HILLSDALE
LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
Building Character, Expecting Excellence

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A Message from the Hillsdale Local School District Board of Education

Public Dollars, Public Schools: Protecting Local Education and Tax Fairness in Ohio

Dear Hillsdale Community,

As your Hillsdale Board of Education, we write not as politicians, but as community members and stewards of the schools that shape our children's futures. Like you, we open our property tax bills with concern, and we share your frustration with the growing burden placed on local taxpayers. It's important for our community to understand how we arrived here, and what's at stake for the future of public education in Ohio.

The Funding Shift: From State to Local Taxpayers

Over the past two decades, the State of Ohio has steadily reduced its share of K-12 education funding.

- In 2002, the state funded 44.8% of Ohio's public education.
- By 2023, that number dropped to 33.5%, 11 percentage points below the national average.
- Meanwhile, the local property tax share increased from 49.5% to 53.1%.
- Ohio has fallen to 45th in the nation in state support for K-12 education.

This means local communities like Hillsdale now shoulder the difference, funding our schools primarily through property taxes rather than through fair state investment. Yet, Ohio still ranks just 20th nationally in per-pupil spending, meaning we're not overspending; we're simply paying for education differently and less equitably than most states.

The Rover Pipeline has not been paying the full property tax obligation that was originally projected to support our local schools. Instead of contributing approximately 88% of its assessed tax liability, Rover has paid closer to 42%. With the recent ruling from the Ohio Supreme Court affirming that Rover Pipeline must pay the taxes owed, we are optimistic that the Hillsdale Local School District and our community will begin to see an increase in anticipated revenue in the near future.

The Rise of Vouchers: Billions Diverted from Public Schools

At the same time state funding has decreased, Ohio has dramatically expanded its K-12 voucher system, which uses tax dollars to pay for private school tuition:

- The Ed Choice Scholarship provides up to $6,166 per K-8 student and $8,408 per high school student.
- Hillsdale Local receives approximately $5,266 per student, which is less than the students using the voucher system.
- In 2023-24, Ohio spent approximately $970 million of state tax money on private-school vouchers.
- The state's next two-year budget sets aside $2.44 billion for voucher programs; nearly $1 billion per year.
- By comparison, the state's total public K-12 funding was about $11.6 billion in FY 2023 and $13 billion in FY 2024. That means 6–10% of Ohio's K-12 state education dollars now fund private education.
- These schools receive a portion of our community's tax dollars but are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools. Their teachers are not required to hold state certification, they are not subject to the same financial transparency and public oversight, and they are not required to implement state learning mandates such as the Science of Reading, among other regulatory differences.
- Each dollar that funds a private school scholarship is a dollar not available to the public schools that serve 90% of Ohio's children, including Hillsdale's students. These programs expand without the same accountability or transparency required of public districts, and without local voter approval.

Why This Matters for Hillsdale

The result is a funding system increasingly out of balance:

- Local property owners, farmers, families, and small businesses, are carrying a greater share than ever before.
- As the state diverts more money to private education, public districts must rely on levies to maintain essential programs.
- Property taxes are funding not only education, but also police, fire, EMS, infrastructure, and parks, services that hold our community together.

While Hillsdale has used Rover pipeline revenue to invest in new facilities, we continue to streamline operations, share services, and prioritize student safety and strong course offerings. These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to efficiency, excellence, and fiscal responsibility. Without stable state support, however, maintaining these standards will become increasingly difficult.

A Call for Balanced Reform

We are not asking for higher taxes; we are asking for fairness and balance for our students in public schools.

Real property tax relief and sustainable school funding require the State of Ohio to restore its responsibility to fund public education, as nearly every other state does more effectively. We call for:

- Targeted relief for seniors, low-income families, and those with disabilities.
- Caps on growth tied to inflation and income to ensure affordability.
- Transparency and accountability in how tax incentives and vouchers are granted.
- Protection for local control so that communities can sustain their schools without constant levy cycles.

Understanding Hillsdale's 20-Mill Floor and Tax Classes

Hillsdale Local Schools is now operating at what's called the "20-mill floor."
This means the district's residential and agricultural taxpayers are already paying the lowest amount possible allowed by Ohio law for school operations.

