



# GREENVILLE

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## COGG group learns about Montcalm County's special ed services

By **Curtis Wildfong** • Last Updated 9:38 am on Friday, March 21, 2014

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Members of the Coalition of Greater Greenville toured the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District's (MAISD) Seiter Education Service Center in Greenville as the May 6 vote on a millage increase for special education draws near. MAISD Associate Superintendent of Special Education Kathleen Flynn, right, shows the gymnasium to the group as Montcalm County Commissioner John Johansen, at left, listens. — Daily News/Curtis Wildfong

**GREENVILLE** — Representatives of the Coalition of Greater Greenville (COGG) toured the Seiter Education Service Center on Thursday to get an inside look at what a proposed millage increase would help fund.

The Seiter Center, located on East Van Deinse Street in Greenville, serves students ages 2 to 26 who have special needs.

“We serve kids from all seven districts within the Montcalm Area ISD district,” said Principal Derek Cooley.

And it accepts kids with all sorts of needs.

“Some kids come here because they have physical needs and some come who have behavioral problems,” said Kathleen Flynn, associate superintendent of special education.

Students with behavioral needs tend to attend the center on a temporary basis, usually 6 months to 1 year old to undergo social and behavioral guidance. They then tend to return to their school district, Flynn said.

Some students have a mild cognitive impairment, some more severe. Some need physical assistance, others social skills. The school has something for every student with a special need.

On the 30-minute tour around the building, officials representing Greenville businesses, schools, organizations and government caught a glimpse of what is offered at the building.

The tour showed everything from sensory rooms, which offer those with cognitive impairments with lights, textures and sounds, to calming rooms, which provide a soothing atmosphere for students who may be susceptible to sensory overload. In these rooms, lights are dimmed and sound is minimal as students swing or just rest.

In the school's gymnasium there is a basketball hoop, rock climbing wall, a swing and more.

“We try to integrate physical activity into the curriculum,” Flynn said. “We get children right out of their wheelchair and walking or being mobile.”

The school uses technology, like iPads, as a visual tool to engage students and allow them to set daily tasks and answer questions.

Typically, the Seiter Center has around 50 students, but that is just a “snippet” of the overall special education system in the Montcalm area, according to Superintendent Scott Koenigsknecht.

There are around 1,800 students who the MAISD district serve in some capacity. Many of the school districts have different levels of their own special education program and the MAISD works with each one.



Montcalm Area Intermediate School District Associate Superintendent of Special Education Kathleen Flynn displays a classroom at the Seiter Education Service Center during a tour for Coalition of Greater Greenville members Thursday.  
— Daily News/Curtis Wildfong

Thursday's tour for COGG officials was part of the MAISD's efforts of informing the public of what the Seiter Center and the MAISD offer in special education as the May 6 vote on a millage increase draws nearer.

The millage will ask voters across the MAISD district, which includes Montcalm County and multiple others, whether or not to restore the MAISD's special ed millage — currently 2.1878 mills — to 2.50, as well as add another mill for a total of 3.50 mills. If approved, the nearly \$2.6 million it is estimated to raise will allow the MAISD to continue its current operations at no direct cost to districts, provide new buses for the MAISD and also provide a teacher consultant to coordinate required post secondary transition activities.

Because special education is mandatory, districts in Montcalm County have been



funding it through their general fund, meaning less money for general education. The millage proposal is an effort to fund special education in the county, allowing districts to use more of its general fund on general education, or at least avoiding having to make cuts.

The MAISD most recently put a special ed millage increase request on the ballot in 2002. It failed by 2,006 “no” votes to 1,657 “yes” votes.

Since then, Montcalm County has become the lowest debt-levying ISD in the region, coming in last for special ed funding per pupil after Ionia, Gratiot-Isabella, Kent, Mecosta-Osceola, Newaygo and Clinton counties.

In the past seven years, the MAISD has eliminated 63 positions, ended several non-mandated services such as a psychiatrist and a job placement service, and closed a number of programs such as an early childhood center and the H.O. Steele High School program.

The district now shares many services with surrounding counties as a result of increased cost and low revenue.

“We’re turning every stone over that we can turn over,” Koenigsknecht said.

## About the Author



### Curtis Wildfong

Curtis Wildfong is the Greenville area reporter for The Daily News. Wildfong, a 2009 Central Michigan University graduate, brings a passion for covering hard news stories that impact all members of the community. He lives in Sparta with his wife and daughter.

Curtis Wildfong has written 233 articles.



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### Montcalm County school officials hope time is right for special ed millage

Saturday, March 15th, 2014

Posted in: [E.Slider](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Photos](#)

Twenty-six years.

That’s how much time has gone by since Montcalm County voters last approved an increase in special education funding. In the meantime, Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) officials have made more than \$2.5 million in cuts to special education services and reduced their workforce by 22 percent. Programs not required

by law have been consolidated or eliminated, including the shutdown of Harold O. Steele Alternative High School in Fenwick in 2006.

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## Montcalm Area Intermediate School District special education millage not moving forward

Sunday, March 11th, 2012

Posted in: [Local](#)

A proposed Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) special education millage will not be moving forward due to lack of support from school districts. All seven school districts in Montcalm County decided in their February board of education meetings whether to support the millage. Five supported it and two did not.

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## MAISD eliminates special education supervisor position

Thursday, April 11th, 2013

Posted in: [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#), [Local](#)

Because of program and budget cuts, the Montcalm Area Intermediate School District (MAISD) Board of Education made the decision to eliminate a staff position. During Wednesday's meeting, MAISD Superintendent Scott Koenigsknecht told the board that because of the economy, the reduction has to take place.

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