

Frequently Asked Questions about the Fayette County Public Schools Comprehensive 10-Point Safety Investment Plan

Question: Could the district implement the safety improvements immediately with the money in its contingency fund?

Answer: School districts are required by state law to set aside money for unexpected emergency expenses, just like families have savings accounts. The existing contingency fund for Fayette County would cover less than six weeks of expenses.

The Comprehensive 10-Point Safety Plan calls for hiring more than 200 additional mental health professionals, school nurses, law enforcement officers and security monitors to address the complex issues of school safety. Those are recurring costs. A contingency fund is like a savings account. Once you spend it, it's gone.

At a time when safety is number one for our families, it is imperative that we address these issues in a permanent, financially responsible way. This dedicated investment – which will cost the average homeowner less than the price of an adult movie ticket a month – can only be used for safety, so our community, families and students can rest assured that these additional safety resources will remain in place.

Question: Could the safety plan be funded by cutting central office?

Answer: The top legislative priorities for FCPS during the 2018 General Assembly session were full funding for public education, increasing investments in school safety and security, and expanding mental health services.

While we greatly appreciate the actions of the General Assembly to increase state education funding through SEEK, the formula works such that Fayette County Public Schools will actually lose \$5.1 million in state funding next year. In order to protect the classroom, the school board already cut more than \$4.4 million from the central office to cover the deficit. We cannot cut our way to safer schools.

Central office accounts for less than 2 percent of the district's total number of employees. In the past decade, Fayette County Public Schools has grown by more than 7,000 students, yet today there are fewer people working at the central office than there were in 2005.

Question: Is the district raising property taxes by 5 percent?

Answer: No. The Fayette County Board of Education approved a property tax dedicated to safety that is 5 cents for every \$100 of home value. The average Lexington homeowner would pay an additional \$87.50 a year in property taxes.

Question: Doesn't the school district already benefit from the housing growth in Fayette County?

Answer: Sometimes that is true. Growth in Fayette County property values have allowed the district to not raise tax rates in 2016 and 2017.

However, the Fayette County Board of Education is only allowed to collect 4 percent more local property tax revenue than the year before, even when enrollment growth is more than enough to fill a new elementary school each year. That creates limitations when the student population increases at a greater rate and means the district does not recoup the benefit of the rapid expansion in our housing market.

Question: How was the public informed?

Answer: The Comprehensive 10-Point Safety Investment Plan is the result of more than four months of study and discussion, drawing upon input from hundreds of community members and the best thinking from across the state and nation.

Meetings were held publicly in each of the district's six high schools and residents were invited to participate via an online engagement system and communication directly to the council. Meetings were filmed and replayed on the district's cable channel. Summaries of each meeting were emailed to all families, employees and key community leaders and shared on the district's website.

Press conferences were held to announce the creation of the council, the release of the white paper, the proposed Comprehensive 10 Point Safety Investment Plan and the recommendation for a property tax to pay for it.

Question: Is this taxation without representation?

Answer: No. The Fayette County Board of Education is an elected body, whose members are voted into office by the citizens of the community.

Question: Are other ways to pay for this?

Answer: The district has looked for other sources of funding. The school board cannot levy a sales tax or increase the occupational license tax or utility taxes. One-time grants from the state or federal government cannot fund a long-term solution. And it is fiscally irresponsible to fund the recurring investments outlined in the safety plan with one-time contingency funds. The first year investment for this plan – which will increase in subsequent years – is \$13.5 million, which is the equivalent of 207 teachers. Our children need teachers as much as they need law enforcement officers, nurses and mental health professionals.

Question: Did the district consider making the tax temporary so it would sunset in the future?

Answer: The vast majority of the costs are recurring because they pay for mental health counselors and security staff. Even the metal detectors, which have a one-time purchasing cost, have recurring staff costs for operation.