Here's what that means for each property class:

- **Class I – Residential & Agricultural:**
  The district's effective tax rate is now 20 mills, which is the *minimum* amount any school district can collect from homeowners and farmers. When a district reaches this level, tax rates can no longer be reduced ; it is the lowest rate taxpayers can pay for school funding.

- **Class II – Commercial & Industrial:**
  This rate is still above the 20-mill floor, so it can continue to be adjusted downward (or "rolled back") when property values rise. This ensures no additional revenue is collected beyond the original voted amount.

- **Class III – Public Utilities:**
  Public utility property — such as pipelines and electric transmission is always taxed at the full voted millage rate, not the reduced "effective" rate.
  For Hillsdale, this is currently 47 mills, and collections are based on the reported values from the district's largest public utility taxpayer, the Rover pipeline.

Moving Forward Together

We believe in Hillsdale's future. Our students deserve the same opportunities we had with strong teachers, safe schools, and programs that prepare them for success. Public schools are the heart of strong communities, and they must remain publicly funded and locally governed.

We invite you to stay engaged, ask questions, and join us in advocating for real, lasting solutions. The path forward requires collaboration between residents, educators, and lawmakers to restore balance and fairness in Ohio's school funding system.

How You Can Help

Your voice matters! Here's how you can make a tangible difference for our students, our taxpayers, and the future of public education in the Hillsdale Local School District:

1. Call or email your state legislators and education committee members. Ask them to protect and invest in public schools like ours, ensure transparency in the use of public dollars, and defend local control for school districts and children.
    - Mark Romanchuk (Ohio State Senate, District 22)
      Senate Building, 1 Capitol Square, First Floor, Room 132 Columbus, OH 43215
      Phone: (614) 466-7505
      Email: romanchuk@ohiosenate.gov
    - Melanie Miller (Ohio House of Representatives, District 67)
      77 South High Street, 12th Floor Columbus, OH 43215 -6111
      Phone: (614) 466-0961
      Email: rep67@ohiohouse.gov
2. Share the message
   Help spread the word: post the letter on social media, send it to friends and neighbors.
3. Support local schools
   Talk with other parents and community members about why strong public funding matters. When our community engages, our schools thrive.
4. Advocate for fairness and local decision-making
   Recognize that public schools serve 90 %+ of Ohio's children, so they deserve fair funding, accountability, and the ability to decide how best to serve the students in their own communities. Be the voice for that fairness.

Together, we can make a difference for our schools, our taxpayers, and our children's future.

Public Dollars. Public Schools. Hillsdale Takes Flight.

Thank you for your continued support of public education, and for believing, as we do, that Hillsdale's children deserve the best our state can offer.

Hillsdale Local School District Board of Education,

Jon Burkholder: _____

Vella King: _____

Steve Smith: _____

Melinda Turk: _____

Keith Yeater: _____

Ohio House of Representatives – Education Committee (K-12)

Representative	Email Address	Phone number
Sarah Fowler	Rep99@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-1405
Mike Odioso	Rep30@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-8258
Sean Brennan	Rep14@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-3485
Adam Bird	Rep63@ohiohouse.gov	614-644-6034
Gary Click	Rep88@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-1374
Gayle Manning	Rep52@ohiohouse.gov	614-644-5076
Joseph Miller III	Rep53@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-5141
Jonathan Newman	Rep80@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-8114
Beryl Piccolantonio	Rep4@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-4847
Kevin Ritter	Rep94@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-2158
Phillip Robinson	Rep19@ohiohouse.gov	614-644-6041
Jim Thomas	Rep49@ohiohouse.gov	614-466-8030

Ohio Senate – Education Committee

Senator	Web Contact	Phone Number
Andrew Brenner	ohiosenate.gov/andrew-o-brenner	614-466-8086
Louis Blessing	ohiosenate.gov/louis-w-blessing-iii	614-466-8068
Catherine Ingram	ohiosenate.gov/catherine-d-ingram	614-466-5980
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