

# Keep Our Schools Strong

## ADVOCATE - MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

### Background Information

- Fort Mill Schools are currently losing \$8 million of funding annually from the state
- Next school year, funding levels are projected to be equal to 1995 levels. According to the state formula, EFA Base Student Cost should be \$2720; in the present House budget it is \$1630.
- Fort Mill school District has grown 160% since 1995, - 3465 students in 1995 and 9955 in 2010
- Refer to the district web site <http://www.fort-mill.k12.sc.us/home> to see the list of cuts for the 2010 – 2011 school year; including 47 positions, larger class sizes, middle school sports, etc.
- Fort Mill Schools are recognized as a leader in public education not only in the state, but nationally. With the budget cuts affecting our approach to providing quality programs, this success is jeopardized for all students.
- Index of Taxpaying Ability\*\*

### How can you help

Contact our local legislators, chair of the education committees, speaker of the house and senate and let them know you want to **Keep Our Schools Strong**.

### Local Legislative Delegation:

**Senate District 15: Sen. Robert W. (Wes) Hayes, (803) 212-6410**

**Senate District 16: Sen J. Michael (Mick) Mulvaney, (803) 212-6024**

**House District 45: Rep. Deborah Long, (803) 212-6874**

**House District 48: Rep. Ralph Norman, (803) 212-6888**

### South Carolina Legislative Leadership:

**Senate President *Pro Tempore*: Sen. Glenn McConnell, (803) 212-6610**

**Speaker of the House: Rep. Bobby Harrell, (803) 734-3125**

**Chair, Senate Education Committee: Sen. John E. Courson, (803) 212-6250**

Chair, House Education and Public Works Committee: Rep. Philip D. Owens, (803) 734-3053

E-mail to Senate members: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/html-pages/senateemail.html>

E-mail to House members: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/html-pages/houseemail.html>

(Click appropriate name to send e-mail message)

### What to say

- Ask them - to place education first and protect K-12 education from further funding cuts
- Ask them - to strongly consider the recommendations of the SC Tax Realignment Commission (TRAC)\*
- Ask them - to enact maximum financial flexibility for local school districts
- Ask them - to allow – not mandate – the local school district to furlough employees in order to absorb budget reductions
- Ask them - to allow school districts to reduce local supplements paid to teachers over the State Minimum Teacher Salary Scale in order to preserve jobs and balance budgets
- Ask them - to temporarily hold (for one year) the Index of Taxpaying Ability published in Feb 2009 and use it for funding fiscal year 2010-2011\*\*
- Ask them - to please email or call me back and let me know what you are doing to help  
**Keep Our Schools Strong**

Include your name and address, that you live in their district, email address and phone number, and if you are a parent of grandparent, PTA/O member, booster club member, or any other relevant info.

A concerted advocacy effort that speaks with one positive voice is an effective tool to build relationships with legislators.

### **\*SC Tax Realignment Commission**

On June 24, 2009, the General Assembly passed, and the Governor subsequently signed, Senate Bill 12 (Act 81 of 2009), creating the “South Carolina Tax Realignment Commission”, also known as “TRAC”.

TRAC, a temporary and independent commission comprised entirely of non-legislators, was created to assess the effectiveness of the state’s current tax structure and, in doing so, make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding necessary changes, if any, to that structure. Such changes must be designed to ensure that the state’s tax structure is “balanced” so that the system is “adequate, equitable, and efficient.”

The goal of TRAC, and ultimately of the state's tax structure, is creation of a system that enhances the state's reputation as a "...optimum competitor in efforts to attract business and individuals to locate, live, work and invest..." in South Carolina.

### **\*\*Index of Taxpaying Ability (ITA)**

We are supporting keeping the same ITA until a formula can be rewritten by the state so that it is fair to all school districts in the state.

The ITA is simply the assessed value of taxable property in the district divided by total assessed value of taxable property in the state. The index of taxpaying ability serves as the single variable in the Education Finance Act formula that adjusts the local match a school district must make each year to fully fund the base student cost as set by the legislature. In other words, the index tells us what percentage of the total taxable property in the state, or wealth, is in this particular district.

In the current formula, 4% assessed primary-home property is still included in the ITA formula which generates less state revenue for districts like Fort Mill that are primarily residential based. Act 388 did correct this problem and removed this 4% property for next fiscal year, but the Department of Revenue also changed another portion of the calculation, median sales ratio, which caused more school districts to unfairly gain large amounts of revenue while others lost unjustly. With only the 4% property removed, our school district would have seen an increase in EFA State revenue of approximately \$1.2 million dollars. With the additional change in the formula, the projections show our district only increasing EFA revenue by \$160,000.

The formula must be updated to concur with the current Act 388 legislation; however, this needs to be studied and revised to a methodology fair to all school districts in South Carolina and reflective of their true tax base. This is why we are supporting keeping the ITA the same until it can be rewritten properly.