



BLUE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT

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May 17, 2024

Dear Blue Mountain School District Community,

We are writing to you today to address a matter of considerable importance: the tax increase for the 2024-25 school year. We recognize that any discussion about raising taxes can evoke concern and uncertainty among residents, and we want to assure you that this decision was not made lightly.

As stewards of education in our community, it is our responsibility to ensure that our school district continues to provide the highest quality education to our students. This includes retaining qualified teachers, offering a comprehensive curriculum, and providing necessary resources for support services and co-curricular activities.

It is important to note that this tax increase is not tied to a building project. The construction of the new Blue Mountain Elementary West School allowed us to refinance existing bonds from prior building projects at a better interest rate. By extending the bonds an additional eight years, we were able to reduce the cost of these bonds by \$150,000 a year. Therefore, our yearly cost is less than it has been in the past. Additionally, due to the reconfiguration and consolidation, we will receive money from the sale of the Blue Mountain Elementary Cressona School for the Capital fund for building projects.

This tax increase is not caused by the turf athletic fields at Blue Mountain High School. Due to an awesome combined effort among private donors of the Legacy Group and a partnership with Penn State Schuylkill, there was a contribution by the district from the Capital Fund. No General fund monies were used to pay for BMEW or the turf fields.

The increase is primarily driven by the rising costs associated with inflation. BMSD has not raised taxes for the past two school years. Yet, inflation has been on the rise.

2021-22 Average 6.75%

2022-23 Average 4.95%

2023-24 Average 3.45%

Despite the rising cost of inflation, we were able to maintain our budget by cutting costs wherever possible. Our projected budgets did not grow to meet the cost of inflation. Our proposed budget is \$51,242,009. If we did not cut costs and just added to the budget to compensate for inflation, our projected budget would be \$53,573,851. Instead, each year, we cut wherever possible without sacrificing our dedication to excellence.

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Another area of concern that we have minimal control of is the increase in health care costs. Our goal will be to educate our staff to be more aware of ways to reduce medical costs. BMSD health care costs will increase by \$971,371 for the 2024-25 school year. Our transportation costs have increased by \$300,000, and we will always look to keep these costs as low as possible. Raising taxes by 1.5 mills doesn't cover these increases, but it is a big help. Please note, the maximum we can raise taxes is 2.869 mills, and we do not intend to do so.

Because of state law, BMSD is spending 3 million dollars in cyber charter education. If you know someone who lives in our district but attends a charter or cyber school, encourage them to try Blue Mountain Virtual Academy. It is a comprehensive program, and students will earn a Blue Mountain diploma. Each student who attends an outside cyber or charter school costs the district \$13,044 for regular education students and \$33,175 or more for students with special needs.

Another issue that our district faces is that Schuylkill County has not completed a county-wide assessment in 30 years. Our district's real estate assessed values are set at 1996 prices. Our district and local municipalities are missing out on realistic property values of 2024.

Contrary to some beliefs, Blue Mountain School District taxpayers pay less than other area school districts. Currently, BMSD ranks #6 out of the 12 Schuylkill County school districts in milage rates. At BMSD, we are committed to maintaining the high standards of education and support services that our community expects and deserves.

The school board and administration are being diligent stewards of taxpayer money. We have spent considerable time and effort to apply for five different grant programs in hopes of achieving facility and technological improvements and upgrades to fulfill district needs without using taxpayer money.

We understand that no one wants to pay more taxes, especially during challenging economic times. However, we firmly believe the benefits of investing in our schools far outweigh the short-term costs. A strong and vibrant school system not only enhances property values and attracts new residents but also enriches the lives of all members of our community.

We are committed to transparency and accountability in how we manage taxpayer dollars. We will continue to work diligently to maximize efficiency and minimize waste in our operations, ensuring that every dollar is spent wisely and effectively. First and foremost, we will ensure that the culture of Blue Mountain School District remains dedicated to excellence.

Sincerely,

Blue Mountain Board of School Directors