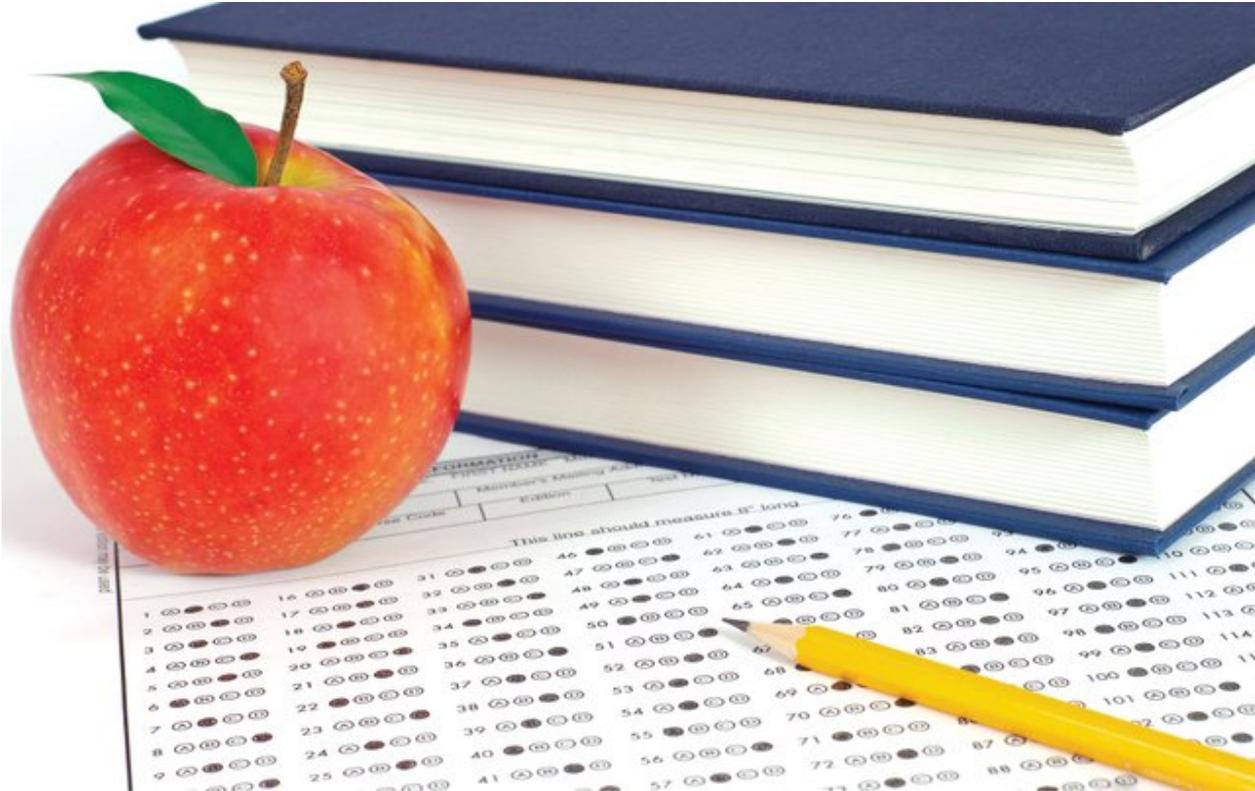




Melville School District Wants to Raise Property Tax Rates

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By: Brittany Wagner

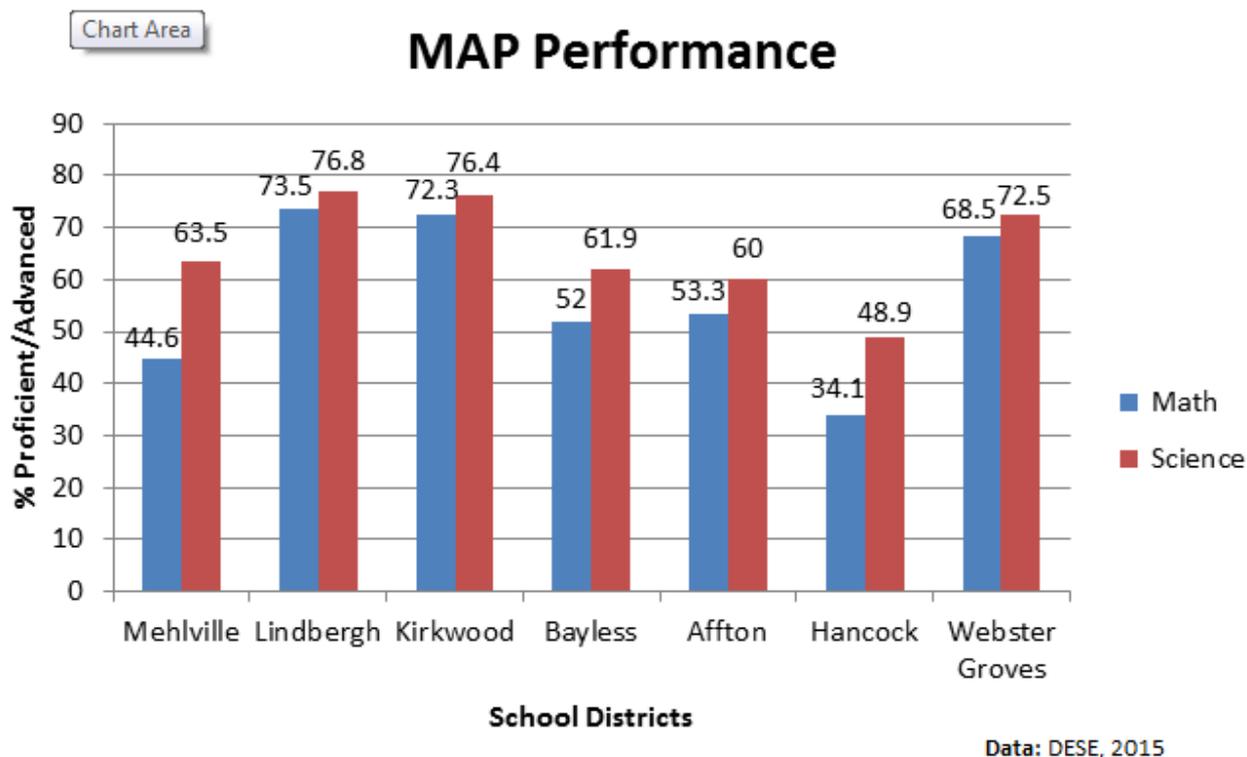
Today voters in the Melville School District will decide if their current property tax rate will increase by 49 cents per \$100 dollars of assessed valuation. If [Prop R](#) passes, the owner of a \$150,000 dollar home will pay about \$140 more per year in property taxes.

Funds raised from the tax increase will be directed toward [priorities](#) such as hiring 16 new certified teachers to help struggling students and restoring technology and student club funding. Proponents of Proposition R say that without additional funds, home values will decrease due to declining academic performance. Opponents believe the additional funds won't be used wisely, in which case the increased tax rate will lower the value of their homes.

Analysts at the Show-Me Institute have looked at how school quality and tax rates affect home prices. In [Real Estate Assessment and Property Taxation](#), analysts demonstrated that the quality of schools and their related tax rates are capitalized into the value of property. As the video below explains, homeowners in the Clayton and Ladue school districts in Richmond Heights pay substantially more for comparable homes with better performing schools and lower tax rates.

In short, homeowners and voters want to get the most bang for their tax bucks. The following data on school performance and school funding may shed some light on what's going on in the district.

First, the graph below shows how Mehlville and the districts around it performed on the MAP test in 2015 in both math and science.



Mehlville doesn't look great. In fact, the district has the second lowest math scores in the area.

But, if we look at a second data set—college readiness indicators like average ACT scores, college remediation rates (the percentage of students who enroll in courses they should have completed in high school), and the number of AP courses the district is offering—Mehlville is performing better than other districts in the area (see table below).

