Any citizen unhappy that the Palm Beach County School District might ask voters to approve a boost in property taxes should take their complaint to the Florida Legislature.

That’s because lawmakers — in particular, House Republicans — have taken their anti-tax ideology to an extreme. Not only have they refused to raise any taxes on what we’ll generously call principle, they also have refused to allow the state’s school districts to tax property at the same, already-existing rate while property values have risen since the Great Recession. By the solons’ twisted logic, the increase in proceeds would constitute a detested “tax increase.”

So, although Palm Beach County has become more prosperous and real estate values have surged, its public schools are going begging. For three straight years, the legislature has rolled back the schools’ millage rate, from $5.003 in fiscal 2016 to $4.078 for fiscal 2019. (That’s per $1,000 assessed valuation.)

As a result, the heroic tax-cutters of Tallahassee have lavished an owner of a $300,000 property with a savings of $277 in fiscal 2019. But they have deprived the Palm Beach County School District of $178 million.

Editorial: Don’t like raising school taxes? Blame Florida Legislature

OPINION
By The Palm Beach Post Editorial Board
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Note that cities and counties aren’t handicapped by similar rollbacks. Just last week, Palm Beach County commissioners exercised their right to keep the county’s property tax rate as is — the very thing the school district can’t do. Now county government is looking forward to a $52 million windfall because of rising property values.

What is a Millage?
The mill levy is the “tax rate” that is applied to the assessed value of a property. One mill is one dollar per $1,000 of assessed value. The mill levy is the assessed property tax rate used by local governments and other jurisdictions to raise revenue in order to cover annual expenses.

What about the lottery money?
Most of the Florida Lottery funds go to the Bright Futures Scholarships for graduating seniors and higher education.

The District receives enough lottery money each year to fund two days of operational expenses.

Funding
For 2018-19, state lawmakers have only increased basic education funding by $0.47 per student.
What is the need?
The District is committed to placing a certified law enforcement officer in every school. Funds from the approved mill will also be utilized to outfit Police Officers and Schools with the most up-to-date safety equipment.

Development
Additional mental health counselors and school counselors will support the social and emotional development of students.

Achievement
By improving pay for experienced teachers, schools will be able to improve upon academic achievements and keep their best teachers. Students directly benefit from having an experienced teacher in their classroom.

How is this different from the penny sales tax voters approved in 2016?
District schools receive half of the penny sales tax approved by voters in November 2016 for local government infrastructure capital needs. The sales tax proceeds can only be used for school repairs, renovations, classroom technology, IT infrastructure, school buses and support vehicles. Sales tax dollars by law cannot be used for teacher salaries or other operating costs.

How will the money be spent?
Revenue generated by the levy will be dedicated to the following critical needs:

Professionals
1. Continue paying for over 650 fine arts, music, physical education, and career education teachers. Of the 1.0 mill levy, 0.25 mill or approximately $50 million will continue to be dedicated to funding these teacher positions and further expansion of District choice programs.

2. Dedicate 0.25 mill or approximately $50 million to bolstering school safety through both enhanced security measures and student mental health services by increasing the number of School Police Officers and Mental Health Professionals across all District operated schools.

3. Dedicate 0.50 mill or approximately $100 million to keeping experienced teachers in the classroom by improving their pay through retention supplements.