

RICHARDSON ISD TRUSTEES CALL TAX RATIFICATION ELECTION

Addresses School Safety, Class Sizes, Teacher Retention, Strategic Initiatives

June 7, 2018 - After months of budget discussion, and incorporating recommendations from the comprehensive community and staff strategic planning process that began last fall, the Richardson ISD Board of Trustees voted to set the district's operating tax rate at \$1.17, triggering a tax ratification election (TRE) for September 4, asking voters to approve an increased tax rate.

"For those who believe in safe schools, outstanding teachers, and maintaining a strong district that meets the high expectations of our community, this action could no longer be avoided," said RISD Board President, Justin Bono. "From our highest achieving schools to our campuses and students in need of additional resources, RISD can no longer operate on the reduced state funding and revenue generated by a minimum operating tax rate."

Trustees seek to raise RISD's operating tax rate, which has remained unchanged since 2008, from its current level of \$1.04 to \$1.17. If approved, the change would raise the property taxes on an average value home by \$24.66 a month, or \$296 annually. Numerous area school districts have raised their operating tax rates over the last decade, while Richardson ISD trustees have kept RISD's rate unchanged.

Under the Texas school finance system, RISD has received \$24.2 million less in state funding since 2014, and state funding is projected to decrease by another \$33.7 million over the next five years.

"The school finance system in Texas is broken," said RISD Superintendent, Dr. Jeannie Stone. "RISD's operating budget receives no recurring benefit from rising property values, yet the state continues to decrease its share of funding. The bottom line is that because of the outdated school funding system, RISD taxpayers must pay a higher share of the cost of public education."

Last year, RISD used one-time reserve funds to balance a \$6.3 million deficit budget – an action that was a direct result of decreased state funding. If the TRE is successful, RISD's 2018-19 operating budget would include the following priority expenditures recommended through the community strategic planning process and external audits:

- A salary increase of 2.5% to help retain and attract high-quality teachers
- Additional student resource officers, district safety & security staff, and establishment of an RISD office of safety and security

- Additional teaching and staff allocations to serve students in special education and those with special needs
- A moderate compensation increase for custodial and hourly employees to be more competitive with the market and closer to surrounding districts

RISD consistently seeks ways to reduce costs and bring efficiencies to operations. As part of budget and curricular planning this past year, RISD identified several operational and organizational changes that generated a \$3.2-million cost savings, allowing the district to pursue instructional initiatives designed to help students without adding dollars to the budget. In addition, central operational cuts have been made to save \$600,000 for 2018-19 and beyond.

If the TRE is not successful, the district will not be able to fund a salary increase needed to attract and retain quality teachers and staff; instead, the district will be forced to implement a hiring freeze that would result in increased class sizes. Additionally, RISD would have to consider eliminating academic programs and collecting fees for activities as part of additional cost-cutting measures to cover a projected \$13.3 million operating deficit over the next five years.

“Passage of a TRE is an essential step for our students, our teachers and our district,” Stone said. “We have been operating on a 27 year-low tax rate, and we’ve reached the point where action is needed to protect what’s great about our district and secure our future.”

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