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# CALLED: LESS MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS

*KSD proposed Prop A, an operating tax levy of 78 cents per \$100 of assessed property value spring of 2015. Subsequently, this proposition was voted down by the community, resulting in a budget crisis for KSD. This issue, 99 percent of TKC staff (80:1) voted they believe Prop A and budget reductions could have been handled more appropriately.*

When something with the slogan “Keep Kirkwood Great” is voted down by the community, does it make that community decidedly *less* great? Well, no, but it increases class sizes, leaves KHS with a \$4 million deficit (\$1 million to still cut) and leaves 25 teachers, 23 support staff members and three administrators throughout KSD knowing that if “things don’t change” their contracts will not be renewed. When you have teachers losing their jobs and a school blindsided by the severity of the repercussions of Prop A not passing, someone messed up.

In the spring of 2015, KSD proposed Prop A, an operating tax levy of 78 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. The Keep Kirkwood Great website said despite resident student enrollment increasing by more than 650 students in the last five years alone, the operating tax had not been increased for 10 years. To maintain the level of excellence Kirkwood is known for, an increase was in order. Unfortunately, Kirkwood had a confused public, and Tax Fairly, a group against Prop A, had an incredibly strong argument detailing high pay of teachers, revenue growth and enrollment realism.

What the public only really understood from the campaign, however, was (kind of) why we needed the tax increase. There was an ambiguity to what would happen if it didn’t pass, as well as where all the money would go. If the community visited the Keep Kirkwood Great website they could read all about how KSD needed the money to continue to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and continue to excel in student programs and services, but a mention of an increase in class sizes isn’t found unless you click around looking for it. Furthermore, the language used lacked urgency: if KSD wanted the community to treat the proposition with seriousness they

should have advertised like the crisis it was.

“It was very clear that we knew we were at a tipping point in terms of what we had to do,” Dr. Tom Williams, superintendent, said. “We didn’t want to go to the negative part of it [in terms of scare tactics]; to be optimistic. I think we all believed Kirkwood is not going to *not* pass this.”

However, it is our belief that something isn’t a scare tactic if it’s the truth. By definition, a scare tactic is a strategy intended to manipulate public opinion based on fear or alarm. Often, it’s a strategy put into the same category as false information. Divulging the whole story, in retrospect, may have worked on the district’s side as well as clearing up some of the confusion surrounding the situation.

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## “I THINK WE ALL BELIEVED KIRKWOOD IS NOT GOING TO NOT PASS [PROP A],” TOM WILLIAMS, SUPERINTENDENT

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Moreover, it would have prepared teachers for the possibility that their job may need to be cut in order to help make ends meet. Until January, most staff members felt pretty good about the whole thing according to Justin Flack, physics teacher.

Flack said from the beginning KSD made it sound like the cuts were never going to be serious enough that teachers’ contracts would not be renewed. This belief continued even after the board meeting that took place after Prop A was voted down Dec. 14. Flack said he left the meeting feeling confident because Williams said they were going to try to accomplish the reductions mainly through attrition, people leaving on their own and retir-

ing. Wednesday of finals week, Flack was told that “if things don’t change,” his contract would not be renewed.

For residents within KSD without a student or connection to the district, there was virtually no incentive to vote yes, especially for those on fixed incomes who simply wouldn’t be able to afford it.

“[Tax Fairly] was mainly arguing about our operating budget, and they were combining all of our maintenance funds and our technology fund in with the funds we used to support our classrooms, which was misleading to people,” Ginger Cayce, KSD director of communications, said. “Very successfully, they used a fear tactic.”

Dr. Michael Havener, principal, said that even with the budget cuts KHS will still be able to keep opportunity for students as well as meet individual needs. He said the effects of Prop A would not change KHS’s level of education.

Obviously, there isn’t a huge solution to fix everything. The damage is done. Next year class sizes will be more cramped, bus transportation might be for students located 2.5 miles away from the school instead of 2 miles, support staff will be smaller and we’ll be missing some much loved faces.

Williams said right now they are gathering information and planning to run another proposition in the future. To help with the budget, TKC staff offers KSD could lower salaries, increase the cost of attendance to athletic events, rent fields to other teams for use, switch from Groupwise (the secure server used by staff to send emails) to Gmail and get rid of eBackpack, which costs the district \$5 per student.

Although we may be criticizing the district’s handling of the situation, we understand at the end of the day we are all on the side of what is best for the education of our students, and that’s what should be the main goal. ●

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## FAQ REGARDING PROP A/BUDGET CUTS ACCORDING TO TKC

**Q:** Why does KHS need money when they have a 2.5 million dollar journalism center and 10 million dollar pool?

**A:** Both the pool and the journalism center were private donations made to the school meaning the money afforded for those buildings could only be used for those buildings.

**Q:** What is attrition?

**A:** According to *Dictionary.com*, attrition is a gradual reduction in work force without firing of personnel, as when workers resign or retire and are not replaced. It’s how KSD hoped to accomplish most of their reductions.

**Q:** Why don’t we just sell the iPads?

**A:** The money for the iPads was taken from KSD’s designated technology budget. The money from that budget can only be used towards technology, so selling the iPads wouldn’t help even if it was an option.

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