Flint Community Schools Millage on March 10 Seeks to Honor Our Roots, Build for the Future

To the residents of the city of Flint –

Honoring our roots while building for the future—that’s our commitment to the students and families of Flint Community Schools. It’s also the goal of our March 10 millage, through which residents living in the School District of the City of Flint will be able to vote on the renewal of the original measure, which was passed in 2010.

The millage is not a tax increase for the citizens of Flint—it keeps school-related tax rates exactly the same as they are now.

Of course, context is critical. This millage comes at a time when the district is working to consolidate school buildings to invest in the future of our students and our community. While the consolidation plan is still in working form, one option is off the table: the closure of elementary school buildings. We heard loud and clear from our residents that closing elementary schools would not be a viable path forward. We listened to that feedback and, as a result, are removing that element of the plan. Doing so requires us to make other difficult choices and go back to the drawing board, but we simply cannot call ourselves “Community Schools” if we do not take to heart the requests of our community.

The millage renewal would support the work of the consolidation plan. Specifically, the millage would maintain the current rate of 4 mills on residential properties, which would then be divided into Fiscal Stability Bonds to reduce the district’s legacy debt and Sinking Fund Dollars to improve the District’s infrastructure.

Doing so—in tandem with the consolidation plan—will help eliminate debt so that we may do the important work of investing in programs and efforts that benefit the whole child. That includes keeping class sizes low, investing in our teachers and staff with competitive wages and benefits, building on the growth in our academics that we experienced last year and growing the Community Schools model to increase important wraparound services for children and families. It also includes fortifying and fully funding our services for students with special needs and continuing to build a climate that is conducive to learning with programs like “Capturing Kids Hearts.”

While continuously looking forward, we must also honor the roots of Flint that made our community the envy of others across the country decades ago. Our district was the first in the nation to implement the Community Schools model at the request of our voters. The model is just as much a part of our legacy as it is a part of our future. Leveraging the Community Schools model today, Flint’s neighborhood schools serve the whole child and community by staffing every school with a Community School Director, developing after-school programming, and partnering with the CRIM Fitness Foundation and YouthQuest on sports programming.

The Flint Community Schools district was once seen as a national model for educating children and investing in neighborhoods. We once hosted strong magnet academic programs and storied arts programming. Flint’s athletic programs have a legacy of athletes competing at the collegiate and professional level. We strive to return to such prominence, but we need the continued support of the entire community—parents, residents, business owners, policymakers, etc.

We have had modest but measurable academic gains in the last year and we are moving in the right direction, but our goal is nothing short of a return to glory for our district. We are laser focused on all aspects of literacy, and growing math literacy with targeted programming for all students. We also intend to expand our pre-kindergarten program, and place arts and music in every building. We plan to develop a range of magnet and thematic programs, including arts and music programs, STEAM programming, arts instruction integrated as a discipline and the build out of additional skilled trades programs.

Much of our success is dependent on providing our children with a warm and inviting learning environment. To that end, it’s well known that our district, like many in the state, has an aging infrastructure. We must also invest in the buildings we inhabit to create spaces that are deserving of the students that walk our halls. When we do, we will be able to take pride in offering our students the high-quality education that will chart the path forward for their future success.
We have made great progress in recent months, having installed new boilers in every building in our district, eliminating the wintertime temperature control issues that used to plague our district. Through the millage renewal, school building investments will include new lighting in hallways, new roofs for facilities that have not yet received them, and upgrades to the exteriors of our facilities.

When we achieve sustained improvement in academic, social and emotional outcomes, Flint Community Schools can then dream big again. We can dream of building a new Flint Senior High School and Flint Junior High School on the former Flint Central site. We can envision a new Magnet Arts Program for all of Genesee County in this facility adjacent to our Cultural District. We can work to renovate existing elementary schools and seek to revitalize neighborhoods by building new elementary schools within the district, resurrecting magnet programs where this generation of students can be creative and thrive. In short, collectively, we can build a new chapter in the history of Flint Community Schools, rooted in our rich and storied history.

If approved by voters on March 10, the millage would go into effect in 2021. Residents with questions regarding the millage or future of Flint Community Schools are encouraged to contact the Superintendent's office at 810-760-1249.

Sincerely,

Derrick Lopez
Superintendent