

Below is a question-and-answer summary from the open conversation with the Board of Education held on March 7, 2023. You are encouraged to view and listen to the recording of the presentation [here](#). A copy of the presentation slideshow is available [here](#).

The Q&A reflects a summary of questions and topics discussed and combines information from the presentation and conversations to provide a summary answer. Additional resources have been added in this Q&A, where appropriate.

Q: Before the pandemic enrollment was projected to decrease, but enrollment has increased. Has the projection methodology been re-evaluated to ensure enrollment projections for the future are accurate?

A: Yes. Part of the enrollment increase is due to decisions made by the district during the pandemic. Our district offered in person and live streaming options for families. Our success in keeping kids in the classroom during the pandemic contributed to the increase in enrollment that was not anticipated. Currently the district is making projections 2-years out based on preschool and kindergarten enrollment numbers. 40% of Ottawa Hills students enter after kindergarten, so we are working with the projection numbers available. We are hesitant to project beyond that to maintain as accurate as possible enrollment estimates.

Q: How does an increase in enrollment result in an increased cost for school operations?

A: The district has needed to hire additional teachers and special needs staff, as well as create more classroom space. A specific list of new hires is as follows:

FY 2020:	full-time kindergarten teacher, and a part-time kindergarten special teacher
FY 2021:	full-time 3rd grade teacher, and an elementary school nurse due to COVID
FY 2022:	4 part-time specials teachers for grades K and 1, a full-time 2nd grade teacher, an elementary counselor, a math interventionist and math tutors (math tutors are grant funded), and a part-time special needs paraprofessional
FY 2023:	4 additional special needs paraprofessionals

Q: As our property values increase, does the school get more funding?

A: No. Without passage of additional millage, the tax collected does not increase. [House Bill 920](#) provides that voted millage (previous millage approved by voters to support the school district) is reduced to effective millage so that your property tax contribution to the school district remains unchanged. The Lucas County Auditor website provides a search feature to show how taxes are broken down by levy and fund [here](#).

Q: As enrollment increases, can parents expect more transparency on staffing decisions that affect their children? What are the criteria used to make staffing decisions?

A: The district cannot discuss personnel decisions with parents prior to notifying personnel. Decisions that affect individual staff members are personal and private. The district has recently given ample notice to staff whose positions are affected to ensure they have plenty of time before the start of the next school year to find new employment. Sometimes that information becomes public knowledge before school or district leadership has had a chance to properly communicate staffing decisions and future plans with parents. The district will continue to strive for improvement in transparency of decision making when appropriate. No staffing decisions are made lightly. Student needs and junior/senior high school scheduling requests, along with potential efficiencies and attrition are some of the criteria considered to make staffing decisions.

Q: Can you explain more on the \$650,000 and \$750,000 cuts and the thought behind staffing cuts?

A: The **estimated savings** for each cut are as follows:

- 3-5% pay cuts for all administrative leadership staff (-\$61,000)
- Retire/rehire of the junior/senior high school assistant principal (-\$12,000)
- Elimination of a full-time communications director that has been replaced by a consultant that assists a few hours per week with much of the communications director duties (press, social media, etc.) being absorbed by the superintendent. (-\$85,000)
- Elimination of 2 gifted intervention specialists who work primarily with teachers. Student experiences will remain largely unchanged. For example, junior/senior high school students identified as gifted will still have access to honors and advanced placement courses, independent studies, or College Credit Plus. (-\$110,000)
- Elimination of the consumer science program and teacher at the junior/senior high school. With the retirement of the business education teacher, the business education program will be revamped to incorporate many educational experiences that were previously provided through the consumer science program, and still other aspects of the consumer science program may be incorporated into other courses. (-\$160,000)
- Attrition of an English teacher at the junior/senior high school. With the large 2023 graduating class leaving the junior/senior high school and the '23-'24 incoming 7th grade class being a smaller than typical class size, the district will not need to replace a retiring English teacher immediately. The need for this position will be re-evaluated in future school years and is expected to be added when needed. (-\$145,000)
- Delaying the implementation of a new English/Language Arts Curriculum (-\$240,000)

- Eliminate 1 school (LPN certified) nurse. During the pandemic, with the many extra cautions, illness, quarantine/isolation requirements, parent communications, and COVID case reporting, an additional assistant/LPN nurse was hired. Nurse Baird, who is a skilled, registered nurse (RN) will return to the elementary school for 80-90% of the school day and check in at the junior/senior high school on an as needed basis. (-\$42,000)
- Eliminate 1/2 world language position. This decision was made based on the elective course choices students are making. Specifically, project enrollment in Spanish classes can be readily served by a reduced faculty. All five levels of Spanish will continue to be offered, with no change to the student experience. (-\$62,000)
- Physical Education program changes allowing for 1/2 time PE position cut. The district will join most other districts and allow (only) high school athletes to have their PE requirement waived. This will allow for the 1/2 PE position at the junior/senior high school to also serve students at the elementary school. (-\$23,000)
- Retirement savings for three veteran/highly experienced teachers. (-\$144,000)
- 10% budget cuts on all discretionary budgets in the district (e.g. technology department, math department, etc.). (-\$225,000)
- Additional Cost-Savings include; Elimination of Travel for Board and Administration (-\$3000), Elimination of one issue of Around These Hills (-\$10,000), Restructuring of the Technology Dept. (-\$5,000), and a few other smaller areas of combined savings within district budgets are still being discussed and could be made, based on the end of the school year budgeting process and looking at student need as we plan ahead for the 23-24 school year. (-\$73,000)

Q: Assuming the requested levy is approved by voters on the November 2023 ballot, can we expect programs, staffing positions, and services that have been cut to be reinstated?

