



Owatonna Public Schools Update

Strong schools = Strong communities

Message from the Superintendent



While we are very excited to welcome students back to school, last spring and this fall are not what we ever imagined. COVID-19

has upended routines, changed lifestyles and taught us all a lot about patience and flexibility.

Our number one commitment is to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment—for our staff and for our students. We've spent the summer learning from last spring, reviewing state guidance and developing plans for how best to serve our students this fall. We know that things could change at any time, but we are ready with a school start plan, along with options if conditions change.

As you go about your daily lives, I ask that you show compassion and kindness to every parent, student and school staff member you see. They are demonstrating adaptability, resilience, creativity and patience in the face of ever-changing circumstances. A little kindness can go a long way. **We are all in this together.** It is clear that our local collective effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 will determine whether or not students can attend and remain in school in-person. **Thank you for your continued support as a community.**

We are #OwatonnaProud!

Jeff Elstad, Superintendent
jelstad@isd761.org 507.444.8601

Owatonna's Safe Learning Plan

Planning for various options

District staff—with input from parents and students—spent the summer preparing for a safe return to school this fall. Using guidance from the Governor and Minnesota Department of Health, we prepared for three different learning models: **In Person Learning, Hybrid Learning and Distance Learning.**



In Person Learning

Traditional, in-class face to face learning with modifications for social distancing and extra safety precautions



Hybrid Learning

A combination of in person and hybrid learning with creative space utilization to maximize in person attendance



Distance Learning

All students use online platform Available to all students

The safety of our students and staff is a top priority as we return to school in September:

- Face mask/covering requirements
- Enhanced cleaning and sanitation protocols
- Social distancing
- Space modifications to maximize social distancing
- Breakfast and lunch adjustments for safe and sanitary meals at all schools
- Soap and water or hand sanitizer frequently used throughout the school day



Safe Learning Plan continues on page 4

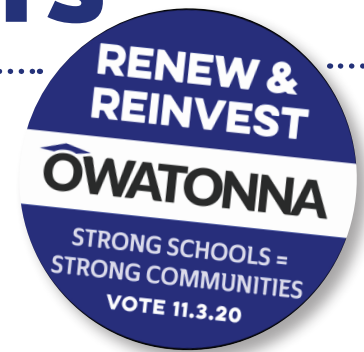
Working Together to Keep Families Fed

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this summer Owatonna Public Schools **served more than 55,000 meals** to kids through 'grab and go' stations around the district. That's **more than triple what was served in summer 2019**. Healthy minds require healthy bodies!

State of the District: September 23, 6:30 PM

Get a first-hand update from Superintendent Jeff Elstad on current initiatives in the district: back-to-school during a pandemic, new high school, Levy 2020 and more. The update will be live-streamed so you can watch from the comfort of your home. Check the district website for viewing information.

LEVY 2020 FACTS



On November 3, 2020, Owatonna School District residents will be asked to vote on two school funding requests to maintain quality academic programs and support services for students.

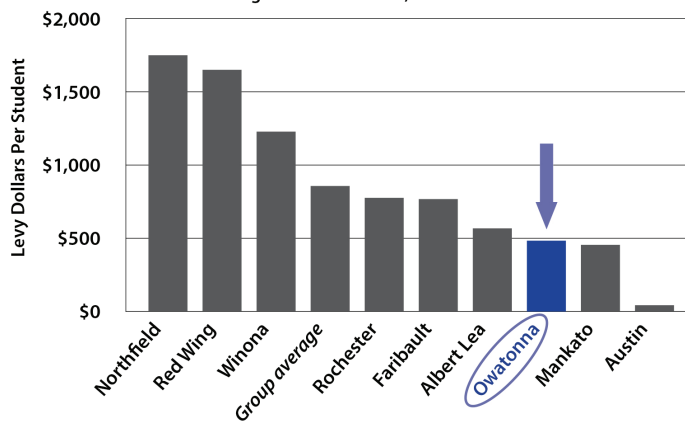
- **Q1 - Renew.** Requests a straight renewal of the district's existing operating levy which is about to expire. Operating levies provide critical funding for classrooms, instruction and other operating costs.
- **Q2 - Reinvest.** Requests a phased-in increase to the district's operating levy in 2022 and 2025. By phasing in the increase over time, it also phases in the tax impact with **no tax increase until 2022**. The additional revenue provided if question two is approved would enable the district to maintain quality programming and activities, appropriate class sizes and career-technical education programs, while providing financial stability for the next several years. *Q2 is contingent and can only pass if voters first approve Q1.*

A shared approach

The School Board unanimously approved a shared approach that **combines budget cuts on the district side ... and a request to voters to increase the operating levy on the community side**. This balance acknowledges the community impact of COVID-19 by reducing the levy request through budget cuts and using a phased-in levy to only ask for what is needed, when it's needed.

Voter Approved Operating Levies

Big 9 School Districts, 2020-21



Owatonna Public Schools' voter-approved operating levy is in the bottom third of the Big 9 Schools—and lower than Fairbault and Northfield. These levies are one way local communities support their schools and help pay for school operating costs.

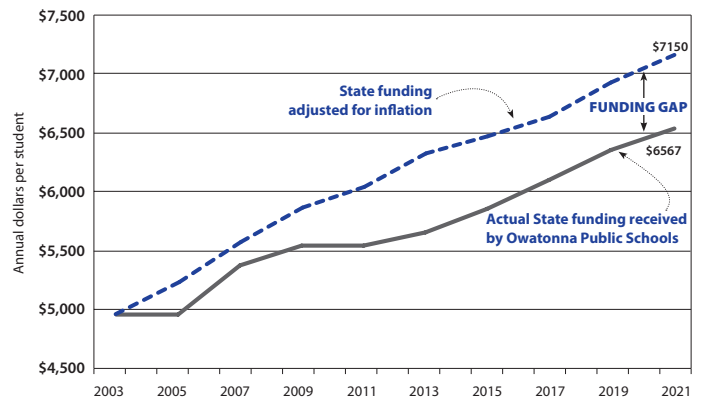
Why now?

