

Kenston Local Schools to seek five-year, limited-term PI levy

By ANASTASIA NICHOLAS

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The Kenston Board of Education unanimously approved this week the first of two resolutions to place a 1.35 mill permanent improvement levy on the November ballot.

Superintendent Steven Sayers said that recent discussions with the administrative team led the district to propose a five-year, limited-term levy rather than a continuing levy, which continues for an indefinite period of time.

"We want to be accountable to our taxpayers," Mr. Sayers said. "We recognize that the district belongs to the community and belongs to our taxpayers. We want to be good stewards of the tax dollars that are entrusted to us."

Should the community choose to support the PI levy, the district will have five years to demonstrate and follow through on how it wants to use the funds before seeking renewal five years down the road, he said.

Mr. Sayers said that only 13% of Ohio school districts do not have a permanent improvement or maintenance-type levy.

"Here at Kenston, we are included in that 13% and certainly this is very much a need," he said. "This is very important to our school district and being able to take care of our buildings, our bus fleet and the host of expenses that go along with those things."

Mr. Sayers said the district is seeking a levy that will generate \$1.3 million annually.

"That is truly what we need to maintain our buildings, take care of maintenance and also make sure our bus fleet stays current."

Over the last three years, the district has set aside about \$575,000 a year from the general fund to address permanent improvement needs.

Permanent improvement needs are those with a minimum five-year life span. Permanent improvement levies may not be used for operating expenses.

Mr. Sayers said he was asked why the district would ask for a PI levy to generate approximately \$1.3 million annually if the district is making it work now by transferring this money from the general fund to the PI fund.

"Frankly, we're not really making it work with the \$575,000 that we're transferring on an annual basis," he said.

Mr. Sayers used transportation costs as an example. For transportation alone, staying on a current replacement cycle for school buses and vans requires \$400,000 a year, he said.

"That is just for replacement of three school buses and a van, of which we have 10 every year. That is before we get into any kind of maintenance items, any boiler work, roofs, parking lots, doors, windows, resurfacing of tennis courts, tracks, fencing repairs – all of those are PI-type items," he said.

He offered another example of a \$300,000 quote to replace a boiler at Gardiner Transportation Center.

"With one boiler and just replacing our buses, we're already at \$700,000 a year," he said.

With this levy, the district is looking to not only cover big-ticket items and be prepared for those expenditures. A key reason why the district is seeking this levy is to be proactive in building replacement plans for items, including classroom furniture, he said.

Mr. Sayers said that the district does not have a cycle to replace items such as classroom desks, tables, chairs or cafeteria tables, and the district has many of those items across its buildings.

The board's next steps to place the levy on the ballot are to certify and seek the county auditor's certification on the legal counsel's estimates.

That certification will help the board prepare a second resolution that will be voted on this summer and in place within the coming months, Interim Treasurer Ryan Pendleton said.