College Readiness Indicators

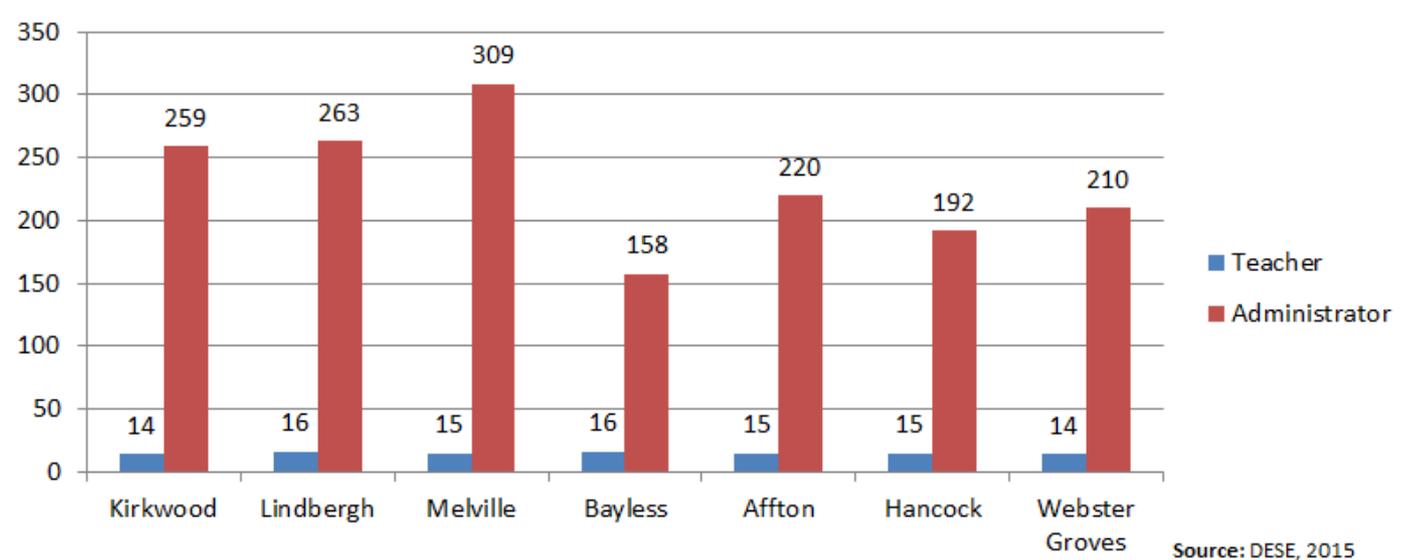
School District	Avg. ACT Score	College Remediation Rate	# of AP Courses Offered
Mehlville	23	32.9	16
Kirkwood	24	30.3	19
Lindbergh	23	23.6	19
Bayless	21.7	59.6	2
Hancock	22	33.3	9

Affton	19.7	50	5
Webster Groves	23.1	24.6	3

Even with [reports of losing teachers to neighboring districts](#), Mehlville is able to offer a large number of AP courses and prepare students for college at about the same rate as neighboring districts with more teachers and administrators (as our next graph displays).

The graph below presents teacher/student and administrator/student ratios. Mehlville has more students per teacher than Kirkwood, but fewer students per teacher than Lindbergh, even though both are better-performing districts. Mehlville also has the highest student-to-administrator ratio in the area.

Students Per Teacher and Adminstrator



Finally, relative to other school district property tax rates in the area, Mehlville has the lowest rate:

School District	Tax Rate Per \$100
Mehlville	\$3.7621
Kirkwood	\$4.2524
Lindbergh	\$4.2906
Bayless	\$4.7682
Hancock	\$4.8164

Affton

\$5.368

Webster Groves

\$5.8584

So what should we make of all of this? Frankly, it's tough to say. In some ways, it appears that Mehlville is operating efficiently. With fewer teachers and administrators and a lower tax burden, the district is achieving about as well on several key indicators as other districts. In other ways, it appears that the district is lagging behind.

The real question is whether new dollars will do anything to move the needle on student performance. Simply hiring more teachers and investing in technology and student clubs doesn't seem particularly compelling. What's more, will raising taxes hurt Mehlville's competitive edge in recruiting new homeowners? Without strong answers to these questions, it is hard to determine if taxpayers should get behind any effort to increase tax rates in the district.

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Brittany Wagner was an education policy research assistant at the Show-Me Institute.

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