

WAUSAU SCHOOL DISTRICT

FINAL

Updated September 15, 2021

We want your opinion!

Dear Community Member,

Last April, voters in the Wausau School District were presented with two referendum questions. One was to provide appropriate staffing levels and support the behavioral, physical, social, emotional, and mental health of our students. The other was to address important facility needs.

While voters approved the first question, the second question was not approved.

Now, the Board of Education is asking for your assistance as it works to find a solution to the district's facility needs that voters can support. We invite you to take this survey, which is open through October 15, 2021. The survey is anonymous and takes about 15 minutes to complete.

Information from the survey will be used by district leaders and the Board of Education to evaluate solutions that meet district needs, are financially responsible, and move the district community forward.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact the Longfellow Administration Center at 715-261-0500.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Members of the Wausau School Board

Pat McKee, President
James Bouché, Vice President
Lance Trollop, Treasurer
Karen Vandenberg, Clerk
Jon Creisher
Ka Lo
Cody Nikolai
Jane A. Rusch
Lee Webster

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**Wausau School District Facilities Survey
General Questions**

We will begin with some general questions. Those marked with an asterisk are required.

1) What is your age?*

- 18 or under
- 19–25
- 26–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55–64
- 65 or over

2) Where do you reside?*

- City of Wausau
- Town of Rib Mountain
- Village of Maine
- Town of Stettin
- Town of Wausau
- Town of Texas
- Town of Berlin
- Town of Hewitt
- Other _____

3) How long have you lived in the school district?*

- Fewer than 2 years
- Between 2 and 5 years
- Between 5 and 10 years
- Between 10 and 20 years
- Between 20 and 30 years
- More than 30 years

4) Please check all of the following that apply to you.*

- I have school-aged children (ages 4+)
- I have preschool-aged children (ages 0-3)
- I have children who currently attend a Wausau School District school
- I have children who graduated from or previously attended a Wausau School District school
- I have grandchildren who currently attend or have attended a Wausau School District school
- I have attended a Wausau School District school

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- I am a community member who has never had children attending a Wausau School District school
- I am currently a student at a Wausau School District school
- I am currently employed by the Wausau School District
- Other _____

5) If you have school-aged children, which schools do your children currently attend? (Select all that apply. If you do not have school-aged children, you may skip this question.)

- Wausau East High School
- Wausau West High School
- Horace Mann Middle School
- John Muir Middle School
- Franklin Elementary School
- Grant Elementary School
- Hawthorn Hills Elementary School
- Hewitt-Texas Elementary School
- G.D. Jones Elementary School
- Lincoln Elementary School
- Maine Elementary School
- John Marshall Elementary School
- Rib Mountain Elementary School
- Riverview Elementary School
- South Mountain Elementary School
- Stettin Elementary School
- Thomas Jefferson Elementary School
- Wausau Area Virtual Education (WAVE)
- Enrich, Excel, Achieve (EEA) Learning Academy Charter (Grades 6-12)
- Wausau Area Montessori Charter School (Grades K-6)
- 4K and Early Childhood
- Public school outside of the District
- Private school
- I do not have school-aged children
- My children are homeschooled
- Other _____

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6) Where do you get information about the Wausau School District? (Select all that apply.)

- Parent organizations
- Friends or neighbors
- My children and their friends
- District mailings
- District website
- School newsletters (email)
- District newsletters (email)
- School board meetings
- Teachers and staff
- Wausau Daily Herald* (online or hard copy)
- Wausau Pilot & Review* (online)
- Local blogs
- Local television
- Local radio
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Other _____

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement.

7) I am satisfied with the Wausau School District.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- No opinion

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8) On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely would you be to recommend the Wausau School District to a friend, colleague or family member? (A score of zero indicates you would not recommend the district, while a score of 10 indicates you would be extremely likely to recommend the district.)

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10

9) How would you describe the Wausau School District to someone who is not familiar with it?

**Wausau School District Facilities Survey
General Questions**

10) How familiar are you with the school district's facility needs and the process the board is using to find solutions? *

- I am very well informed of the needs and process
- I have some familiarity with the needs and process
- I have no knowledge of the needs and process

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Wausau School District Facilities Survey Needs Questions

The Wausau School District proudly serves nearly 8,010 students in grades 4K-12. Our 20 schools include two high schools, two middle schools (grades 6-8), 13 elementary schools (grades K-5), two charter schools, and one virtual school.

While our facilities have been well maintained, the board is considering solutions related to four separate categories, as described below.

1) OUTDATED FACILITY SYSTEMS AND DEFERRED MAINTENANCE NEEDS

While our maintenance staff has made the most of the district's maintenance funding, facility systems in several of our buildings have outlived their useful lives. This includes inefficient and outdated heating and cooling systems in some buildings. In other buildings, systems are obsolete and no longer supported by their manufacturer. These needs also include electrical systems that are not conducive to modern classroom use and lights that are both inefficient and no longer effective.

