



# Investing in our Future

## Frequently Asked Questions

We will continue to update this page based on additional frequently asked questions.

Q. What is a referendum

A. A referendum allows a school district to ask its voting community to approve funding for specific projects or other funding needs.

Q. When is this referendum about?

A. By state law, school districts are subject to an annual tax levy cap. Often times, adequate funding to maintain, improve, or expand facilities or projects or to maintain and expand programs cannot be absorbed in the District's yearly budget. This referendum, if approved, would provide funding for operating expenses necessary to maintain levels of programs and class size and expenses related to full-day kindergarten.

Q. What is the referendum question that the Hillsborough community will be voting on in March, 2019?

A. The referendum will be held March 12, 2019 from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Mail-in ballots can be obtained from the [Somerset County Clerk's Election Division](#).

Q. What is the specific referendum question that the Hillsborough community will be voting on in March, 2019?

A. The referendum question approved at the January 7, 2019, Board of Education meeting will appear on the March 12, 2019, ballot as set forth below:

### Proposal

There shall be raised an additional \$8,094,108 for General Funds in the 2019-20 School Year. These taxes will be used to provide funds to maintain levels of programs and class size. The taxes will also be used to implement a full day Kindergarten program, including the employment of additional personnel, acquire supplies, and pay for the initial set up and lease of temporary classrooms. The temporary classrooms will be used for office and specialty classrooms, freeing up space in the schools for the kindergarten classrooms. Approval of these taxes will result in a permanent increase in the District's tax levy. The additional taxes authorized herein will be used exclusively for

purposes described herein and to finance expenditures that are in addition to those necessary to achieve the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

#### Explanation

State funding for Hillsborough Township Public Schools is expected to decrease by \$5,346,508 over 6 years. The reduction of State aid coupled with rising costs outside of the Board's control will have a negative impact on instructional programs.

Passing the referendum will allow the District to maintain current programs and class size. In addition, the district would implement a full day Kindergarten program. Teachers, supplies and the initial set up and lease of temporary classrooms will be funded, so that full day Kindergarten will begin in the fall of 2019. Approximately 90% of districts in New Jersey offer full day Kindergarten. Meeting the State Standards for Kindergarten are much more challenging in a half day versus full day program. The state aid formula calculates funding full day Kindergarten programs at twice the amount as a half day Kindergarten program.

If not passed, the School District would need to consider reducing teachers and staff, increasing class size, increasing fees for students to participate in athletics and co-curricular activities, increasing fees for technology, and eliminating programs that the Board could no longer afford. Reductions would continue in future years as state aid is decreased by \$5,346,508 over 6 years.

Q. Why do we need this referendum?

A. Large-scale programmatic changes, such as creating a full-day kindergarten program, are priced outside the District's reach with our current annual budget limitation of 2% growth. In order to implement a full-day kindergarten program, costs such as additional salaries, supplies, and initial set-up and lease of temporary classrooms would need to be incorporated into an already tight school budget. In order to make a programmatic enhancement such as this, while still remain under the law's 2% tax cap, other programs would need to be cut.

By state law, there is a 2% cap on the district's annual budget. This limits the District's ability to address costs that are out of the district's control such as health insurance, energy, special education needs, and more. These costs continue to grow in excess of 2% each year. Over the last several years, in order to cover these increasing costs while still maintaining class size and programs, the District has used a portion of its fund balance (uncommitted savings) to maintain class size and student programs.

Financial concerns were compounded this summer when the state announced it would reduce state aid to Hillsborough by \$5.3 million over the next six years. This is a 21% reduction in state aid.

Q. What is the tax levy cap and why is the District asking the voters to exceed it?

A. In 2010, New Jersey created a 2% levy cap. This cap restricts school districts from increasing the local school tax by no more than 2% per year. As costs for special education, health insurance, energy costs and other bills continue to rise far above a 2% increase each year, Hillsborough and districts around the state are unable to maintain programs and staff at their current levels. Without a voter approved increase to the levy, the District will be forced to make a total reduction of approximately 50 staff members reaching across all schools, in all departments and all classification of employees. Class sizes will increase and additional fees will be assessed to families for technology, athletics, and co-curricular activities. The District will be forced to increase building usage fees paid by many community organizations that use our school facilities. Courtesy busing for students within a certain distance of our schools will also be reduced. Reductions will continue for the next six year and will impact the District's ability to address the individual needs of our students.

Q. If the referendum passes when will full day kindergarten be implemented?

A. If the referendum passes, full day kindergarten will be implemented in each of the District's six elementary schools for the start of the 2019-2020 school year. Registration for the full day program will begin in March following the referendum.

Q. What is the total cost for the referendum?

A. This is an \$8.04 million referendum.

Q. What is the cost of the referendum to taxpayers?

A. The \$8.04 million referendum will result in a 2019 property tax increase of about \$25/month on the average Hillsborough home valued at \$389,300. This is equal to about \$6/month for every \$100,000 of assessed home value. Because the school year is split between two tax years (2019 and 2020), the increase in the 2020 property taxes will be impacted by the change in ratables (taxable properties) and budgetary needs for the 2020-2021 school year.

Q. What are the benefits of full day kindergarten?

A. Hillsborough is one of only three districts in Somerset County that only offers a half day kindergarten. Approximately 90% of districts in New Jersey have a full day kindergarten. Meeting the State Standards for kindergarten is more challenging in a half

day versus a full day program. More information and research of a well-planned full day kindergarten program can be found on the District [website](#).

Q. If the referendum passes, what is the impact on enrollment and where will we put our kindergarten students?

A. The district anticipates that should the referendum pass, the 2019-2020 kindergarten class would be approximately 500 students. This is in comparison to this year's kindergarten class of approximately 400 students. Included in the implementation costs of this referendum is the initial set-up and lease of modular classrooms. It is anticipated that these classrooms would be needed at five of the six district elementary schools. These modular classrooms would be used for offices and/or specialty classrooms. This would allow for additional kindergarten classrooms to be set-up in the school buildings.

The anticipated growth in kindergarten enrollment as well as the change from a half day to a full day program will also support the long-term financial stability of the district, because the state will provide more than twice the amount of funding for a full-day kindergarten program when compared to a half-day.

Q. Where can I find out more information regarding the referendum

A. Information regarding the March 12 referendum may be found on the district website, [www.https.us](http://www.https.us).