



No Alternative Facts for FLSD

Description

Please, No Alternative Facts or Spin

Written by [Bob McCleskey](#) (HSV resident, served 8+ years on the Fountain Lake Board of Education)

The May 21 Fountain Lake (FL) School District taxpayers deserve nothing less than true facts and clearly stated aspirations and commitments.

I have no doubt that much of what has been written about the “needs” of the school district are valid, but not all. What bothers me is some of the specious arguments which are being used to justify a millage increase, as are documented in items #7 through #12 below.


What I would much prefer to hear from the FL District Board and Superintendent are the specifics of the “needs” and “wants”, and a lot more specifics about the academic improvements which are anticipated and need funding. Even better, would be having measurable goals and objectives for academics. If the desire is to have teacher salaries competitive with Lakeside and Lake Hamilton, we should expect the increase in salaries to result in FL becoming academically competitive as well. As reported by the State, [FL is currently in 3rd place](#) academically in the area, behind Lakeside and Lake Hamilton.

FL positives and Taxpayers wish list

- 1. First, I would like to compliment the Superintendent and Board of Education for conducting public forums to both educate local citizens about the school district and listen to those who want to support education.

- 2. Other positives worth mentioning are: (a) an improved [web site](#) (which could benefit by further improvements); (b) linking many documents related to Board matters to Google Doc URLs making the documents readily accessible; (c) adopting the use of Google Docs for both students, Teachers, and administrative work.
- 3. There is no question that the District has “needs” which need to be met before “wants” are considered. A review of the 1-page flyer (see below) which contained background information and plans, as well as needs, was prepared for the purpose of obtaining the support of taxpayers clearly includes several “needs”, but some of the items listed are better categorized as “wants”.

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Supporting Every Student
Everyday For Success



FINANCIALS

- o Real Estate property assessment has been flat since 2011
- o Per pupil expenditure has declined steadily since 2013
- o Budget projections for next three school years shows a deficit spending budget to meet current need and legislative requirements (assumes flat enrollment)
- o Current millage rate is the lowest in Garland and Saline County
- o The last millage increase for the District was in 1990
- o No base salary increases in the District since 2013

LEGISLATIVE / STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT OUR BUDGET

- o Minimum wage increase
- o Rising annual cost of health insurance/benefits
- o Staffing increases in Special Education, Counselors, Para Professionals

WHAT CURRENT AND FUTURE DISTRICT NEEDS MUST BE ADDRESSED?

- o Enhanced professional development / investment in teacher's development / improve teacher retention
- o Continued investment in quality academic programs to improve student learning
- o Enrollment growth has strained our cafeteria capacity
- o Increasing class sizes and the statutory requirement to hire para professionals
- o Space for a sufficient number of pre-k classrooms to meet community demand
- o Teacher's salaries have been flat for 6 years while all other schools in Garland County have approved same timeframe
- o Traffic flow on campus is inefficient, constrained, and more dangerous than desired
- o Aging transportation fleet
- o Additional Security enhancements are needed to further improve student safety
- o Athletic facilities are aging, in need of repair, and undersized for serving current and future enrollment

WHAT HAVE WE DONE SO FAR TO ADDRESS CURRENT NEEDS AND BUILD A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE:

- o Surveyed staff and administration on current and future needs
- o Early release Wednesday's provide staff valuable collaboration time to identify and act on student improvement
- o Visits to top schools in the state to share best practices and identify instruction gaps
- o Partnered with East Lab students to map current facilities
- o Partnered with B&F Engineering to evaluate current campus layout, topography and drainage, and identify areas for future expansion
- o Identified future roadways for traffic flow and expanded parking
- o Purchased 20 acres behind the Press Box that can provide secondary access to Park Avenue, which would improve traffic flow, and safety
- o Partnered with Modus Studios to develop a master facility plan (including review of each building's purpose, footprint, mechanical/electrical age, etc.)

- o Secured/redesigned entrances to several buildings (ongoing work) to improve student safety
- o Added perimeter fencing near the Elementary School to enhance student safety

Fountain Lake School District Millage Increase Handout

- 4. What I did not see nearly enough of in the FL documents, and news articles, are specifics about needs and plans that address academics (only 3 of the 10 Needs).
- 5. One of the academic items was adding classroom space and (by implication hiring the staff) to “meet community demand” for Pre-K students which I strongly support. Ironically, this is an issue largely because of a decision made this school year to eliminate one classroom and staff cost to free the money for an unknown purpose.
- 6. Since increasing teacher salaries is one of the main arguments for a millage increase, I would like to see the District explain the actions planned to convert higher salaries into higher academic results. I have no problem supporting the salary increase contemplated, but from past experience, promises are more likely to be met when they are accompanied by measurable goals and objectives which are announced to the public. This is not a new concept and in fact has been used in the past at FL and should be reinstated.

Specious statements as reasons for the millage increase

Now to review some of the more specious statements which have been floated as reasons for the millage increase.