A: Even with the cuts of \$650,000 we will still end this fiscal year with a \$1.3 million deficit. If, for example, voters approved a 10 mill levy next November, that would get the district back to a break-even budget for next fiscal year (a budget that maintains the current \$650,000 cuts and adds the additional \$750,000 in cuts), but does not create enough additional revenue to increase our expenditures. We do know and are planning for the replacement of the full-time English teacher at the JHHS due to an increase of enrollment coming from the elementary school in the next 1-2 years. Due to high levels of inflation, costs continue to rise faster than expected in other areas such as cleaning and instructional supplies, utilities and health insurance coverage.

Q: Would increased cuts affect the new spaces in terms of staff or availability of student use for new spaces, such as The Foundry, that so many people have worked hard to create and contributed to financially as taxpayers and private donors?

A: The Foundry, which is still evolving over the course of the year, has helped in so many ways to streamline study halls and other support services. The new space allows our teachers to spend more time teaching rather than monitoring study halls. More information on all of the programs and services offered in The Foundry can be found [here](#).

Q: If the levy does not pass, can you show what cuts would be made?

A: The school will be forced to make deeper staffing cuts if the levy doesn't pass. Many districts start making cuts first with programs such as arts, music, theater, and athletics. We do not want to cut those programs. Class sizes, especially at the elementary school, would be larger, and if we don't pass a levy, our next budget forecast to the state will put us in what's called "fiscal caution." Fiscal caution would remove decision-making power from the district and place it in the hands of the state. The state would determine where cuts need to be made to lower our expenses enough to break even- this would likely cause an immediate reduction in teachers and increase in class sizes, among other potential changes that we might not agree with.

Q: What is a normal budget deficit for comparable schools?

A: It is normal within most school district's five-year forecasts to show a budget deficit in years four and five. A three-year levy cycle is typical for school districts. In this cycle, the first fiscal year after a levy, the district has a surplus of funds. At the end of the second year, the district breaks nearly even. Then at the end of the third year, the district has a deficit of funds. A new levy is then passed, and the cycle begins again. Following the decision to break with the traditional three-year levy cycle in the past, with a conscious decision to spend down our carryover cash balance, we now find ourselves in deficit spending. Five-year forecasts for all school districts in Ohio are available [here](#).

When making comparisons to other school districts around the State of Ohio for research purposes, we always compare our district to other Lucas County districts, as well as other top performing districts in Ohio like Oakwood City Schools near Dayton, and Wyoming City Schools near Cincinnati.

Q: What can be done to increase revenue? What alternate sources of funding have been explored?

A: Leadership will continue to apply for grants, such as the grants that provided the funding for new Mac and Chromebooks for students this year. The Foundation, which was formed after a failed levy initiative as a vehicle to provide more services to students from outside funding sources, will continue to provide enhancements to our facilities and student experiences. The district is always open to discussing ideas, like those brought up by community members at the meeting, to generate more revenue.

Q: With increased enrollment primarily at the elementary school, are the physical structures at the junior/senior high school adequate for when these kids begin 7th grade?

A: Yes. The district will continue to reorganize and relocate classrooms as needed to accommodate fluctuations in enrollment. Student time is structured differently in grades 7-12, allowing grades to be spread out in various classes throughout the building. The district feels the space at the junior/senior high school is sufficient, especially considering the recent renovations that have optimized space use in the building.

Q: Has our district ranking fallen?

A: All school districts are ranked in a variety of ways by a number of different organizations. One of those methods published by the state department of education is called the Performance Index. This is one of many components that provide an overall grade for the district. It is based upon state testing performance only. In that one component area, our ranking did go down as a direct result of COVID, but we are recovering from that quickly. Our district remains an overall “A” and a 5 Star District on the [state report card](#). Other ranking areas like [Niche](#) or [US News and World Reports](#), which take into account other test scores and student achievement in multiple areas, continue to rank us at the top.

We are the #1 school district, #1 high school and #1 elementary school in Northwest Ohio (Niche), and the district is ranked in the top 1% of thousands of public school districts in the nation (US News and World Report).

Q: Is there an update on the proposed mixed-use development by the Village and has adding a commercial development been considered to generate more tax revenue?

A: The district is not aware of any updates to the proposed development that would be primarily residential with a small amount of commercial space. To the Board’s understanding the project was put on hold following push back from residents on how adding more residential space could lead to an even further increase in enrollment. The district recommends reaching out to the [Village Administrator](#) or [Village Council](#) for more information.

Q: This discussion is focused on one Strategic Plan initiative. How is the Strategic Plan goal of creating a lifelong sense of belonging being accomplished considering a recent incident involving the use of hate speech?

A: Following extensive community input in the development of the Strategic Plan, the Board formed its first subcommittee: the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee to work on achieving that pillar of the Strategic Plan. Last fall the DEI

conducted a sense of belonging survey and recently published the data (with a [video](#) explaining the data, and the [dataset](#)). The Board recognizes it is just beginning its work on this pillar and has a long way to go. There is no room for hate speech of any kind within our district. As always, disciplinary action was taken to address the recent incident and communication about the incident was emailed to all parents. The Board of Education will consider creating a clearer policy on hate speech, how it is handled, and addressed, and may approve adding this to the student handbooks at both the elementary and secondary levels.

The Board of Education is looking to plan a second open conversation with the board to continue the discussion on district finances and collect community feedback as we plan for our financial future. Stay tuned for a date to be announced after spring break. More details on district financials is available on our treasurer's page [here](#).