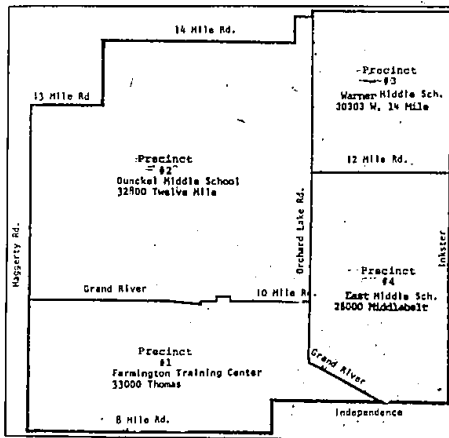


County voters will consider tax increase

Continued from Page 1



Farmington Public Schools voting precincts for Monday's special county election.

Clarenceville set for Monday vote

Voting in favor of the Oakland County special education property tax hike also will help support general education in Clarenceville Public Schools, says Superintendent Michael Shiber.

On Monday, Oct. 7, voters in the Clarenceville district, which includes parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township, will be asked to approve a 0.75 mill hike (75 cents per \$1,000 of assessed value) for special education programs.

Because the Clarenceville district includes communities in two counties — Wayne and Oakland — the district was given the option of which intermediate district it would join.

Clarenceville High School and Clarenceville Junior High School will serve as precincts for the election with the polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

THE COUNTY, through its intermediate school district, Oakland Schools, currently levies one mill for special education programs. The proposed millage would be an addition to that already being collected.

With the 0.75 mill increase, the

owner of a \$50,000 home in the district would pay an additional \$18.75 a year in property taxes.

If the millage increase does not pass, the district will have to pay Oakland Schools an estimated \$855,100 over the next five years to cover its share of costs not handled by state funding or the current one mill rate, Shiber said.

Shiber said Clarenceville has 218 special education students. Some 37 of those attend center programs.

IF THE hike is approved, that money will not have to be paid and will remain in the district for general education programs, Shiber said.

"We're facing more than \$600,000 in billbacks in the next five years. That money has to come out of the general fund so those funds will not be available for students in Clarenceville."

Absentee ballots for the Oct. 7 election can be picked up until Saturday in the Clarenceville Board of Education Office, 20210 Middlebelt, Livonia, Call 475-8900.

Oakland road revenues

There is no countywide road tax in Oakland and the elected board of county commissioners is prohibited by law from using any of its general property tax levy for roads.

County Road Commission revenues come mainly from state gas and weight taxes which motorists pay at the pump for gas and diesel fuel, and at the secretary of state's office for vehicle registrations.

Gas and weight taxes are the only source of substantial funding for county road maintenance, and snow and ice control. Federal, county, municipal and taxpayer contributions augmenting the main road taxes have been restricted to construction and reconstruction projects such as adding lanes, intersec-

tion improvements, paving gravel roads and road resurfacing.

Some local communities levy road taxes, and property owners can be specially assessed for road projects within subdivisions. Local municipalities or the property owners themselves may initiate these projects.

NEARLY 2,000 students — from the trainable mentally impaired to the severely mentally impaired — are enrolled in Oakland Schools' special-education center programs.

Center programs — offering classroom and vocational settings — help reduce special education costs by eliminating duplication in staff, services and facilities.

Oakland Schools coordinates center programs for the "low incidence" population of handicapped children — those with less common disabilities, such as autism or blindness.

"Through center programs — through mutual support and cooperation — we try to bring a level of quality to children with uncommon severe handicaps, but who are not high in number in any one place," Lewis said.

"Some communities with a high number of such children face an undue burden. We try to bring an equity to those children while guarding against local budgets from being strained," he added.

OF THE 19,800 special education students in Oakland County in 1984-85, 1,776 were enrolled in 70 center programs housed in 16 host school districts.

Host districts include Farmington, which last year provided center programs at nine sites for 400 trainable mentally impaired, severely mentally impaired, physically impaired and pre-vocational students.

