

Chippewa Valley boss makes case for enhancement millage

- By Nicole Tuttle For MediaNews Group
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File photo.
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Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ron Roberts recently began his pitch for a regional enhancement millage proposal.

At the Jan. 13 Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education meeting, Roberts outlined what will be presented to groups within the school district regarding the millage proposal.

“But we really believe at this time if you look what is going on in education and what is expected of us, what we want kids to be able to know and do, we need to be able to support our programs to help kids be successful,” Roberts said.

He also said that approval of the millage proposal would generate \$418 more per pupil, which the district could make decisions on how to spend. Likely targets, he said, could be student safety, social and emotional learning, student mental health, state standards to ensure that all students are proficient in reading by third grade, increasing career and technical education learning, retaining staff and maintaining current programs.

“We are running a deficit model. You can only do that for so long. And we also want to protect our important extracurricular opportunities that we have for kids,” Roberts said.

The Macomb Intermediate School District (MISD) regional enhancement millage proposal will appear on the ballot on March 10. Pursuant to state law, revenue raised by the proposed enhancement millage would be collected by the MISD. It would be distributed to local public school districts and eligible public school academies within the MISD boundaries and the MISD based on pupil membership count.

The proposed increase would be by 1.90 mills, or \$1.90 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation, for 10 years from 2020 to 2029. The millage would raise an estimated \$55 million if approved and would be first levied in 2020. A few of the 22 school districts that signed on include Utica, Anchor Bay, Chippewa Valley and L'Anse Creuse.

Officials in Utica said they plan to present information about the millage in the coming weeks while a spokesperson in Anchor Bay and L'Anse Creuse's superintendent did not respond to Macomb Daily requests for comment.

The enhancement is being sought under a state law that authorizes an ISD to levy a regional enhancement millage at a rate not to exceed three mills for a term not to exceed 20 years, in order to enhance other state and local funding for school district operations if approved by a majority of ISD electors voting.

“So as an example of costs a house with a \$100,000 market value would pay approximately \$95 per year. And this millage would start to be collected in this coming summer, if successful in March,” Roberts said.

Roberts said the March 10 ballot proposal will pass or fail on a countywide basis, and overall over 50 percent of the electorate would need to support the millage for it to pass.

“But in 1994 just to give you a little background, the state controlled school funding and that was with Proposal A. And where it used to be millage based it is now based on, a formula where the money goes to the state and it is redistributed to school districts. The only thing that school districts can really control outside in order to increase funding for their schools is what is called an enhancement millage,” Roberts said.

Roberts also said schools have been underfunded by the state for years, adding no adjustments have ever been made to Proposal A or how school funding works.

“So we have reached this point where we are underfunded. So all schools in Macomb County, all schools I can safely say across the state of Michigan have done things in order to survive on what the state provides to them,” Roberts said.

Roberts listed examples of cost savings in Chippewa Valley including freezing pay steps for teachers, energy conservation, pay to play sports, reduction of building support staff, fewer custodians and a reduction of transportation.

Roberts also cited research by the School Finance Research Collaborative, indicating that schools should receive \$9,450 per student, as well as additional funding for at risk students, special needs students and bilingual students.

“With the most recent increase in state funding we received \$8,111 per student. So we are \$1,300 below what the research collaborative said we should receive. Plus all the additional dollars for the students in special categories. So as you can see it is a model that does not work. And the state refuses to address that. We are one of the largest school districts in the state of Michigan at the minimum funding level which is \$8,101. In Macomb County alone Chippewa Valley Schools receives \$369 less than the average,” Roberts said.

He added schools are not funded to meet inflationary increases.

Grace Caporuscio, a former school board candidate who has criticized the district's spending in the past, questioned how much of the \$418 per pupil would actually go towards the classroom and would not be used for administrators.

“These schools are not living within their means,” Caporuscio said.

Caporuscio also expressed concern about the length of the proposed millage of 10 years.

“Anytime somebody says the words, ‘It’s for kids,’ we are expected to just produce an unlimited amount of tax money,” Caporuscio said.

Also on Jan. 13, the Chippewa Valley Schools Board of Education approved:

- The appointment of John Cafagna to the position of assessment and data analysis coordinator. Cafagna was appointed to fill a vacancy due to retirement and his effective start date is to be determined.
- The purchase of a tablet system. The board approved Microsoft Store for the purchase of 126 tablets with cases. Cost was \$57,088.08. The tablets and cases were purchased for the elementary and middle school early literacy grant program. Funding comes from an early literacy grant for the purchase.