



Victoria Independent School District

Communications

V.A.T.R.E = R.A.I.S.E

As a community, do we support paying our public school teachers and staff competitively? Yes, or no? This is a question voters will have the chance to answer on November 2nd.

For the past three years, the feedback our leadership team has received from the many surveys and Thoughtexchanges that have been responded to by thousands of parents, community members and staff has indicated that “YES”, this is THE top priority. This is a sentiment voters will have the opportunity to confirm on November 2nd.

You may be wondering how our current pay compares with other school districts. An external pay study comparing VISD to area and peer school districts found teacher and staff pay in VISD has not been competitive. The lack of pay competitiveness creates challenges in attracting skilled and experienced teachers and staff and contributes to higher employee turnover rates which negatively impact teaching, learning and the general operations of the organization.

You may be wondering what a VATRE, or Voter-Approval Tax Rate Election is. A VATRE is an election required by State law when a school district is seeking voter approval to raise the Maintenance and Operations (M&O) tax rate above the amount prescribed by the State. For the current school year, the maximum M&O tax rate VISD may approve without an election is \$0.9147. The District is asking voters to consider approval of three additional pennies, which would make the total M&O tax rate \$0.9447.

You may be wondering how this compares to the M&O tax rate in place last year. The M&O rate last year was \$0.9664. Yes, you are reading this correctly. If voters approve the three additional pennies in the VATRE, the new M&O tax rate will be 2.17 pennies LESS than last year. A recent State law will require the VATRE ballot to state “this is a tax increase”, but the M&O tax rate will actually be lower than last year.

You may be wondering how VISD would benefit from passage of this VATRE. Voter approval will result in a nearly \$4.7 million increase in annual funding. Approximately 60% (\$2.8 million) of these new funds would come from the State, not from local taxpayers. You are reading this correctly as well, voter approval of the VATRE would result in almost \$3 million in new funding sent to Victoria from the State each year. These funds would be used to address salary competitiveness for teachers and staff.

You may be wondering what VISD has proactively done to cut costs internally and operate more efficiently before bringing forward a VATRE for the community’s consideration. In the past four years, VISD has reduced total staff through attrition by approximately 200 employees and decreased Central Office staff by over 25%. Texas Education Agency (TEA) data confirms VISD employs less administrative staff than the average Texas school district.

You may be wondering if other communities across Texas have already approved elections to raise their M&O tax rates to increase their teacher and staff pay

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competitiveness. Yes, nearly 500 communities (almost 50%) have accessed additional funding. These are school districts VISD competes with in hiring highly qualified teachers and staff.

You may be wondering what may happen if the VATRE is not approved. In August, the VISD Board of Trustees approved a 4% pay increase for teachers and staff. The long-term funding of this pay increase is dependent upon additional operating funds. Without community approval of these funds, in order to ensure a balanced budget in current and future years, the District would need to reduce current and future costs that may include further reduced staffing, increased classroom sizes and elimination of programs currently in place to support students.

You may be wondering when you can vote and share your voice on whether you support paying teachers and staff competitively. Early voting starts October 18th and election day is November 2nd.

You may be wondering if your voice matters. It does.

Dr. Greg Bonewald is the deputy superintendent of Victoria ISD.