REFERENDUM PASSED! THANK YOU VOTERS!!

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Addressing Financial Needs in the School District of Wisconsin Dells

Over the years, the School District of Wisconsin Dells has served students and families well. We take great pride in offering a top-notch educational experience in a tight-knit environment, ensuring our graduates are prepared for the next stages of their lives.

Among many other successes, the School District of Wisconsin Dells received a four-star (exceeds expectations) rating from the state Department of Public Instruction, and students in grades 3–5 had a higher percentage when it came to scoring Proficient or Advanced on the Wisconsin Forward Exam for Mathematics compared with area schools and the state average. Our high school students have access to 10 dual enrollment courses specific to career and technical education, as aligned with the Wisconsin Technical College System, and have access to eight Advanced Placement courses.

Over the years, the board and district administration have worked extremely hard to make the most of every single dollar community members have invested in their local schools. The School District of Wisconsin Dells is a fiscally responsible, low-spending school district. In fact, we're one of the lowest-spending districts in the entire state.

Our district spends $767 less than the state average per student every year, making the School District of Wisconsin Dells one of the lowest spending districts in Wisconsin.

Although we have very high-performing schools, our district faces significant financial challenges. Most of these challenges are out of our control and largely related to the state's school funding system.

On Tuesday, November 8, 2022, district residents will vote on a referendum. If approved, it would provide the School District of Wisconsin Dells with the financial support needed for the next three years.

Challenges Tied to State Revenue Limit

Wisconsin schools operate under a state-imposed revenue limit that restricts the amount of money they can receive each year. The outdated formula the state uses means the School District of Wisconsin Dells does not receive enough revenue to adequately fund its programs and services.

The School District of Wisconsin Dells is locked into a low revenue limit: Our district's revenue limit has always been lower than most other districts. This is because when revenue limits were created by the state in 1993, low-spending, frugal districts like ours were locked into a very low limit.

Revenue limits have not increased enough: Although revenue limits are adjusted every two years as part of the state budget process, the School District of Wisconsin Dells' revenue limit lags behind increasing costs, largely because of inflation.

Our enrollment has increased faster than our revenue limit: Revenue limits are based on a three-year rolling average. This means that it takes three years for the district's revenue limit to catch up to increases in student enrollment. As a destination district with a growing enrollment, this has created financial challenges as we incur costs for new students.

The needs of our students have increased dramatically: Just like most other districts in the state, our district has seen increased costs over the years, especially in the areas of special education and mental health. The funding our district receives is insufficient to cover the expenses of state and federally mandated services.

Costs for things like running our buses and heating our schools continue to rise, as do other expenses that are out of the district's control.

We invite you to learn more about the district's financial challenges and how we can move forward in a way that maintains the long-term financial health of our local schools.

November 2022 Referendum

To protect our district's great reputation and maintain programs and services, the Board of Education will place a referendum question on the November ballot to exceed the district's revenue limit by $1.2 million each year for four years (for a total of $4.8 million over this four-year period).

To maintain our high level of student success, the district must maintain its current level of instruction, focus on small class sizes, provide a full range of academic programming, and retain its experienced staff.

If passed by voters, the mill rate will drop from $7.76 in 2021-22 to $6.81 in 2022-23. To clarify, the mill rate will drop almost 10% even with the referendum's passage. This is due to an increase in per pupil equalization aid for the 2022-23 school year as well as higher equalized valuations in the district.

The November 2022 referendum is a four-year, non-recurring referendum. This means it will expire at the end of the three-year referendum window.

Ballot Language

Shall the School District of Wisconsin Dells, Sauk, Adams, Columbia, Juneau and Marquette Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by $1,200,000 per year beginning with the 2022-2023 school year and ending with the 2025-2026 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of maintaining current elementary, middle and high school class sizes, technology equipment, existing career

and technical education programming, along with operational costs associated with all school buildings?

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the district's financial needs? Why does the district have these needs?

The School District of Wisconsin Dells faces significant financial challenges that are largely out of our control and are the result of the state's school funding system.

In short, Wisconsin schools operate under a state-imposed revenue limit that restricts the amount of money they can receive. When revenue limits were created by the state in 1993, low-spending, frugal districts like ours were locked into a very low limit. As a result, the School District of Wisconsin Dells is locked into a low revenue limit: our district's revenue limit has always been lower than most other districts.

In addition, because revenue limits are based on a three-year average, it takes three years for the district's revenue limit to catch up to increases in student enrollment. Because the School District of Wisconsin Dells is a destination district, our enrollments have increased faster than our revenue limit. This has created financial challenges as we incur the costs for new students.

Finally, the needs of our students have increased dramatically, especially in the areas of special education and mental health. These are expenses for state and federal mandated services that the district receives inadequate funding for. Finally, the costs for items like running our buses and heating our schools continue to increase, as do other expenses that are out of the district's control.

These challenges require the attention of our entire community if we are to prevent further cuts to programs and services and maintain the high-quality educational experience our residents have come to expect from the School District of Wisconsin Dells.

The School Board and district administration have worked extremely hard to make the most of every single dollar community members have invested into their local schools. As a result, our schools have among the lowest per-pupil expenditures in the entire state. However, the time has come to find a solution to these needs.

What has the district done to manage its financial challenges?

The current school board, like past ones, is focused on raising student achievement by following a strategic plan and making the most of every dollar invested in the schools. Our schools are very low spending.

In fact, the School District of Wisconsin Dells spends $767 less on a per-student basis when compared with the state average, and the district's mill rate this past year was $0.91 lower than the state average. Last year, the district had a mill rate of $7.76. This year, the district will have an estimated mill rate of no higher than $6.81.

