

November 2020 Election Issues

There are NO Ohio State or Hamilton County issues on the ballot for this election.

There IS a Cincinnati Public School District Levy, Issue 17, on the ballot. (See below)

There ARE other levy and ballot issues for other communities in Southwest Ohio.

To see which issues will appear on your ballot, download a sample ballot at:

- **Vote 411:** <https://www.vote411.org/> (click “Find What’s on your Ballot”)
- **Board of Elections:** <https://votehamiltoncountyohio.gov/> (click “Find Sample Ballot”)

Issue 17 Summary

PROPOSED TAX LEVY (RENEWAL) CINCINNATI CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A majority affirmative vote is necessary for passage.

Shall a levy renewing an existing levy be imposed by the Cincinnati City School District for the purpose of PROVIDING FOR THE EMERGENCY REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT, in the sum of \$48,000,000 per year, and a levy of taxes to be made outside of the ten-mill limitation estimated by the county auditor to average seven and thirty four hundredths (7.34) mills for each one dollar (\$1.00) of valuation, which is seventy-three and four-tenths cents (\$0.734) for each one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of valuation, for a period of five (5) years, commencing in 2021, first due in calendar year 2022.

_____ FOR THE TAX LEVY

_____ AGAINST THE TAX LEVY

EXPLANATION: This proposed **renewal** property tax levy request is to provide funds to meet the needs of the Cincinnati City School District (\$48,000,000 per year for a five-year period, starting in 2021). The County Auditor determined the valuation of the district and set the average amount of the levy required to produce the amount needed at 7.34 mills (\$0.734 for each \$100 of tax valuation). This levy request is for a renewal of a levy passed by voters in 2016 and must be approved again or it will expire in December 2021.

WHAT THE LEVY WILL DO: This renewal levy, if passed, will continue to fund two Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) priorities set with passage of the original levy in 2016. The levy will maintain \$15 million in annual funding for expanding affordable access to high quality preschool for nearly 5,000 3- and 4-year-old children through CPS and Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP) community-based providers. The remaining \$33 million will be used for learning programs for the 36,000 CPS K-12 students by continuing college, vocational and career-readiness programs; expanding quality neighborhood school options; and increasing access to learning technology for all students.

BACKGROUND: Prior to the 2016 levy, a group of community leaders and educators began planning in response to information from numerous studies that indicated young children benefit significantly from pre-kindergarten education and they are more successful in later grades. Most indicators suggested that in today's world, youngsters who are able to participate in a preschool beginning at age three will have a far better educational experience than if they wait until age five. They formed the Cincinnati Preschool Promise (CPP) and developed plans for 1. providing tuition assistance based on family income, and 2. working with existing providers to help them meet certain Ohio standards of excellence.

While the 2016 levy was placed on the ballot by the Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) (as has this one), it was agreed that \$15 million of the total sum will be directed to preschool education expansion in the in Cincinnati Public pre-schools and in community-based preschools. Upon its passage, participants in the committees of CPP organized into a Board of Managers to lead the preschool expansion effort the levy would fund. In the past five years, CPP has worked with numerous community providers to help them meet higher quality standards. They developed financial qualifications for students' tuition assistance. As of May 2019, 1,484 students had received tuition assistance, 94 preschools participate in tuition assistance, and numerous providers improved their "Star" ratings. As a result, at the end of Year 1, youngsters who experienced the programs offered by CPP schools scored significantly higher on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment given by CPS.

The remainder of the 2016 levy was used by CPS to meet the needs of the district created by reductions in state funding, increased enrollment (+20% since 2012), quality school options, and increased need for improved technology at all levels. CPS Moreover, CPS has improved curricula at all levels to meet the "E" goals for students i.e., by graduation, by graduation CPS's goal is that students will be prepared for Education (beyond high school), Enrollment (armed services), or Employment.

At its March 2, 2020 meeting, the Cincinnati Public Schools Board of Education adopted a resolution that determined the necessity of a renewal tax in excess of the ten-mill limitation. This request is for an "emergency" levy, which is a property tax that serves as a limited operating levy for a maximum of five years. If approved, it will yield a specific dollar amount (stated in the ballot request), which must

remain constant no matter what happens to property values in the district over the life of the levy. Thus, the millage figure could increase or decrease over time as property values fluctuate, but the number of dollars for the school district would remain at \$48 million per year. This levy, a renewal, will not raise taxes, if approved.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE LEVY:

- Taxpayers will not be paying more because this is a renewal levy.
- CPS needs these funds to continue the pre-school efforts which are showing good progress. More high-quality preschool programs available to all 3- and 4-year-olds are needed to these children for kindergarten and to sustain the effects in later grades.
- CPS also needs these funds to support the increased enrollment in its schools, especially when state funds continue to decrease.
- If this renewal levy fails, millions of dollars dedicated to preschool funding for thousands of 3- and 4-year olds will be lost and CPS may be forced to reduce many academic and career-training programs and scale back classroom technology and learning materials.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE LEVY

- The amount of this levy continues to be a burden on taxpayers, especially given the loss of income many families have experienced due to the pandemic.
- The number of preschool students being served is far from the original goal of 5,000 preschool students.
- Not enough low-income parents are receiving assistance for preschool programs.
- The work to increase high quality preschools, especially in low-income neighborhoods would be substantially reduced.