Additionally, several of our buildings have inefficient single-pane windows, worn-out floor coverings, worn ceilings, and aging roofs and pavement that require replacement.

While the district does have a maintenance budget to cover some of these costs, under the Wisconsin school finance system, most districts are not able to set aside enough money to cover big-ticket items like those described above.

2) SAFETY AND SECURITY NEEDS

While our facilities have served generations of district residents well, most of our buildings were constructed before newer school security standards were established. Our schools are safe. However, some of them require enhanced entrance security upgrades and modern emergency systems, such as updated fire alarms, mass notification systems, and video surveillance. In addition, traffic into and out of our schools can become congested and should be addressed as pavement is being replaced.

3) OUTDATED INSTRUCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT NEEDS

Education has changed significantly since many of our school buildings were designed decades ago. While classrooms in our schools generally function well for traditional instruction, they are not aligned with the kinds of flexible environments found in colleges, universities, and workplaces today. The district has a need to create larger spaces for group learning, separate cafeterias and gymnasiums, and additional space for after-school programs and community events.

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4) OUTDATED CO-CURRICULAR AND FINE ARTS FACILITIES

Over the years, as the district budget has tightened, the Board of Education has sought to put money into the district's core responsibility of advancing student learning, achievement, and success. However, this has also meant that while co-curricular and fine arts facilities have been maintained, relatively little has been invested to improve these facilities to the degree that other districts in the area have.

This has led to a situation in which programs have limited access to practice and performance spaces due to increased participation in co-curricular activities, coupled with wear and tear and some inadequate facilities. Areas of particular interest include:

- Wear and tear on grass fields at several campuses
- Lack of lighting on outdoor spaces
- Inadequate training facilities and locker rooms
- Inadequate fine arts practice and preparation spaces
- Need to improve the guest experience

Improving facilities could enhance safety and offer greater access to programming, as well as develop new co-curricular opportunities for students.

As noted, the school board is considering solutions to address the district's facilities challenges — something that would require voter approval through a referendum. The board has committed to addressing these needs with no or very little increase in the tax rate. This is made possible due to the retirement of existing district debt.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

11) I believe the district's facility needs must be addressed now.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Wausau School District Facilities Survey Solutions Questions

After the April 2021 referendum, the Board of Education and district leaders worked to prioritize the needs that have been identified and explored next steps. Board members have determined that (1) outdated facilities needs and deferred maintenance and (2) safety and security should be priorities for the district to address. The board also determined that efforts should be made to minimize or eliminate tax impacts on voters.

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Board members feel that as the more urgent needs are being addressed, less urgent but still important needs should also be considered. To that end, board members look to get the input of community members about addressing these items, as well.

The specific items being considered by the board are as follows:

Solutions for Outdated Facility Systems and Deferred Maintenance Needs

1. Replacing roofs
2. Replacing windows and doors due to inefficiency and wear
3. Improving heating/cooling, ventilation, and plumbing systems
4. Installing air conditioning at all schools
5. Replacing pavement and sidewalks due to deterioration

Solutions for Safety and Security Needs

1. More secure and welcoming entrances
2. Improved mass notification systems
3. Improved video surveillance
4. Safer traffic flow and parking

Solutions for Outdated Learning Spaces

1. Modern and functional classrooms
2. Innovative hands-on learning spaces (i.e. labs, career/tech ed spaces, maker spaces, Environmental Learning Center)
3. Adequate Pupil Services spaces (i.e. counseling, social workers, school psychologists, behavior intervention spaces)
4. Separate gymnasiums and cafeterias at all schools lacking one or the other

Solutions for Co-curricular and Fine Arts Facilities

1. Renovated choir/band/orchestra rehearsal and performance spaces
2. Drama/theater (i.e. improve and expanded rehearsal and storage/set construction spaces)
3. Athletics (i.e. improved training, practice, and performance spaces, artificial turf fields, renovated locker rooms, and field lighting)

Based on district needs and the priorities outlined, voters may be asked to consider the approval of a referendum to finance a solution to the district's facility needs.

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Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

12) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question to address Outdated Facility Systems and Deferred Maintenance needs, as described. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question to address Safety and Security needs, as described. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question to address Outdated Instructional Environment needs, as described. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question to address Solutions for Co-curricular and Fine Arts Facilities needs, as described. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Wausau School District Facilities Survey
Solutions Questions**

Finance

In developing a solution to the district’s facility needs, the school board understands that addressing all of the district’s needs at one time may not be feasible.

