

Dear Parents,

As educators, we consider it a privilege to both work with your children and be a part of the Arbor Park community. Many times over the years we have been witness to the generosity of spirit and outpouring of support given to families hurting and in need. Regardless of their own personal challenges, our families have provided encouragement and assistance to friends, neighbors, and strangers alike.

As you may know, our district is going to referendum on April 5, 2011 asking for a tax rate increase of \$0.60. Please don't think us naïve; we understand this is the worst time possible to ask our community for help regarding school funding. However, ask we must because we've very few options left.

In the spring of 2009, we asked for a \$0.60 tax increase to help resolve the district's \$2 million structural deficit. The board of education and district administration also committed to reduce expenditures which, when coupled with a tax increase, would have balanced the budget through 2013 and perhaps beyond. The referendum failed but the district kept two important promises.

1. Through revenue opportunities and expenditure cuts the deficit was reduced by \$1 million.
2. State lawmakers supported and overwhelmingly passed legislation introduced by our district that now prevents the State from reducing their share of school funding after local taxpayers successfully pass a tax rate referendum.

Our district was able to close that deficit gap from \$2.4 million in 2009 to \$1.3 at the end of the 2010 school year. Unfortunately, the State of Illinois did not meet their financial obligations to schools last year and now owes us \$1.56 million this year for things like our early childhood grants, transportation, and special education reimbursements, dollars that frankly, we may not ever see. If these funds are not received, we will still have to pay for these programs with your tax dollars, and that will further erode the little savings we have left moving us ever closer to insolvency.

Our district has never been extravagant and has always tried to do more with less. You may know that State and federal grants have paid for much of the technology and even many of the support staff members that service our students and families. The only significant technology upgrades we've seen have come because of the federal stimulus funds that were made available last year for one-time purchases. That money was truly a welcome windfall and allowed us to replace student computers that in many cases were more than 10 years old. Despite a lack of financial resources and the challenges of NCLB sanctions, we are proud of the fact that our students' academic scores are at the **highest levels in our district's history**, a testament to the dedication of our teachers, support staff, families, and of course your children.

Please consider the following points when you think about the \$.60 tax rate increase:

- **The last tax rate increase for educational purposes was 16 years ago, in 1995.**
- In 2010, the district took the following actions to reduce the deficit:
  - Eliminated 10 teaching positions which raised class sizes in grades 1-4 to 30 students.
  - 1 administrative position and 5 support positions were eliminated. Administrative salaries frozen, support staff salary increase rates reduced.
  - Summer school and after school study programs were discontinued.
- In 2011 and 2012, actions that were taken and are being considered to reduce the deficit:
  - Administrative and support staff salary freeze (2011).
  - Health insurance changes for all staff members (2011).
  - No early / late extra-curricular buses (2011).
  - Possibly additional administrative and teaching positions eliminated (2012).
  - Extracurricular activities at risk of elimination (2012).

- The ballot will state, a \$0.60 tax rate increase will cost each homeowner around \$60.00 per \$100,000 of fair market value. Community members are encouraged to contact the cook County Assessor's Office for the most accurate information regarding the impact on your property taxes.

Administration has tried very hard over the years to keep fiscal issues from impacting students and you can be sure that we will continue to be cautious and frugal with our limited resources. However, if this referendum fails, and State funding is eliminated or even reduced, the district must seriously consider discontinuing, reducing service, or charging families for bus transportation, our pre-school and early childhood programs will be at risk, class sizes may increase further, and some or all of the extracurricular activities our students now enjoy will be in jeopardy. These are not easy things to think about and certainly not easy things to say, but the truth is we must say them because as community members and stakeholders, you deserve to know the hard decisions that may lie ahead.

We see everyday what the courage and perseverance of our students and families can accomplish and we remain optimistic that working together we can make sure that Arbor Park School District 145's future will be as promising as the accomplishments of our past.

Thank you for your support,

Allen J. Jebens Jr.  
Superintendent