The decision to request support from district voters was based on a thorough review of district long-term financial projections and discussions about inadequate state funding and unfunded mandates that are putting pressure on an already stretched budget.

Finance facts

- State funding is not keeping pace with inflation or increasing educational costs, resulting in a \$3 million gap.

State Basic General Education Funding per Student



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, Feb 2020 inflation estimates

- Required academic and support programs **cost the district nearly \$7 million more than it receives** each year from the state and federal governments.
- To balance the budget, the district already cut \$500,000 in 2019-20 and \$2 million in 2020-21.
- If the operating levy is not renewed in November 2020, the **district will lose \$2.5 million per year**, requiring additional cuts to programs and services.
- If voters renew the levy, **the state will match every three local dollars with one state dollar** through state equalization aid. This additional money will only come to Owatonna Public Schools if voters renew the levy and reinvest in the schools.

How does a phased-in levy work?

A phased-in levy increases the levy over time, rather than ask for the full amount all at once. This means the resulting tax increase is also phased-in over time. Because the levy increase being requested would only occur in 2022 and 2025, the tax increase for this levy only happens in 2022 and 2025. The School Board saw this as a **fiscally conservative and respectful approach**—only asking for what is needed, when it's needed.

Bonds are for building, levies are for learning

In 2019, the community approved bonds to build a new high school—but **bond funds can't be used for school operating costs**. These November 2020 ballot requests are to maintain and increase the district's operating levy, which is a legally separate funding stream from building bonds. Unlike with bonds, agricultural land is not taxed on an operating levy question—only the house, garage and one acre.

Our community recognizes that strong schools help build strong communities*:

94% rate the job performance of teachers and instructional staff as excellent or good

93% rate quality of Owatonna Public Schools education as excellent or good

91% agree the community receives a good value from its investment in our schools

*Fall 2018 community survey

Estimated Monthly Tax Increase*

	2021	2022	2025
Q1: Renew existing levy	+\$0.50	+\$0.50	+\$0.50
Q2: Reinvest by increasing levy	\$0	+\$10	+\$10

*School tax increase estimates are for this referendum only and are based on the \$175,000 average home value in the district. An online tax impact calculator is available at isd761.org/levy.

What if both questions fail?

If voters do not approve the two ballot questions, the **district will face a total of at least \$8.5 million in budget cuts from 2020-21 through 2022-23**, resulting in class size increases through teacher and staff layoffs, cuts to school and district support services, and cuts to academics, activities, athletic and music programs.

Voting Information

Polls will be open 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on November 3, 2020—but **you can avoid lines and any health concerns by voting early**. Absentee/early voting begins September 18 and can be done in-person at the Steele County Auditor's Office located at 630 Florence Avenue or by applying for your ballot online and then mailing it in before Election Day. Learn more about where and how to vote at www.mnvotes.org.

Learn more

Visit: isd761.org/levy

Email: levy@isd761.org

Call: 507.444.8650

New High School Update



Thanks to the community's support in November 2019 and several teams that have been meeting since December 2019, plans for the new high school are marching along. A full presentation was made to the School Board in June, based on an agreed-upon set of principles.

Additional design work and construction bidding will take place for the next several months, with groundbreaking expected in spring 2021. The new high school will open in fall 2023.

More information and updates are on the district website (www.isd761.org).

Owatonna High School Design Concepts

- Students first
- Welcoming and inclusive
- Safe and comfortable environment
- Innovating, inspiring and exciting
- A source of excitement and pride
- Opportunities for all to succeed
- Flexible spaces
- Community use
- Foster a sense of community
- Learning should be on display
- Promotes collaboration
- Accommodate student choice
- Personalized learning
- Foster student ownership over their learning

POSTAL CUSTOMER
 ECRWSS

Safe Learning Plan *continued*

How we'll start the school year






In addition to local COVID-19 data, the models that each grade level will use to start the school year take into account the ability to keep students in smaller groups to limit the risk of spread, the value of in-person learning and the challenges of younger children being home unsupervised. All families were given the option of enrolling in full-time distance learning for the entire semester, which about 20% of our families chose.

Based on Steele County's COVID case rate in mid-August, the schedules shown at right will be used for school start (Sept. 2 for grades 9-12; Sept. 3 for grades 6-8; Sept. 8 for grades K-5). Staff are prepared to shift to a different learning model if conditions change.










Stay Up-To-Date on School News!

Follow along with district news by visiting the district's website (www.isd761.org). You can also sign up to receive our monthly eNewsletter by sending your name and email address to shoffman@isd761.org.

Grades E-5 Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
 School In Person	 School In Person	 School In Person	 School In Person	 School In Person

Grades 6-12 Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
 Group 1 School in person	 Group 1 School in person	 Group 1 & 2 Distance Learning & Academic Support Opportunity for students, staff and parents to connect and provide individual and small group support.	 Group 2 School in person	 Group 2 School in person
 Group 2 Distance Learning	 Group 2 Distance Learning		 Group 1 Distance Learning	 Group 1 Distance Learning

You can learn more about the district's Safe Learning Plan at www.isd761.org.

The first day of school is just around the corner and I find myself filled with all sorts of excitement. I am excited for laughter to once again fill our classrooms and to watch new friendships form. BIG air hugs to the kindergarten class of 2021. We are excited to meet you!

—Jen Koziolk, Kindergarten, McKinley