But even though Farmington is a host district, it doesn't serve the full range of impairments. For example, some hearing impaired and visually impaired Farmington students attend classes in another district.

"It's more cost-effective to have support services under one roof as opposed to being spread out. And the more severe the handicap, the more cost-effective it is to have a center program," Lewis said.

The average cost to educate an autistic impaired student enrolled in a center program is \$20,757. In comparison, the average cost to educate an emotionally impaired student enrolled in a center program is \$7,629, according to Oakland Schools.

FARMINGTON SENT 96 special education students to center programs and educated another 1,200 in district-operated special education classes last year. Special education students range from infants to 26-year-olds. In 1984-85, Farmington's district-operated special education programs cost

taxpayers \$3.4 million. The cost of center programs offered through the school district cost the county \$4.6 million, Flanagan said.

Previously, the one mill levied for special education in Oakland County was sufficient to meet enrollment increases and mandated programs.

But since 1980-81, the cost of special education programs has exceeded tax revenues. State financial support of special education dipped from 45 percent in 1975-76 to 16 percent in 1981-82.

To trim costs, Oakland Schools increased class size and reduced staff — where legally permitted. Despite the cost trimming, the county has posted a \$4.5-million special education deficit.

STATE AND federal law requires local school districts to meet local special education needs. As a result, Oakland County's 28 school districts must share responsibility for the cumulative deficit and for future special education costs that exceed tax revenue.

The tax boost would remedy the county special education fund deficit, cover anticipated program growth because of increased enrollment and defray some special education costs met by local districts. It would keep the county's special education programs financially solvent for 10 years, according to Oakland Schools projections.

In addition, it would be used for:

- expand the autism program by 1½ classrooms;
- expand the severely mentally impaired program by four classrooms;
- start a program for the severely emotionally impaired;
- increase pre-vocational training for handicapped students.

The additional 75 mill would raise taxes \$22.50 a year for a property owner whose house has a market value of \$80,000, \$30 a year on a house valued at \$80,000 and \$37.50 a year on a house valued at \$100,000.

IF THE tax boost is approved, Farmington Public Schools would "save" \$223,600 in billback costs during 1985-86, according to Oakland Schools projections.

A billback is the amount that Farmington pays Oakland Schools for costs above those the intermediate school district can afford through the current one-mill levy. The money reimburses host districts, assuring that taxpayers in those districts aren't overtaxed for special education.

"If the millage increase is defeated, a billback of a couple hundred thousand dollars would now seem like nothing compared to the billbacks we'd be seeing in the next few years," Flanagan

said. "The main reason is because the cost of educating special education kids has exploded."

Flanagan added, "It's a positive thing that we're taking care of people who need help. And with medical technology the way it is, we have more and more people surviving who otherwise might not have. And our obligation is to take care of them."

OAKLAND SCHOOLS estimates that three years ago, Farmington paid \$800 per center-educated child through billback charges — \$35,000. It warns that figure may jump to \$4,500 per child four years from now — \$485,800 total for Farmington.

Countywide, the increased millage would produce \$11.2 million this year and up to \$14.4 million in 1995, according to Oakland Schools projections.

Farmington taxpayers, meanwhile,

would generate another \$952,000 for countywide special education in 1985-86 through the additional millage. Figuring in the existing one-mill levy, Farmington taxpayers would generate \$2.2 million overall for countywide special education in 1985-86.

Enrollment for special education is expected to rise partly because of Oakland County's reputation, which attracts more families with handicapped children, and partly because of advances in medicine, which save the lives of many infants with serious illnesses.

POLLS WILL be open Monday from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Voting precincts are: 1. Farmington Training Center, 33000 Thomas; 2. Dunckel Middle School, 32100 12 Mile; 3. Warner Middle School, 30303 14 Mile; 4. East Middle School, 25000 Middlebelt.



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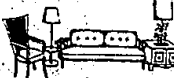
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