

The below list of questions and answers (**bold**) is ongoing and will be added to as questions are submitted to the superintendent. The intent of list of FAQ is to share information with as many stakeholders as possible in a variety of ways.

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When you referred to spending money on 3 new buses because the "funds" couldn't cross over to another area, before the buses were purchased was it discussed to save the money and shift the levy that would have previously been allocated to the Bus fund over to another more "needy" fund?

**The bus replacement and transportation funds are max levy and the capital projects fund is a max rate fund. The tax levy and dollars received in the bus replacement fund could not be shifted to another fund as all funds are governed by Indiana law. The only way money, once received, could be moved from bus replacement is through a resolution to transfer to Rainy Day**

You mentioned that you adhere to a strict 12 year replacement schedule, but if these are assumed to be general guidelines and you took into consideration fewer students meant less travel and stops, could the 12 years could be extended? If this was the case, then the money spent could be saved to fund the Bus department while the levy was allocated to other funds to help build their cash/revenue. This could be done even if only 1 bus was necessary.

**While this might seem to be a possibility, especially given the life of a diesel engine, at the end of the 12 years our buses experience enough wear and tear to their frame and chassis, rusting out primarily, is a negative benefit and presents safety issues even though the life of the engine still has some remaining. Additionally, buses older than 12 years need to undergo bus inspection with the state police twice a year. We continually evaluate the bus routes to determine the appropriate ridership.**

What expenses can be made from the school rainy day fund?

**Expenses from Rainy Day are allowable for whatever is budgeted. For the pay 2018 budget, the entire amount was budgeted to 'other personal expenses' which allows us the broadest flexibility.**

If you have saved over 1.3 million dollars in 1 year, can you provide details on what and where that money has been saved and then spent or allocated?

**The bulk of the savings has come from staffing and employee benefits. A teacher retirement buyout was offered (savings of over \$450,000). Additionally, all vendor contracts were rebid that were within two years of expiration. This yielded a vast savings in several cases (over \$100,000). A purchase order system was implemented and credit spending was reduced drastically. An in-house energy study was also done and staff were asked to remove small appliances as well as standard thermostat settings were put in place. The savings that has been incurred will be allocated to rising healthcare costs and be used to operating expenses so that Rainy Day does not have to be used.**

Does the school have a budget that has been overspent in the last 5 years or is it budgeting outside of the revenue and then using its cash to fund the difference?

**The school has not overspent its appropriated budget for each fund. However, in previous years, expenditures exceeded revenue sources and the cash balance or rainy day funds were used to cover the difference.**

When the Levy was first explained by 2 members of the school, 1 being a board member, it was described as money needed to make structural improvements that couldn't be done otherwise. How did it get switched to operational?

**The levy is the maximum amount of dollars the school can collect from taxpayers. I believe you are referring to the referendum, which has been defined as an operating referendum since May 17, 2012.**

Does the school have investments? If so, what is the interest rate and is there a penalty for cashing them out before they expire?

**Yes. We invest our Rainy Day fund in certificates of deposit of varying amounts and terms. So long as the funds are used for the necessary operation to meet regular obligations, there is not a penalty.**

What would it take for the school to no longer need the referendum?

**A large (100+) in enrollment or a vast decrease in expenses is what would be needed to no longer need a referendum or a combination of both. It is interesting to note, according to the Indiana Department of Education, that 417 school-age children live within our attendance area and 172 of those children attend other schools.**

What percentage of the budget goes to salaries?

**Approximatley 70% of our funds are budgeted for salaries and employee benefits.**

What is the tax rate now?

**The current school tax rate is \$0.7929.**

How can we sustain the school with declining enrollment?

**A school with declining enrollment has several choices to make to sustain a school. One is to reduce expenditures, which we have done. The other choice is to ask taxpayers for dollars to support the school. This was done in 2012 and is now being asked for again for November 2018 and will take effect with the May 2019 tax installment, if passed.**

Where is enrollment going through 2027?

