe.

AP Capstone is a two-year College Board diploma program that offers high school students two rigorous yearlong courses: AP Seminar and AP Research. These courses develop students' skills in research, analysis, evidence-based arguments, collaboration, writing, presenting and college-readiness.

"AP Capstone students enhance their academic skills for college readiness," said Kara Sears, Rochester High School teacher. "They learn to develop well-reasoned arguments and present their findings clearly and concisely for a smooth transition to higher education."

Research-intensive scholars take advantage of two-year AP Capstone program

Importantly, students have the freedom to explore personal interests through research-intensive investigations of real-world problems, perspectives and solutions.

"It's empowering to explore our own passions and topics that interest us," one student said. "I'm not just growing as a scholar; I'm growing as a person."

Some of the research topics chosen by students include: deforestation, nanotechnology development and energy consumption in Rochester Hills, artificial intelligence in the music industry, political maturity of adolescents, homelessness, practices to curb overfishing and inefficient transportation infrastructure caused by suburban sprawl.



"AP Capstone offers exceptional personal growth and development," said Adams High School teacher Allie Danielson. "Students have an understanding of their role as citizens of a global community who are empowered to make positive improvements."

Topics of interest range across many fields to cover clinical research, behavioral studies, social sciences, economics, technology, popular culture and more. One student, who is studying data collection and privacy associated with the social media activity of adolescents, hopes the evidence he presents will help his own friends and classmates think more critically about their actions.

The Class of 2023 celebrated its inaugural AP Capstone graduates. RCS had 91 students earn the AP Capstone Diploma, receiving scores of three or higher in AP Seminar and AP Research and on four additional AP exams from the College Board.

This year, 145 students at all three RCS high schools are participating in the rigorous program.

Stoney Creek teacher Daniel Bliss said, "We are proud of our students for going above and beyond to embark on this impressive pathway that makes college-level learning deeply personal and impactful."



RCS recognized for budget excellence

Rochester Community Schools was presented with the prestigious Association of School Business Officials International Meritorious Budget Award for the seventh consecutive year.

The MBA promotes and recognizes excellence in school budget presentation and is conferred only to school districts whose budgets have undergone a rigorous review by finance professionals and have met or exceeded the program's stringent criteria.

Rochester Community Schools was one of only three districts in the state of Michigan and one of 139 districts across the United States and Canada to be honored as a 2022-23 MBA recipient. The full listing for 2023-24 was not released by the time of this publication.



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Dual enrollment provides college courses for RCS high school students

More than 50 RCS high school students are taking advantage of dual enrollment opportunities to advance their education and complete college courses at Oakland University, Oakland Community College and online—while they are still in high school.

Through these learning partnerships, students are able to maximize requirements, earning credits that count toward their high school diploma through the Michigan Merit Curriculum, while also earning college credits at the same time.



"Dual enrollment allows our students to engage in a more rigorous academic environment, experience higher education early on, and prepare themselves for future academic pursuits," said Neil DeLuca, executive director of secondary education.

Typically, students access dual enrollment when they have completed all Rochester Community Schools course opportunities in a particular subject area. This semester, students are enrolled in college level courses including calculus III, oriented programming, French creative writing and advanced Spanish grammar.

"Dual enrollment offers the unique advantage of experiencing college-level coursework while still in high school, providing students with a head start on their academic journey," said Taylor Antoski, an RCS teacher who helped develop a partnership with Oakland University to extend

world language education from RCS to the university level. Some classes offer Oakland teachers onsite at RCS high schools and others have RCS students attending at the college campus in person during the school day.

RCS students who begin taking world language courses when first offered in seventh grade could complete Advanced Placement® world language and culture in eleventh grade within the district. Additional dual enrollment options have been beneficial for individuals who continue to advance their world language learning and prepare for successful college work and careers.

The Michigan Department of Education administers the dual enrollment program across the state and provides a set amount of funding per student each semester, which is paid through Michigan Student Aid, free of charge to students. Semester-long courses at Oakland Community College are generally covered in full by this funding. Additional Oakland University tuition costs can be offset through the Rochester Community Schools Foundation dual enrollment scholarship fund, which helps reduce financial barriers and ensure that more students have access to these transformative educational experiences.

"Dual enrollment allowed me to get a taste of what college-level Spanish is like and to understand if it's going to be a good fit for me," one high school senior said. "It has made me more well-rounded and better prepared for the future."

Free pre-K programs for four-year-old children in Rochester Community Schools

Michigan's preschool expansion increases kindergarten readiness programs for four-year-old students in RCS and across the state

The Michigan Department of Education's Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP) has expanded to increase early education options for families. GSRP is the nationally recognized state-funded preschool program offering kindergarten preparation for four-year-old children.



With enhanced GSRP state funding for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school year, Rochester Community Schools will increase free pre-K slots; extend instructional

hours to be consistent with full-day school calendar schedules; ensure a highly qualified and credentialed teaching staff; and potentially save eligible families approximately \$10,000 per year in tuition costs.

"RCS has a long history of providing high-quality pre-K programming for three- and four-year-old children," said Cory Heitsch, assistant superintendent of early childhood and elementary education. "The GSRP expansion will better meet

the needs of families by increasing access, affordability and instructional time, while supporting student growth and kindergarten readiness."

All GSRP programs work cooperatively with their intermediate school district and must adhere strictly to state standards for student-teacher ratios, early childhood specialist qualifications and classroom support plans.

Eligibility for free GSRP preschool is primarily determined based on family household income; thresholds have been lowered to allow access for more families. For the 2023-24 program year, GSRP eligibility is offered to households making up to 300% of the federal poverty level. The state determines income eligibility guidelines and families may find the federal poverty level calculator tool to be helpful when making estimations.

GSRP eligibility also requires that students reside in the state of Michigan, turn four years of age on or before Sept. 1 of the school year for which they are enrolling, and meet the household income requirements.

Additional information on RCS pre-K programs can be found on the district website or by visiting rochester.k12.mi.us, then selecting schools, district specialized, and pre-K.



FREE
Pre-K
for
4-year-old students

Nationally acclaimed and state-funded

Visit rochester.k12.mi.us.
Select: schools, district specialized, pre-K

Great Start Readiness Program
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