Additional Reading

[Opinion: CPS needs your help to get students back in school](#)
[www.cincinnati.com › story › opinion › 2020/08/06](#)

Aug 6, 2020 — Opinion contributor. Laura Mitchell, Cincinnati Public Schools superintendent, talks about the plan moving forward for education.

[CPS' superintendent has recommended students return to ...](#)
[www.cincinnati.com › hamiltoncounty › 2020/10/05](#)

Oct. 5, 2020 — Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Laura Mitchell has recommended the district go back to in-person blended learning classes Oct. 12.

[Investigation: Meager results for Ohio vouchers after spending \\$250 million](#)
<https://www.beaconjournal.com/story/news/local/2020/08/24/investigation-meager-results-for-ohio-vouchers-after-spending-250-million/113467124/>

Max Londberg, Cincinnati Enquirer

Aug. 24, 2020 — Since 2018, hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars have been shifted away from Ohio's public schools and into private, mainly religious ones in the form of vouchers, all to enhance academic success. Yet those same private schools mostly failed to meet the academic caliber set by their neighboring public school districts, according to a Cincinnati Enquirer analysis of nearly 2.5 million test scores from schools in more than 150 Ohio cities during the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years.

League Positions

What is a Position? The League of Women Voters takes action on an issue only when we have a position addressing that particular issue. Members must study and come to consensus on an issue to then form a position. This thorough grassroots process ensures that our advocacy is well considered by a broad range of people, understood by our members, and we have a sense of the political environment.

POSITION: Cincinnati School District Tax Levies and Bond Issues

The LWVCA supports tax levies and bond issues to implement policies for operations and improvements in the Cincinnati School District system.

The LWVCA supports tax levies and bond issues to implement policies for operations and improvements in the system. The Board, in determining LWVCA action on a proposed Cincinnati Public Schools tax levy or bond issue, should consider the following information:

1. Improvements and upgrades in programs offered;
2. drop-out/graduation rates;
3. the spending per student;
4. the condition of the physical facilities;
5. the socio-economic background of the student body;
6. Continuous outreach to parents and members of the community.

The trends for these data should be that the district is showing improvement toward meeting its announced goals, and where progress is not being made, remediation efforts are in place. In addition to the above information, the Board should examine the CPS budget to determine what monies are coming into the district and how they are being spent. Moreover, before any position is taken, the Board must be confident that the LWVCA members have been thoroughly updated on the state of the CPS and that their activities are being routinely monitored.

POSITION: Tax Levies

The LWVCA supports criteria for Hamilton County-wide voted property tax levies.

A model tax levy process would include:

- a committee of citizens with the authority to review tax levy proposals and tax levy recipient organizations and other criteria;
- reduction of the total number of voted levies without sacrificing needed services;
- timing that prevents placing all levies on a ballot at the same time;
- funding county services based on a determined level of need that balances funds, services and resources;
- funding broadly defined services that can respond to changing conditions and needs;
- provision of meaningful opportunities for citizen involvement, input, monitoring and review;
- assuring agency accountability to the Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners;
- ballot language that is understandable to citizens and accurately describes services funded by the proposed levy.

Discussion Questions

1. Levy Basics

- a. Why is this termed an “emergency” levy?
- b. What parts of the levy language are difficult to understand?

2. Levy & The Pandemic

- a. How might the COVID-19 pandemic change voters feelings about the CPS levy?
- b. How has the pandemic changed voters’ views on the importance of education? On the role of teachers?
- c. How has the pandemic changed voters’ feelings on tax burdens?

3. Read the two LWVCA positions (see above, pg. 5)

- a. How does the CPS levy measure up to the LWVCA positions on levies?
- b. Are our LWVCA positions on levies still relevant? Would you change or update the positions in any way?

Take Action!

- Contact Marcia Futel, the Chair of the LWVCA Education Committee, to find out how you can help the Campaign for Issue 17.
- Communicate on your personal social media the importance of *voting early* to “Flatten the Voting Curve.”
- Encourage voting through the “OutVote” texting campaign—an effort by the League of Women Voters of Ohio, Ohio Voter Rights Coalition, and Ohio Organizing Collaborative. For more info., contact the LWVCA office at info@lwvcincinnati.org.
- Adopt a senior living building to provide Voter Guides and sample ballots for the address. Be their LWV contact to answer voting questions.