**Projections are accurate to five years in advance due to the live birth rate assumptions that we make enrollment projections on. After 2023, we would flat line enrollment trends.**

Is the curriculum more advanced at other schools?

**HCS offer nearly all of the courses state approved course guide. Courses are then taught based on teacher licensure and student requests. When we hire teachers, we look for teachers with multiple areas of licensure in order to be able to offer as many classes as students select. If students do not request a class, it is not placed on the master schedule. We will run a class with as few as two or three students in the class in order to build capacity and interest.**

For families researching schools, what kind of grade is Hamilton on the internet?

**Our school corporation is rated a 'C' with the Indiana Department of Education.**

How do we attract students if we have a C grade?

**Our graduation and attendance rates are consistent with State averages. Additionally, we have low instances of bullying and small class sizes which provide individualized attention to student needs.**

What do we do about fixed costs issues?

**Expenses have been reviewed and reduced where we able that will not compromise the quality of education we provide for students. Reductions have been made and vendor contracts have been rebid. Additionally, purchasing processes were implemented.**

Is referendum separate from debt?

**Yes. The power point illustrates the funds schools have to use for spending.**

Why are we so worried about heating and plumbing if school closes?

**While students are in attendance, we need to provide a safe learning environment. Having an appropriately heated and cooled building with adequate air circulation ensures the safety of our students. We do not currently have plumbing concerns.**

What is the old referendum base rate and when does it end?

**\$0.44 is the current referendum rate and if it runs its full seven years, it will expire in November of 2019. If a new rate is voted on by taxpayers in November of 2018, then the current referendum would end then and the new rate would begin in January of 2019.**

Is it fair to the kids to send them to HCS when other schools offer so much more with comparable tax rates?

**Even though we are a small school that has a declining enrollment, we offer intangibles that other schools cannot. That is an issue each family will have to decide.**

Can we consolidate classrooms to save money?

**There will still be maintenance and upkeep costs for the entire building that will not disappear. Keep in mind, consolidating classrooms means we consolidate students. Which in some cases could mean putting over 35 students in a room or teaching two different subject areas in the same classroom. Neither of these situations is conducive to a positive learning environment.**

The students that leave, are they moving or still living here?

**Students have left HCS due to a physical move or a school choice. In many cases, students who choose to attend school elsewhere still reside in our district.**

If kids received school online, are they still our students?

**Yes, unless they enroll in an online school.**

Why should I pay twice as much to keep the school open? People who are sending their kids to other schools say they are getting more classes offered at bigger schools.

**Students at HCS are not just a number. Teachers know who each student is and what their needs are. Yes, a larger student body will likely select courses that are more varied, resulting in a more diverse master schedule, but students are a number there. Larger schools experience a broad range of behavior problems. Our small school has a low incidence of major discipline issues. Additionally, the town needs a school. If the school is not here, patrons will do business elsewhere and the town will lose revenue. The closure of a school affects a town as well.**

Do we have students transferring in from other districts?

**Yes. We had 39 this school year.**

What can we, as taxpayers, do at the state level to change school funding?

**Contact your state and local representatives.**

At what point would we be consolidated by other schools? And if we do, would they have to increase their tax rate to afford us?

**The Board of School Trustees will make the choice to run a referendum or discuss consolidation. At this time, the conversation is related to running a referendum. Each district determines their own tax rate.**

What are we doing to increase student numbers or bring old students back?

**As students leave HCS, administrators conduct an exit interview to ascertain the reason a family is leaving. We are also working with a group to share the great things we are doing at Hamilton. Our teachers have also received and continue to receive weekly professional development in research-based best practices for teaching. The strategies learned are aimed at student engagement and individualized learning. We are also beginning the multi-year process to become a STEM certified school.**

Has the elementary lost students or just the high school?