The board is currently considering two solutions. One option would have no additional tax impact and the second would result in an increase in taxes.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The school district has some debt that is retiring. As a result, the district could potentially borrow up to \$150 million to address facility needs with no increase in taxes. Similarly, the district could borrow up to \$200 million to address facility needs with a \$0.35 tax increase per \$1,000 of equalized home value. This equates to a \$35 increase per \$100,000 home.

Please consider these questions and answers.

How can this be?

One of the questions we have received is how property taxes can remain unchanged while the district is taking on new debt. The fact is that the district is retiring some debt. If voters approved a referendum, the new debt to address the district's facility needs would essentially replace the old debt.

Would taxes go down if the board does not move now to address the district's facility needs?

It is true that taxes would go down in the short term if the district did not address its facility needs and debt is retired. However, the retirement of debt would also cause a decrease in district costs and thus a reduction in state aid in subsequent years. Therefore, taxpayers would not see the full tax savings of the retired debt and the district's facilities would not be addressed, creating potentially greater taxpayer costs in the future as facilities deteriorate.

Now, we would like to ask a series of questions related to tax impacts.

16) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question if I felt it was the correct solution to address the district’s needs and it had no tax increase over the current year, based on the information presented above. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

17) I would vote “yes” on a referendum question if I felt it was the correct solution to address the district’s needs and additional facility needs and it had a tax impact of \$35 over current taxes for every \$100,000 of equalized value based on the information presented above. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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**Wausau School District Facilities Survey
Solutions Questions**

To address these facility challenges, the Board of Education would need to ask voters to borrow funds to address significant facility projects through a referendum.

The following solutions could address the needs and priorities relating to the district's facilities challenges. Please review the options below and indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Option #1: The first option would address deferred maintenance needs and modernizing learning spaces primarily in schools in grades Pre-K through 8. It would also address safety and security needs. Option #1 would require a \$150 million investment that, if approved, would have no tax increase over the current year.

18) I would vote “yes” on Option #1, a \$150 million investment question having a tax impact of \$0 increase over current year, based on the information presented above.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Option #2: In addition to the items identified above, the second option would also address corresponding needs at the high schools. Option #2 would require a \$200 million investment that, if approved, would have a tax impact of \$35 per year on a \$100,000 home (\$35 per year for every \$100,000 of property value).

19) I would vote “yes” on Option #2, a \$200 million investment question based on the option outlined above, having a tax impact of \$35 over current taxes for every \$100,000 of equalized value, based on the information presented above.*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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Wausau School District Facilities Survey
Possible Restructuring of the Wausau School District

In the previous section, you learned about significant facility needs within the Wausau School District. In addition to facility needs the district has an interest in possibly restructuring the Wausau School District. This section seeks community input on two important questions.

The first is related to inequitable programming at our two high schools, Wausau East and Wausau West. The second is related to the inefficiencies of operating 13 elementary schools. Please know that we will have some in-person community sessions that will be based on the information provided in this survey.

Let's first explore the inequities of our two high schools. While the district has worked to ensure consistency between the schools in terms of what they offer students, the differences in enrollment have created a situation in which the schools offer inequitable educational experiences.

One solution the district is considering is to create a dual-campus high school. Under this model, 9th and 10th graders would attend high school at one existing campus, while 11th and 12th graders would complete their education at the other school. The benefits of this would include every student having access to all curricular and co-curricular programs, such as:

- Career and Technical Education Programs
- Advanced Placement Curriculum
- International Baccalaureate Programs
- Athletic and Fine Arts Programs
- Student support programming

Moreover, these efficiencies could improve the experience for students and staff and could lead to expanded programming, which could include:

- Intramural Sports
- Extracurricular Offerings
- Expanded Course Offerings

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

20) It is critically important that all students have access to all high school programming.

*

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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21) It is critically important that all students have access to all high school co-curricular programs. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Understanding that you may have a lot of questions at this time, we would like to get a sense of the levels of support in our community for the creation of a dual-campus high school, as described above.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

22) I would support a dual-campus model, based on the description above, to ensure all high school students have access to the same level of programming. *

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The idea of merging elementary schools has been explored previously. However, the pandemic offered limited opportunities to have a transparent and robust discussion about this idea with the community. This survey is a new attempt to seek the opinion of a broader audience to gauge the interest of merging elementary schools to make the District more efficient and better able to withstand fluctuations in enrollment and funding, while still offering the highest quality education.

23) I would support merging two or more elementary schools to accomplish the goals listed above.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

24) I would support merging two or more elementary schools to accomplish the goals listed above even if it impacts the school(s) where children from my family attend.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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25) Please use the space below to provide any additional information to the board as it considers this and other solutions to address the district's facility needs.

Thank you for your participation!