

## **Local business and community leaders show support for proposed tax increase**

Local business and community leaders in Lexington recently announced the formation of “It’s About Kids ... And Where They Learn,” a group created to demonstrate strong support for the school board’s recent decision to increase property taxes by 5.5 cents per \$100 of property value.

Over the past three years, Fayette County Public Schools and members of the business community, including the Commerce Lexington Inc. Board of Directors, have worked to find a long-term solution to the problem of the district’s aging school buildings and need for new construction to keep up with the growth of the school-aged population. After pursuing all other alternatives at the local and state levels, including a legislative solution and cuts to local spending, the school board passed the tax increase at its August 27 meeting. The additional tax can only be used on bricks and mortar projects.

“The school system has exhausted all possible funding options, and that delay has cost us. The list of necessary renovations, new construction and their projected cost has continued to increase now to the tune of \$290 million,” said Guy Huguelet, Commerce Lexington Inc. board chairman. “Because education is one of the cornerstones of a prosperous economy, we must provide our children with what they need to succeed.”

The group has support from the Home Builders Association of Lexington, Lexington-Bluegrass Association of Realtors and a unanimous endorsement from the 50 members of the Commerce Lexington Inc. Board of Directors, among others.

“As an organization, I and the other members of ‘It’s About Kids ... And Where They Learn,’ believe that a strong public education system is a key to a healthy economy and a positive future for Lexington,” said Alan Stein, leader of the organization and president and CEO of the Lexington Legends. “We are here to confirm strong community support of the board members’ courageous efforts and its decision.”

The proposed tax increase would generate more than six times the current bonding capacity. This will allow the Fayette County Public Schools to undertake construction, renovation and improvement projects on more than one-third of the school buildings by 2008. Without the tax and with the current bonding capacity, several of the projects needed immediately could not be completed until beyond 2020.

“Our entire community benefits from quality schools, and it is the responsibility of the community to ensure that our students are taken care of,” said Bill Lear, attorney at law and managing partner of Stoll, Keenon Ogden PLLC. “If you’re not for this—then you’re not for public education.”

The last time the school district asked the community for a tax increase to support facility needs was more than 40 years ago.

“What is the cost to our community if we turn our backs on the needs of our children and their futures?” asked P.G. Peeples, president and CEO of the Urban League of Lexington-Fayette County. “If we don’t do the right thing now with this tax, when this generation of children becomes adults, I would imagine us having to answer a question that goes like this, ‘What were you all doing as leaders in our community while our buildings were decaying around us?’ If not us, who? If not now, when? Let’s get it done.”