**Both schools have experienced a loss in enrollment.**

Is it possible to just keep the elementary?

**An attorney has looked into this for us and while it is possible, it would be unique in the state. If this were to occur, we need to develop an interlocal agreement with another high school for our students to attend. At this time, conversations have not been had with other school districts.**

Why are we spending twice as much as other schools?

**Building operational costs still exist for the entire facility. We, like other school districts, are experiencing rising costs. With our declining enrollment, which in turn decreases the revenue generated from student enrollment creates a gap in funding.**

**Additionally, the high school must offer certain courses required for graduation. For example, not all students are on the same math track. We have several students who need Geometry for a graduation requirement. Because the students may also need a different English class and choose different electives, we offer Geometry a couple of times throughout the day and each section may only have 10-15 students in it instead of one section of 20-30.**

Why do we not send the same exit interview questions to those who live in our district but go to other schools (and have never attended our school)? Why does it just have to go to those who have left?

**The state report we receive with the information on how many students reside in our attendance area does not tell us who the students are. If students have never enrolled, we do not know who they are. During the summer of 2017, we did survey those families who left prior to the exit surveys being conducted.**

If the referendum does not pass, at what point do we close the school?

**We would have to look at alternative options, some mentioned in these questions. One of the options that would have to be discussed is closing the school. Currently, there is revenue to support the school through the graduating class of 2020.**

What does the enrollment have to get below to close the school?

**There is not a set number. However, when the revenue from the state and the referendum, if passed (not passing is answered above), does not cover expenses the school would not be able to operate. If the referendum passes, the date when the funding gap occurs is 2027. At this time, the school would close, or if conditions remain the same, a referendum could be passed again.**

What alternatives do we offer if we do not have athletics?

**We currently offer as many IHSAA sponsored athletics as we can. We make the decision based on the numbers of students interested in each sport as well as their level of experience; always keeping the safety of students participating at the forefront of our decision. During the school day we offer a host of clubs and have many opportunities throughout the year for student participation in whole school activities. Additionally, we have academic teams who are very competitive and theater opportunities for students.**

What are we going to offer the elementary-high school for band/choir?

**We currently have band for grades 5-12 and choir for grades 7-12. We plan to continue to offer these opportunities for students. We also had a parent booster group established for all fine arts this past spring. Look for them at registration in the fall to help promote our fine arts programs.**

What is the total student capacity of the school?

**In 2005, there was adequate space for the 659 students enrolled.**

The surrounding schools starting line ups are former Hamilton students. Shouldn't they have stayed here if the move was for athletics?

**We follow the IHSAA guidelines when we release a student to another school. The IHSAA requires schools to give a student limited eligibility (no varsity competition if they have previously played at the high school level).**

If 85 people showed up to this meeting, why was the board president sleeping through most of the meeting?

**All board members were fully engaged in the meeting, each processing the information individually. We encourage you to attend regular board meetings to observe board interaction.**

Do any of the kids walk to school and not ride the bus?

**A few high school students walk. Elementary students do not walk as the school sits on a state highway and students have to cross a railroad track. The safety of our students is our primary concern.**

Why can't the buses pick groups of students up at certain locations instead of buses going to each house? Wouldn't that save on gas so money could be spent elsewhere?

**If pick up points were utilized, students now have to walk to and from a bus stop. By doing this, our bus drivers now would not see students walking to and from the stop. Additionally, when students gather in groups at stops without adults, discipline problems occur. Our bus drivers are very aware of each home situation and recognize when a car looks out of place or know if a student goes home alone and can ensure the student makes it safely in the home. This seamless gap from leaving home, where the parent supervises, to the school when the student boards the bus ensures the safety of each student. This is a benefit we can provide because of our size. Again, the safety of students is our primary concern.**

Are supplies given/donated/brought in at the beginning of the year accessible to everyone?

**School supplies are available to all students at the grade level or school.**

Can we raise the cost to attend school here?