The district also has a healthy fund balance, which means it does not need to engage in expensive short-term borrowing. Finally, the district's new high school, completed in 2020, was on time and under budget, and the district's new 700-seat auditorium, which is now under construction, will be completed on donated land, with building costs solely covered by donations.

Didn't voters recently approve a referendum?

In 2018, voters approved a referendum that allowed the district to build a new high school. That project, which was completed in 2020, was finished on time and under budget.

It is important to note that under state law, districts must have facilities and operations budgets. The challenges that will be addressed by the November referendum will address the district's operational needs.

The district's new 700-seat auditorium, now under construction, will be completed on donated land, with building costs also covered by donations.

In 2021, voters were presented with an operational referendum. That solution did not pass.

Can the district use federal COVID relief funds (ESSER Funds) to address its financial needs?

The district has received one-time federal funds through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, which was part of the COVID-19 relief effort. Although this money has been helpful, it is temporary in nature and will do little to address our long-term financial needs.

The district is largely using these one-time funds to help offset the impact of COVID-19 on student learning, as required by law.

Will district residents get to vote on this?

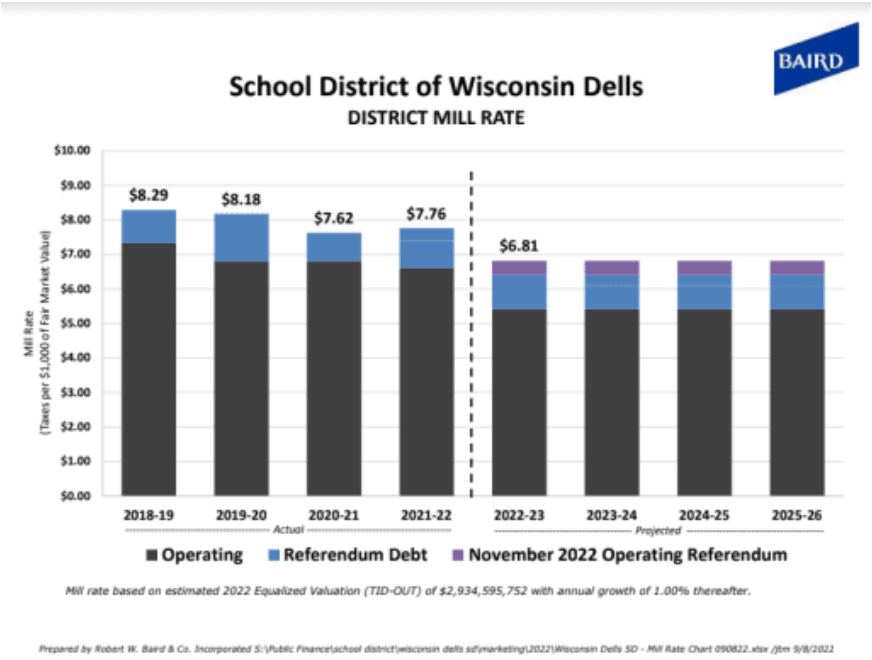
At its Monday, August 22, 2022 meeting, the Wisconsin Dells Board of Education approved a referendum question that will appear on the ballot on Tuesday, November 8, 2022.

If the referendum is approved, how would the district use the funds?

If voters approve, the November 2022 referendum will address the ongoing costs for the day-to-day operation of the school district in accordance with the district's strategic plan. This includes maintaining its current level of instruction, focusing on small class sizes, providing a full range of academic programming, and retaining its experienced staff.

How would the referendum affect property taxes?

Because of good planning by the school board, if passed by voters, the referendum will not increase taxes. In fact, the mill rate will drop from $7.76 in 2021–22 to an estimated $6.81 in 2022–23 through 2026–27. This is because of a drop in future facilities-related debt payments.



How much revenue would an approved referendum generate for the district?

If approved, the referendum would provide the district with $1.2 million per year in additional revenue to address its financial needs for the next four years. The referendum would expire at the end of the 2026-27 school year.

When is election day?

Residents will vote on the referendum question on the fall election date of Tuesday, November 8, 2022.

Where can I vote?

District residents can vote at their regular polling location on Tuesday, November 8. You can find voting and registration information at https://myvote.wi.gov/.

Can I vote early?

Registered voters in Wisconsin may vote early by mail by requesting an absentee ballot. You can make your request by visiting https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Vote-Absentee-By-Mail.

Residents may also vote in-person before election day. For more information on this option, please visit https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Vote-Absentee-In-Person.

What is the exact question that will appear on the ballot?

Voters will see the following question on their ballots on Tuesday, November 8:

Shall the School District of Wisconsin Dells, Sauk, Adams, Columbia, Juneau and Marquette Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by $1,200,000 per year beginning with the 2022-2023 school year and ending with the 2025-2026 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of maintaining current elementary, middle and high school class sizes, technology equipment, existing career and technical education programming, along with operational costs associated with all school buildings?

Governor Evers has announced a considerable increase in public school funding. With that in mind, do we need an operational referendum?

It is important to note that the school funding increase mentioned by the governor would be part of the biennial budget he will submit to the legislature. There is no promise that such an increase will be part of the final budget signed into law, especially since several legislative leaders have indicated that they do not support it.

As district leaders plan for the future, they must do so based on current realities. While any increase in school funding and revenue limit authority would be welcomed, the need of our district for more revenue limit authority now and in the foreseeable future, despite efforts to keep costs low, is clear. The fact is that district leaders see a need for an operational referendum.