- 7. **“The last millage increase for the District was in 1990”** is flat wrong. There is a long and involved history which started in the 1990’s and was ultimately resolved in 2007. The issues involved are too numerous and complex for a simple explanation, but the key points are: (a) In 2003 the millage was 30.25 where it remained even though an election which increased the millage to 37.80 which was challenged by a taxpayer lawsuit. Due to the lawsuit, a portion of the 37.8 mills (7.55 mills) were held back from the district and placed in an escrow account with the district receiving revenue only from 30.25 mills. In 2007 the lawsuit was settled through arbitration during the Summer with the millage rate set at 34.90 mills (27.10 M&O plus 7.80 mills for debt service). As an article on November 14, 2007, Village Voice reported, the approximately \$1.6 million in escrow funds were distributed \$324,000 to the District, \$944,000 to the taxpayers, and the remainder to the attorneys and a disbursement agent. In the school election of 2007 voters approved a millage rate of 34.9 which was subsequently lowered to 34.8 by an Amendment 59 “millage rollback” which the AR Assessment Coordination Department triggered. The net-net, there has been a millage increase since 1990, namely in 2007 which was approved by the voters.
- 8. **“Current Millage rate is the lowest in Garland and Saline County.”** Although this is a factually correct statement it is very misleading and should not be used to justify the increase. Consider this, each of FL’s mills is worth 3.7 times that of Cutter Morning Star’s, 36% more than Hot Springs, and 45% or more than the other districts. Cutter Morning Star needs the highest millage rate to generate income primarily because each of their mills generates so much less than most districts. Which is the reason they receive over \$6,000 in State Aid per student. To produce as much revenue per student as FL, CMS would need a millage rate of over 175 mills (vs. FL’s 34.8)! More pertinent is the millage rate that Jessieville would need in order to produce as much URT tax revenues per student as FL and the answer is 72.2 mills! What does having that much more value for each mill mean to the FL district? It takes fewer mills for FL to generate

more revenue per student than all of the other area districts. In 2010, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) determined that FL was one of 4 school districts who were so wealthy they demanded the district “remit” (confiscate is a better way to put it) about 10% of FL’s URT tax revenues to the State. They were prevented from doing so by a successful lawsuit against the ADE. (See “**Impact of Choice on Area School Districts**”)

Impact of Choice on Area School Districts

[Impact-of-School-Choice-on-Local-Area-Schools_2](#)

- 9. “**Real estate property assessment has been flat since 2011**”, not true but the total assessed values have fluctuated. The property reappraisal process which occurred in 2012 did reduce the total assessed value by 3% but that was more than made up over the next three years. Then in 2017, there was another property reappraisal which lowered the total assessed value by 3.18%, which will very likely be made up in the next 2-3 years. (See **FL Assessed Value per ADM**)

Fountain Lake Assessed Value per ADM

[FL-Assessed-Value-per-ADM-2007-2018_V4](#)

- 10. “**No base salary increases in the District since 2013**” and “**Teacher salaries have been flat for six years while other districts have had raises**”. These statements are correct, but they ignore some history which largely explains why the salaries were not increased before now. In 2010-2011 FL implemented a performance-based incentive program. FL contracted with the UA-OEP staff to design and administer the bonus program for a 3-year period. It was designed to encourage both teachers and support staff to work together to improve the academic performance of the district. The teacher bonuses were designed to reward teachers (and administrators) up to \$10,000 per year and many teachers and administrators received bonuses of between \$7,000 and \$9,000. Support staff bonuses were much lower amounts (up to \$1,500). The CPIP program was in place for 3 school years during which time teachers received bonus compensation (as well as their normal step increases). The bonuses were far greater than a normal salary increase would have been. Unfortunately, the program was not successful in improving the district’s academic performance and clearly established that teachers prefer nominal salary increases versus the opportunity to earn meaningful bonuses. The net-net conclusion is that teachers have the view of “what have you done for me lately?”
- 11. “**Athletic facilities are aging**”. During the years I was on the board (2007-2015) the following major facilities were installed or upgraded: (a) a new Middle School was constructed, (b) the bus barn was relocated and first class tennis courts installed, (c) artificial turf was installed on the football field with a 6 lane track adjacent to the field, the football clubhouse and exercise building was expanded and renovated, (d) two “safe rooms” were constructed and outfitted so they could be productively used for multiple school purposes beyond protecting students, staff, and nearby community members. The athletic facilities may be aging but so is everything else.
- 12. My last issue with the district is how it is responding to the Arkansas’ School Choice statute. It is really bothersome that the number of School Choice students are quoted differently in different venues. The numbers have varied from 64 to 98 with some in-between #'s as well. The most recent being 98. As anyone reading letters to the editor are likely aware, I have been on a

campaign (lone wolf) to get the school choice students who attend FL to be funded properly. Currently, the District receives \$566 per student in State Aid. Depending on what source one uses, the cost to educate a student at FL varies between \$10,500 and \$12,000. District taxpayers shoulder the difference. One of the more galling aspect is that the state funds OpenEnrollment Charter School students at over \$7,000 per year (\$6,781 in foundation funding plus categorical aid). The issue should be a cause celebre because it impacts virtually every taxpayer in the State, some at a lesser rate than others but unfortunately most are not aware of the problem. My multiple attempts to enlist the FL Superintendent and Board of Education to help with pushing for a solution to the issue has thus far fallen on deaf ears, which tells me their only immediate priority is selling the millage increase, taxpayers be damned.



Fountain Lake School District Safe Room

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[Fountain-Lake-School-District-wants-to-raise-YOURT-taxes-by-4-more-mills](#)

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