**Hamilton Community Schools is a public school and cannot charge a fee for students who live in our attendance area to attend school.**

Hamilton spends twice the amount per student compared to school corporations in our area. The website says we have a student teacher ratio of 7.1 and the state is 13.1. Can HCS reorganize its teachers to become more in line with the state average?

**This number is generated by taking the total enrollment and dividing by the number of certified teachers on staff. If we were to reduce that number and bring it line with the state average, we would need to reduce electives offered. As stated in a previous question, we cannot eliminate some classes as they are required for graduation. The other choice to bring this number closer to the average is to greatly reduce the number of courses scheduled and offer the minimum for graduation. With the changes taking place for graduation requirements, this simply cannot be done.**

Are administration costs included in any of the budget figures or any future referendum?

**Yes.**

If a referendum is on the ballot and the referendum is passed how much income will HCS expect to receive from the referendum?

**Depending on the rate selected (0.7188, 0.7503, or 0.7773), the formula to calculate the total amount would be:**

**Rate x Assessed Value/100 = Total Dollars Generated**

**For example, assume a rate of \$0.7503 using our current AV, we would generate approximately \$2,871,000.**

Will the new referendum dollars replace or be in addition to the current referendum?

**The new referendum would replace the current \$0.44. The figures shown in the presentation for the new rates would be added to the current rate. For example, the power point shows the current impact for a \$160,000 (average market value) home is \$317.42/year. If a rate of \$0.7503 were passed, \$223.85/year would be added. The total amount this taxpayer would pay would be \$541.27/year.**

Can a picture or graph be made available to show HCS and other districts with current tax rates?

**This is available in the power point posted.**



How are we appealing to families who live in the district but have chosen to leave the district?

**We have reached out to them with a survey. All students are welcome at our events and many attend. Our doors are open and any family living in our attendance is welcome to re-enroll/attend our school. They simply need to contact the school office to enroll in school.**

What is the plan or ideas for trying to increase student enrollment? Is the school working with the town or chamber?

**The school is working with marketing consultants, takes advantage of low/no cost advertising, and is works with the town and the chamber to promote the school and town.**

Can advanced placement courses be offered at HCS?

**Yes. We always seek teachers with this capability. Recent changes in licensure requirements have made it more difficult for teachers to be able to teach advanced courses. All schools experience this issue.**

What percentage of the student body has internet access?

**A recent survey of parents indicated that 75% of our families have cable or satellite.**

How can we improve internet access for the area?

**As the school becomes aware of free or low-cost options, we share them with families.**

What other ways will this information be distributed other than posted on the school website?

**A second meeting will be held June 14 at 5:30pm to share the same information.**

Why are students leaving? Sports? Course offerings? Other?

**Exit surveys indicate both athletics and academics are reasons students leave.**

How can HCs work with other districts to enhance the student experience with regards to trips, programs, and athletics? Can our students attend other districts to attend certain classes or athletic teams?

**Students cannot be enrolled as a student in two school districts. We currently partner with twelve (12) other districts to offer vocational courses as well as special education classes.**

What is the current balance of the Rainy Day fund?

**\$1,288,118.27**

Why have we been dipping into the Rainy Day fund?

**From January 2010 to June 2016 the Rainy Day fund was used for salaries, fund to fund transfers, the boiler project, and vehicle maintenance. Since July 2016, the Rainy Day fund has been used for salaries budgeted this way by previous administration and a retirement incentive.**

When is the bond that was issued 10-11 years ago paid off?

**The last payment will be made in December of 2018.**

Why will the tax rate not rise during the newly proposed bond?

**The new bond will be assessed at the same rate as the debt Service rate in 2017, making it tax neutral. The new bond amount will not begin to be collected until the May 2019 installment and the current bond will be paid in December of 2018, thus causing no increase to the Debt Service rate from the 2017 and previous, historical rates.**

Did we ask for enough money for the first referendum? Should we ask for more this time?

