

Voters support special-ed tax hike

By Susan Steinmueller
staff writer

A three-quarter-mill special-education tax was approved overwhelmingly by Oakland County voters Monday in an effort that Oakland Schools Superintendent William Keane called "outstanding in every way."

Twenty-five of 28 school districts approved the millage increase for the county's special education programs and services. The final tally showed 84.5 percent of votes cast supported the tax hike, or 17,507 votes in favor to 9,647 opposed.

Officials estimate about 4 percent of registered voters in Oakland County cast ballots. Farmington voters ap-

proved it, 982-410. In Clarencville, voters passed it, 139-81.

The increase brings the total tax levied for special education to 1 1/4 mills, all of which will be levied indefinitely.

"We believe all the children will be winners as a result of this," said Keane. He said that general education students will also benefit because local districts won't have to use general funds to subsidize county-run special education programs.

GRAHAM LEWIS, assistant superintendent for the Farmington Public Schools, was ecstatic about passage of the millage.

"I am as happy as can be. This demonstrated what districts can do when they get together," Lewis said. "The districts that are relatively financially stable came through. Everybody was ecstatic. Whenever you have a financial issue at stake, a 2-1 margin is dramatic."

Lewis' excitement was echoed in the Clarencville district.

"It was a total community commitment coordinated throughout the school district. We are really pleased," said Michael Dombrowski, special services director for Clarencville Public Schools.

"Passage means it won't be any burden on the general fund, which it would have been if it didn't pass. The Clarencville community has always been very supportive of education, anyway."

SINCE 1981, local districts have had to make up for unfunded costs of regional special education programs because the county's fund began lagging behind expenses.

The 7 1/2 cents per \$1,000 assessed valuation tax will yield approximately \$10.5 million, based on Oakland's current property valuation. Until now, Oakland residents have paid \$1 per

\$1,000 for special ed. Voters turned down a previous proposal in 1981 to increase the tax rate, and the last increase was in 1985.

In addition to supporting county programs for the more severely handicapped students, the higher tax is expected to help defray some special education costs in local districts. The tax should keep the regional programs solvent through 1995, officials say.

KEANE CREDITED the successful millage election to different factors.

"I think that school districts began to realize that since 1980, billbacks were getting large" and taking money away from general education students, Keane said, referring to the process of billing local school districts for some services received by local students at county programs.

Secondly, he noted, "there was a concerted effort as large as I have seen in my life."

Local districts that approved the millage include: Farmington, 982-410; Birmingham, 695-328; Bloomfield Hills, 771-274; Southfield, 998-386; Troy, 1-874-478; Rochester, 830-589; Avondale, 269-181; Walled Lake, 552-322; and Clarencville, 139-81. The vo-

turnout was about 3 percent in both Farmington and Clarencville. Clarencville encompasses parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township.

The three districts that did not pass the millage are: Brandon, voting no 117-172; Oxford, 171-184; and South Lyon, 162-287.

MORE THAN 20,000 students, from infants to age 26, receive special ed programs and services in Oakland County, school officials say. Of that number, almost 2,000 attend school in Center Programs operated by Oakland Schools in 15 local school districts. The other special-ed students receive full- or part-time services in the districts where they live.

Center programs serve those who are trainable mentally impaired, severely mentally impaired, emotionally impaired, hearing impaired, visually impaired, physically or otherwise handicapped, severely multiply impaired and autistically impaired as well as providing prevocational and vocational training.

The centers are operated by the districts where they are located but are supported by the special ed fund.

Oakland Schools Special Education Election Tuesday, Oct. 7, 1985

Farmington Public Schools results
76-mill increase for special education

Precinct	Favor	Increase	Oppose	Increase
1. Farmington Training Center	256		92	
2. Duncel Middle School	363		146	
3. Warner Middle School	104		32	
4. East Middle School	217		108	
Absentee votes	42		32	
Totals	982		410	

Total votes, 1,408; turnout percentage, 3 percent.
All vote counts are unofficial.

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