



# Ottawa Hills Local Schools

**Senate Education Committee  
Senate Bill 8 Testimony  
Ottawa Hills Local Schools  
Dr. Kevin S. Miller, Superintendent  
March 1, 2017**

Dear Chair Lehner and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I am Dr. Kevin Miller, Superintendent of Ottawa Hills Local Schools, a small school system nestled in northwest Toledo, next to the University of Toledo. Ottawa Hills holds the distinction of being the first and only school district in the state to earn all A's on the Ohio Department of Education's local report card in 2015 and again in 2016. There is quality education taking place inside our walls. Unfortunately, our buildings are not a reflection of the excellence taking place in our classrooms.

I have been superintendent at Ottawa Hills for seven years. Before that, I served as superintendent of Hicksville Village Schools in Defiance County for seven years.

At Hicksville, I had the pleasure of overseeing the design and development of a new Pre-K through 12 building. The project was funded with \$18.6 million provided through the OSFC, and \$9.9 million in local dollars. The result is a school building that has become the pride of Hicksville. It is a warm, welcoming environment that provides Twenty-first Century learning spaces and modern features in technology, security, and energy-saving building systems.

Ottawa Hills is currently #515 out of 609 districts on the OFCC district eligibility list. Yes, we would be considered an affluent community. But our ability to raise the funds needed to adequately address our building needs is no greater than the school districts in the state with the lowest valuations.

Since the 1940's, Ottawa Hills residents have approved 94% of the levies and bond issues put before them. As a result, Ottawa Hills has the third highest tax rate in the state. When I came to Ottawa Hills in 2010, voters approved a 7.6 mill operating levy. In 2011 and 2012, voters approved 2 mill Permanent Improvement replacement levies. In 2013, voters approved another operating levy—this one for 6.9 mills. After four straight years of school levies, Ottawa Hills voters were then asked to approve a 3.9 mill levy for the Village to replace revenue lost from the phasing out of the estate tax.

However, after five straight years of levies, all of which passed with at least a 65% approval rate, in 2015 when we presented a much needed 10.35 mill, \$24.5 million bond issue for renovations and additions to our buildings, the issue was overwhelmingly defeated. The \$24.5 million is not extravagant. Our elementary building was built in 1930, our high school building in 1939. The bond issue would have allowed us to replace outdated heating systems, install air conditioning, replace aging plumbing and electrical systems, update our technology, ensure handicap accessibility, and install needed security systems.

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Truth be told, the OFCC evaluation of our buildings would point to the need for building a new K through 12 facility. However, the state's share of approximately \$3 million would have our heavily burdened taxpayers facing a bond issue of around 20 mills for the local share. It will never happen. The students and staff of Ottawa Hills Local Schools will never have the Twenty-first Century learning environment that many of the schools around us have—the kind of learning environment we were blessed to give the children of Hicksville.

Our buildings are in need of attention, and that need is now. We can't do everything, but we can do something. One of our greatest needs at Ottawa Hills is security. The designs of our old buildings do not allow us to implement best practices. We have 37 different exterior entrances in our district buildings. We should have the ability to electronically lock all doors with the push of a button. We should be able to monitor the doors and control access through a key fob system. Our offices should be located in such a place that we have a visual of all visitors coming into the building. All visitors should be required to funnel through our offices to access the rest of the building. These changes would require us to relocate our offices at the elementary and build new office spaces at the junior/senior high school. Plain and simple, we don't have the funds.

I have seen what the creation of the OFCC has done for communities like Hicksville, and it is wonderful. Senate Bill 8 allows us all to utilize the commission to maximize that support, ensuring that 100% of the 609 school districts on the eligibility list receive funding. That's a great message for all to share—from school districts to legislators.

Ohio school districts all look different and we have different needs. Ultimately, even when our number comes up, because the state share of a project would be minimal, it would not make sense for Ottawa Hills to enter into the CFAP program. Following the mandates of the design manual would cause us to spend funds unnecessarily.

Giving us an option to receive state dollars sooner would allow us to address crucial security needs. We were able to install new main entry doors and a buzz-in system with grant funds provided a few years ago by the OFCC. There is more we need to do. Re-thinking how the OFCC could best meet the needs of districts who are the bottom of the district eligibility list would allow us to access needed funds and would also absolve the state of their obligation to districts such as ours. In the end, it can be a win-win situation—for our state, for the OFCC, for our schools, and for our children.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today.