**It would be our hope the previous administration asked for what they believed to be appropriate at the time given the data they used.**

**We have presented three (3) rate options that will meet our needs. However, at the end of the eight (8) years, it is quite likely given current information, HCS will need to ask for another operating referendum.**

Can we put a focus on other events and activities other schools don't offer?

**We are becoming a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) certified school with the DOE. This is a two year process. We are seeking grants to assist with this process and will have a Maker Space classroom in each building next year.**

How are we guiding students to academic classes/career choices?

**Our counselor and teachers work with students to provide career exploration classes and as student interest develops, we work to guide students toward opportunities that will help them pursue their chosen career path.**

Do we have teachers to support upper level classes?

**We currently have teachers who are licensed to teach upper level business and technical education classes, English classes, and are pursuing hiring a science teacher who will be able to teach advanced classes.**

Do we have vocational offerings?

**We offer a very broad selection of vocational offerings with IMPACT. Additionally, one of our teachers is teaching a variety of business and technical education classes that are available to receive vocational funding.**

Will the tax rate affect all taxpayers the same way?

**Homeowners, farm and rentals, and businesses are affected at different rates. They are 1%, 2%, and 3% of net assessed value, respectively.**

Will the referendum be used for the elementary or high school or both? Is there talk of splitting schools?

**The discussion is currently based on a referendum for the entire district K-12. If the referendum fails on the November 2018, a myriad of options could be discussed. Splitting schools might be an option, but that is not a current pursuit.**

Why are the IMPACT classes not in house anymore?

**The cost for *each* school to house *each* program offered (facility and staff costs) was far too exhorbant for any one school in the thirteen (13) school cooperative to be able to support. The schools joined together and are able to offer a variety of programs on one site for an affordable cost.**

What are we doing to get qualified teachers that are no emergency licensed in the subject area they teach?

**All high schools in the area and many in the state had difficulty obtaining teachers at the beginning of this school year. In fact, Hamilton was fully staffed on Day 1 of school. Often times a financial incentive is what is required to obtain teachers with advanced licenses.**

At what grade level do most students seem to be leaving for other schools?

**Recent trends indicate grades 6 or 8.**

How does our school compare to others with a referendum?

**Please see the PDF posted (Budget Information\_All Schools). Fremont and Hamilton have operating referenda and are most compartitive in enrollment in northeastern Indiana.**

Do we need to have all the administrators we have for a lower number of students?

**We are approaching a tipping point with all employee classes (i.e. teacher, administrator, instructional assistant) to student ratio. This is continually being evaluated. Staffing decisions are made in the spring with the student enrollment at the time. If that changes in the fall, it is more difficult to reduce staff mid-year. Keep in mind, regardless of the number of students as long as we have two buildings, there are numerous tasks that need to be completed for each building to remain in compliance with the Indiana Department of Education. The number of tasks do not become less just because there are fewer students.**

With heating and cooling issues, can we start later to save money on utilities?

**A heating and cooling project at this time, will do three things:**

- 1. Begin the savings on utilities as our current systems are inefficient.**
- 2. Provide appropriate heat and air conditioning to many spaces in the building. We have many classrooms and spaces that are not cooled and many that are not heated appropriately.**
- 3. Provide outside air ventilation to all classrooms.**

According to the U.S. Government Census, Hamilton population age is increasing. Why would there be any optimism that this will change?

**The enrollment projections shared at the community meetings and in the powerpoint on the website do not indicate a growth in enrollment.**

What are the next positions to be reduced in force (RIF)?

**When a reduction in force is considered, enrollment in grade levels and courses are considered as well as what courses need to be offered in order to meet graduation requirements. Consideration is also given to the impact the reduction will have at the classroom level.**

If you are trying to convince taxpayers to “buy” into a referendum, where are the positive projections?

