

Heights Schools Levy May 2015
Frequently Asked Questions

If Issue 2 costs about \$17 per month per \$100,000 of home value, why does the ballot language say 59 cents per \$100?

The levy ballot language is legally required to be written a specific way, which can cause confusion for voters. To calculate the cost of a levy, a \$100,000 home is assessed property taxes on 35% of its value, or \$35,000. Multiply that by 5.9 mills (1 mill is \$1 per \$1,000) and the cost is approximately \$206 per year, or \$17 per month.

What is the Heights Schools Issue?

The Heights Schools levy on the May 5th ballot is a 5.9-mill operating levy that will protect our academic success and the strength of our community. It will allow the District to keep the critical programs that are helping our students achieve, and retain the teachers and staff members who make these programs successful. The Heights Schools levy is the smallest CH-UH operating levy in decades and it will only cost \$17 more per month per \$100,000 home value.

How do I know that the schools really need this issue?

A review by an independent citizens' committee says that this issue is essential to maintaining academic progress. This volunteer finance review committee has analyzed all of the District's finances and found that they are operating efficiently, but that they must pass the levy to maintain current academic programming.

Why does the District need the money now?

Like all of us, the schools face rising costs every year – in things like healthcare, utilities, fuel and more. But because of our State's school funding system, the school district is stuck with the exact same amount of money that they had four years ago, even though costs continue to rise. And while costs rise, the money the district has to operate our schools continues to be reduced: State funding to our schools has been cut by more than \$2 Million, and we've lost millions more from the State's diversion of funding away from our public schools and toward charters. The schools have cut costs significantly in order to run a more efficient school district, but without this levy, they will have to make large cuts that will hurt education.

Why does this issue matter to our community?

Cleveland Heights and University Heights are special communities. Great communities must have strong, successful schools. That's why it's up to us to protect our schools by approving this issue. Without this issue, academics at our schools will suffer, which will make it even harder to attract and retain families to our community.

Why can't the District just make cuts?

The CH-UH Schools have made millions in permanent cuts in recent years – more than \$3 million just last year. Additionally, teachers, administrators and ALL staff have agreed to only a minimal cost of living increase for the next two years, and the District continues to look for more ways to lower costs, including \$500,000 more in cuts that will be made even if this levy passes. School leaders have been very careful to try to avoid large cuts that directly impact the classroom. Because there are few, if any, such places left to cut, the amount that the District will have to cut if the issue fails is so large that education will inevitably suffer.

What happens if the issue doesn't pass?

The District will be forced to make millions of dollars worth of significant cuts that will impact educational quality. We will not be able to keep critical programs that help our students succeed. Specialized programs – for those who need additional help and also for those students who excel and need advanced programming – will be impacted. Since personnel costs are our highest expense, teachers and support staff, who have worked so hard to improve our school district, will be impacted.

What do we get if we approve the Heights School levy?

We can:

- Keep reading programs that ensure all students read at or above grade level by 3rd grade
- Keep increasing the graduation rate
- Keep innovative programs that are getting our students ready for the world, like college prep, foreign languages, gifted education, performing arts, and athletics
- Keep the teacher-student ratio low
- Keep quality teachers in the classroom
- Keep the education our families want and need
- Keep our community and our schools desirable

How do I know the District uses its current funds wisely?

Our school district has received numerous financial accounting awards and our Treasurer's Officer has been recognized as one of the most responsible and accurate in the State. Our Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, Scott Gainer, was named the best non-profit, school or government CFO in 2014 by Crain's Cleveland. The District has also received their 13th straight Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting (CAFR), one of the highest forms of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting. Additionally, the Lay Finance Committee, a volunteer citizen's group, reviews the District's finances to ensure that the community's money is used effectively. In all, our district has proven year after year that it is a careful and responsible steward of the public's money.

I can't afford more taxes, why should I support this issue?

Making an investment in our children is making an investment in our future - not just as a school district, but also as a community. Without strong and successful schools, we won't have a strong community, strong property values, or a strong future.

If the current method of school funding was found unconstitutional, why can't we just wait for the State to fix it and not pass any more taxes?

It may take years for the State to fix school funding and in the meantime, we have to operate within the current framework. If we don't act now, the children of Cleveland Heights and University Heights will suffer because we won't be able to offer them the materials and programs necessary for today's education.

Why do schools cost so much?

The Cleveland Heights - University Heights City School District faces a range of challenges that few other school districts contend with. School leaders believe that every student can achieve no matter their background or previous knowledge attained before entering the district. The schools provide desperately needed programs that help students facing poverty, advanced

programs for gifted students that our community has come to expect, and special programs for students with significant disabilities. This wide range of services for all students has led to our current success, and is the blueprint for the future that we must maintain by approving the Heights Schools issue. Extensive athletic programs, art, numerous music programs, libraries, extracurricular clubs and activities, social workers, nurses, classroom aides and support staff are just a few of the many offerings our local funding supports.