



Robbinsville Public Schools

Brian J. Betze, *Superintendent*

September 22, 2023

Dear Robbinsville Community,

I am writing to address a recent social media post made by our Mayor Fried in which he shared his thoughts on the School District Public Question scheduled for November. The Mayor has provided his personal perspective on this matter, and I believe it is essential to offer my viewpoint, particularly concerning the impact of this referendum on our school district and community.

First and foremost, as the Superintendent of our School District, my primary responsibility is to ensure the best possible education for our students and the well-being of our community. With this commitment in mind, I would like to offer a different perspective on the upcoming referendum.

Our question on the ballot proposes a tax increase to address a shortfall of \$2.1 million in the School District's budget. This deficit was partially exacerbated by a recent well-deserved 4% (not 5%) increase in teacher salaries, a necessary step to retain our high-quality dedicated educators and prevent them from seeking higher-paying positions elsewhere. It is crucial to recognize that this increase was implemented to maintain the quality of education in our district, which has always been a point of pride for our community.

Now, I would like to address the additional \$2.7 million proposed in the question. This amount is intended to act as a contingency fund, a financial safety net, in case the district faces a reduction in State aid next year. Had it not been for the slimmest of margins of 1.2% of our \$60 million budget, the District would have been cut an additional \$2.7 million this current year which is why it is highly likely this occurs next year and why we are asking for the funds. The district cut 25 staff members, some athletics, and activities for our students when we needed to cut only \$2.1 million. Imagine the devastating impact on our district and students if we had to cut an additional \$2.7 million. We are working to prevent this catastrophe.

Nevertheless, any additional money raised by a public question that is not needed by the district and not taxed can be placed in something called a banked cap for three years, not designated as surplus. This would be determined by the members of the Board of Education during next year's budget cycle. If the money is not required, it will not be utilized and therefore remain untaxed.

In the coming years, we will also see a significant positive development in the form of the conclusion of the \$5 million bond payment for the construction of our high school. When this obligation is fulfilled, the district will not have additional funds. This money can only be used for a possible referendum in the future, after approval from the district's voters, and cannot be included in the operating budget.

It is my opinion and the position of our Board of Education that the district must continually act as responsible financial stewards and seek the funds they genuinely require. While raising additional taxes for an uncertain event may seem unnecessary, it is a proactive measure that demonstrates our commitment to maintaining the quality of education in Robbinsville. In the event that State aid is reduced next year, it is highly probable that the district can use the public question funds to address documented needs and maintain our outstanding educational system.

I understand that this is one of the most challenging decisions our community has faced in some time. It is essential that we engage in rational and informed discussions about this matter, respecting diverse viewpoints. As residents and staff members, we all share the common goal of providing the best education possible for our children, and I believe that with constructive dialogue, we can find the right path forward. I invite the mayor and any other concerned citizens to our Board of Education meeting next Tuesday at 7 p.m. at Pond Road Middle School.

As we move closer to the election, it is vital that voters understand what is planned and why. Often, social media posts are not accurate and can misinform, rather than educate, voters. For regularly updated information with the facts, please see our website:

https://www.robbinsville.k12.nj.us/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=561602&type=d

Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and I encourage you to actively participate in the upcoming discussions and decision-making processes related to the referendum. Together, we can ensure a brighter future for our students and our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian J. Betze', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian J. Betze

Superintendent