**At the community meetings, we have discussed the positives of a small school. Teachers and staff are acutely aware of student needs because students are not just a number or test score. Additionally, each child has the opportunity to be a leader in academics or athletics if they so choose. We also have low incidences of bullying and behavior instances that require suspension or expulsion.**

What are the options that will be on the ballot?

**There will be one option on the ballot. The Board of School Trustees will decide what question is presented on the ballot at a 1028 hearing. This meeting will be later this summer; July or August.**

Is Hamilton Community Schools the smallest district in the state?

**Hamilton Community Schools is the third smallest district in the state.**

What happens if the school closes before the referendum is up? Do taxes stop being deducted?

**As answered in a previous question, taxpayers will stay pay school taxes to whatever school corporation we consolidate with. Our attorneys are checking to see if the referendum levy would still apply since Hamilton Community Schools no longer be a school corporation.**

If you are paying \$26,000 per student, why not close the school and give every student a voucher for a private school?

**Closing the school is a decision the taxpayers will make through the vote on the November ballot when the referendum is presented. If the taxpayers believe the school should remain open, the referendum will be passed. If they do not, then the school will close and what is currently Hamilton Community Schools will be redistricted through a process in working with the counties, townships, and neighboring districts.**

Have you looked into green energy? Solar, geothermal?

**These options are not cost effective and cannot provide the heating and cooling needs for the building. The HVAC option shared at the community meetings does offer savings through energy consumption. Additionally, as part of cost saving measures, the district has removed all unnecessary small appliances, began converting lighting to LED, and uses set temperatures for heating and cooling.**

What efforts are you making for the reenrollment of current students?

**Current students remain enrolled until they withdraw.**

What are the effects to the town if the referendum does not pass?

**It may be best to ask the Town of Hamilton this question. However, the school does over \$100,000.00 worth of business at Four Corners Deli, Carper-Koeppel, and Village Foods. Additionally, all our accounts and investments are held at Farmer State Bank.**

What programs will be increased or returned if the referendum is passed?

**The referendum is being requested to support current programming and expenses. If the minimum rate that was presented at community meetings would be passed, current programming could be sustained, likely bringing in no new programs. If a referendum were passed at a higher rate, then there would be a cash reserve or the ability to offer additional programs/courses. However, that would be the decision of the administration and Board of School Trustees on how to proceed with the additional revenue.**

The Steuben County Auditor has advised that Umbaugh's numbers are completely inaccurate. The auditor advises that the \$0.7188 number would actually equate to \$1.10-\$1.50. Why the difference?

**Please recall the presentation posted online and presented at community meetings shows what the new tax rates would be. The new rate of \$0.7188 (for example) is inclusive of the current \$0.44 rate. The figures on the slide show the *incremental* impact of the additional \$0.28 cents on top of the current \$0.44.**

**\*Taxpayers should be advised to NOT combine the new, inclusive \$0.7188 (example) with the current \$0.44 rate. Umbaugh and Associates will clarify with the Steuben County Auditor.**

Do you still offer dual credit, college classes? Is a general diploma offered?

**Dual credit classes are offered through Ivy Tech. Hamilton Community Schools offers a General diploma in rare cases. The General diploma does count toward our graduation rate and affects our grade as a school. Therefore, it is used in exceptional circumstances. Students are strongly encouraged to secure a Core 40 diploma.**

Will the millions in capital improvements be delayed until after the referendum vote?

**At the June 18, 2018 board meeting, the Board of School Trustees voted to take the next steps in the bonding process. Previously answered questions help to further explain why they will continue to move forward in this direction.**

Of the 22 districts with operating referenda, what is their cost per student?

**Umbaugh and Associates is pulling the information for this question. An answer will be provided as soon as possible.**

Of the average \$160,000 home, how many are lower than average and how many are higher? What is the dollar amount each side of average?

**Umbaugh and Associates is working with Policy Analytics to provide this answer.**