

Background:

On May 6, 2025, ██████████, in Clark County Ohio, proposed an additional tax levy for the purpose of general permanent improvements. This was a millage based levy at a rate not to exceed 2.78 mills. This was the second time a levy of this type was up for a vote, it previously failed in November 2024. ██████████ is listed as typology 3, a small town low student poverty, small student population.¹ According to the Clark County Auditor's website 2024 values the unvoted for rate is already 6.2 for school purposes and voted for levies total 44.12 for this school district. ██████████ School District opened a new K - 12 campus in September 2021 and 5 mills of the voted for tax rate is a bond levy for that project. The new campus includes 2 gymnasiums, art and music rooms and VoAg space.

Legal:

The levy on the ballot May 6, 2025, seems to match the purpose. It is a millage levy with a certain value attached and is for permanent improvements. It is not listed as a permanent improvement levy on the ballot but that is what it is for. The levy proposes to complete unfinished space in the new campus elementary wing, construct a new transportation facility, and construct a multipurpose facility for athletic use. The ballot language is clear and I assume it is legal. It is pretty straight forward. In Ohio there is a ballot board and specifically in Clark County the Board of Elections is primarily responsible for approving ballot language for local questions and issues. I have known them to require changes to ballot language when it is not legal. From what I can find ██████████ complied with ORC Section 9.03 for the purposes of promoting the levy. ██████████ has removed any updates on their website at the subdomain /levy but does still have news about the levy on their news page. The news appears to have only factual information about what the intended purpose of the levy. The newspaper and television articles about this levy appear to use this same language that I assume came from this page or the person(s) who represent the district using the same language. I could not find any social media posts that said to vote yes and as far as I am aware they did not send out emails or other correspondence stating to vote yes.

Financial & Community Analysis:

The ask of the public was for a total near \$5.3 million. I am not sure what the two new facilities would cost or the expected additions in the elementary wing. For the purpose of building large buildings in 2025 \$5 million is probably appropriate. Due to the large majority of residents who voted down this levy I am not sure to what level the monies were aligning with priorities of the district or what the general public felt was necessary. Almost 80% of voters voted down the levy. I am also unsure if the district or levy committee tried to engage all community members but the district does hold regular "town-hall" meetings to address district questions and concerns. I am unsure with this district if that is new this year due to the levies on ballots in both November 2024 and May 2025 or if that is something they do regularly or have been doing previously.

Overall the district appeared to be transparent about the reason for the additional ask and neutral with their levy communications. The monies asked for seemed to align with the projects that were being announced. When reviewing the CUPP report operating millage was below average for the state and similar districts but when compared to Clark County schools of the same type one was higher and one was lower by 10 and 7 mills respectively so they are in the middle. However, ██████████' property tax is almost \$2,000 more per student in than those similar Clark County districts while being close to even with similar districts throughout the state. Somehow bringing in almost \$2,000 more via property taxes their expenditure per pupil is

less than the other districts in the county as well as the state. One of those Clark County districts did recently pass an income tax for the school district however that should not have been a factor at the time of the most recent Cupp Report. Their average teacher and administrator salary is also the lowest in the county of these similar districts and lower than the state averages as well. I share that data when reviewing the need for these additional funds because that is not where their monies are going currently. When reviewing the 5-year forecast one year ago actual income rose just over \$3 million and \$1.6 million was an increase in property tax revenue. This year would show the increase in tax after a significant increase in property value assessments completed after Covid by the Clark County Auditor's office. The school district's actual expenses were \$900,000 more than the year prior with the \$3 million increase. Then the following year (current) estimate was listed as an expected expense equivalent to and more than the new amount of funds coming in. The forecast does indicate a one-year increase in employee's salaries to the tune of \$800,000 approximately and employee benefits of \$300,000. Additionally, there is an estimate of over \$200,000 in purchased services. None of these values are actual at this time however the \$3 million dollar surplus from 2022 -23 to 2023-24 was accounted for in the following forecast for 2024-25.

Judgement:

After my over all assessment I do not believe the levy was a good idea. As illustrated in the review of funds above the district had a surplus of \$3 million dollars after an increase of property taxes. The documentation about levies from OSBA was not populating data and I am unsure all the operating levies [REDACTED] has had over the past 5 years however I can see the bond monies on the tax report. What this increase indicates due to HB920 is that the tax payers have recently approved an operating levy because the \$3 million increase would not be possible based on a past levy after mill reduction OR there has been some significant new construction in the district to allow for more funds without a rate reduction. It appears that [REDACTED] at this time has sufficient funds to operate as well as provide employee raises.

Recommendations:

I would not suggest [REDACTED] put this levy back on the ballot at this time. I think the community was clear with the response twice of turning down the funds for these particular projects. Instead of a levy I think some booster associations could raise funds for some improvements. If they are looking at funding an athletic facility potentially the athletic boosters could play a role in funding an addition. Similarly the PTO if they have one could provide enhancements to the elementary wing getting community support from the people currently in the school using the buildings and facilities. Furthermore, the state budget is specifically funding some transportation enhancements. Possibly funds projected for buses could be set aside for the new transportation facility while the state funds could provide new buses.

¹ <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Typology-of-Ohio-School-Districts>

