

OPINION

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Yes for Highland Schools

Voters in the Highland Local School District will face the third levy try in four

ballots when they head to the polls May 3. We suggest they end the suspense over the district's unclear future and vote YES on the 6.9-mill emergency request.

There's no question that any new money request in these trying times is a tough sell. In Highland's case, there have been some close calls — less than 150 votes on a 5.9-mill request a year ago — but no relief. District officials, subsequently, have had to engage in some of the same cost-cutting measures that others throughout the state are taking.

In Highland's case, however, there simply isn't that much to cut. The favored arguments of those who oppose new school taxes — bloated administrations, too-frequent requests, etc. — simply aren't in play in a district which employs one principal per building. Teacher salaries are just slightly ahead of the state average and no new taxes have been approved since be-

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fore the turn of the century.

The district manages its money well, but it's at a point where, lacking additional revenue, steps to balance the budget will truly become painful, as in elimination of courses, a dramatic increase in fees and staff reductions.

The levy isn't cheap. It's estimated to cost an additional \$211 annually for each \$100,000 of property valuation. But, with student population growing by more than 1,000 since the last levy was passed, a per-student expense which remains among the lowest in the county and below the state average, and a district which consistently ranks among the best, it's clear that district leaders and staff have done their part at giving residents value for their tax dollars.

Now it's time for those residents to respond. Voters should approve the levy May 3 and let the district continue to build on its reputation of excellence.

