

# WILDCAT PRIDE



INVESTING IN OUR

*Future.*

2021 REFERENDUM  
New London-Spicer Schools



"We need to ask ourselves, what is the value of education and of our schools to our community? Taking care of our children's education is a priority because they are the future of our communities."

*Denny Baker* Mayor, Spicer

2021 REFERENDUM GUIDE **VOTE NOVEMBER 2**

# Strong Schools Make Our Communities Strong

New London-Spicer Wildcats are known across the state as top performers not only in arts and athletics but also in academics. We face challenges head on and work together for the benefit of our schools and our community. We owe much of our success to our proactive community members and our dedicated staff who rise to the occasion. We're not only a great place to live, but an ideal place to educate our students. Our schools are one of the important aspects that attracts new families to our communities and keeps alumni coming back.



**DID YOU KNOW?** Enrollment at NLS has been steady with over 1,500 students since 2018.

## Our Schools are a Good Investment

### Our staff not only love it here, they're top-notch

- 51 staff members are NLS graduates while 44 employees are married to NLS graduates.
- 99% of our staff are licensed in their roles.

### We are fiscally conservative:

- The district has an A- credit rating by Standard and Poors (S&P).
- NLS spends 83% of its budget on instruction and support.
- Sites, buildings and other services make up 11% while administration costs are 6% of our overall expenses.

### We are competitive in the classroom:

- NLS schools scored 54.6% in math proficiency compared to the state rate of 44.2%.
- We achieved 58.4% proficiency in reading compared to 52.5% statewide average.
- Our science scores were at 49% proficient in contrast with 43.1% statewide.
- A survey found that 94% of our students feel as though their teachers care about them!
- Our 2020 graduation rate was 93% compared to the 84% state average.

### And outside the classroom too!

- Our Robotics Team has consistently placed in state since 2013.
- Our Speech Team repeatedly sends students to the MSHSL State Competition – we had a state champion last year.
- Since 1962 our athletes went to state 79 times. We have 9 state championships and 10 state runner-up titles in 14 sports.
- The Performing Arts Center hosts fall musicals, Region 5A One Act Play Contests and Large Group Musical Contests – over 2,000 people attended four professional shows at our Performing Arts Center in 2019-20 with new shows scheduled for 2021-22.

“The school is such a vital part of the community. The school provides many things for the community: band and choral concerts, art shows, athletic events, community education programs, academic events, as well as performances at the Performing Arts Center, and the list goes on.”

*Arlene Owsman*

alumni parent, former teacher,  
senior citizen

# The Best Path Forward

## Dear New London-Spicer Community,

We are so excited to serve our community and the wonderful students of New London-Spicer Schools. As you know, our district has been managing financial challenges recently, and we have been working with our community members to find the best path forward, which ultimately led to the two-question referendum that you will see on the November 2, 2021 ballot.

## Investing in Our Future

The theme of our referendum is Wildcat Pride, Investing In Our Future. First and foremost, we are proud. Proud of our students, of our communities, of our excellent teachers and staff, and of our school district. And, due to our financial challenges, we see the need for a new direction in how we operate as a school district. We voted unanimously to put an operating levy referendum before voters to commit to an investment in the future of our students and our communities.

## A New Direction

We are defined by our students' success and our excellent teaching practices — our financial challenges do not define us. We aim to build on strong New London-Spicer traditions with an eye on the future. This means stable class sizes, maintaining core educational programs, and training students for the 21st century while only asking residents for the operating funds we need. We have a new superintendent, and most of the current school board has served for less than 6 years. Under this new leadership, we have a new direction that emphasizes student learning coupled with solid management that will provide stability for students.

Please read this referendum guide. It will answer your questions about the referendum and the extensive process that led to these two questions on the ballot. Please reach out to Superintendent Bill Adams or any member of the school board to get your questions answered during this time.

Thank you for your dedication to your community.

## New London-Spicer Board of Education



*Lucinda Dahlberg*

Lucinda Dahlberg, Chairperson



*Cherrish Holland*

Cherrish Holland, Clerk



*Susan Lange*

Susan Lange, Vice Chairperson



*Renee Nolting*  
Renee Nolting



*Mark Peterson*  
Mark Peterson, Treasurer



*Jeff Vetsch*  
Jeff Vetsch



*Nancy Wehseler*  
Nancy Wehseler



# WHY NOW? We're Struggling To Make Ends Meet.

In past years, our school board set a very conservative fund balance policy and aimed to operate as lean as possible. While this financial strategy did work at the time, it simply does not work today with under-funded state sources, federally mandated expenditures, increasing expenses, and other unanticipated challenges. Where once a low fund balance (savings account) was not only prudent but appropriate, it is now a detriment to programming and day-to-day operations. We actually have to borrow money to pay our bills, which means we are paying interest on loans just to "keep the lights on" and make payroll.

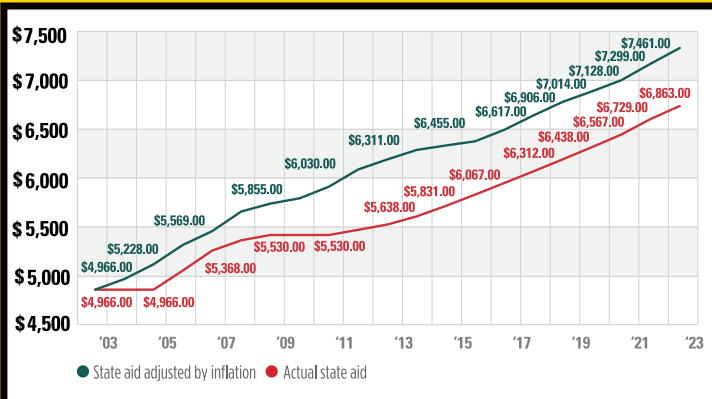
## While our schools have much to be proud of, we are struggling.

- Inadequate state funding increases – Revenue sources are limited and state funding is not keeping pace with inflation.
- Savings account is drained – The cost of federally mandated programs, such as special education, keep increasing, but revenues do not, and our savings account is drained. Without additional revenue budget cuts will continue.
- No operating levy – Our district, unlike most of our neighboring districts, does not have a voter-approved operating levy in place to help fund our programs.

## State Revenue Increases Do Not Keep Pace with Inflation

If state aid had increased at the rate of inflation, schools would have received \$7,461 per student this year. Instead, schools will receive \$6,863 per student, a difference of \$598 per student.

New London-Spicer has about 1,530 students. If state aid kept pace with inflation, that would result in nearly \$1 million in additional state funding in one year, and many millions over previous years, eliminating the need for constant budget cuts.

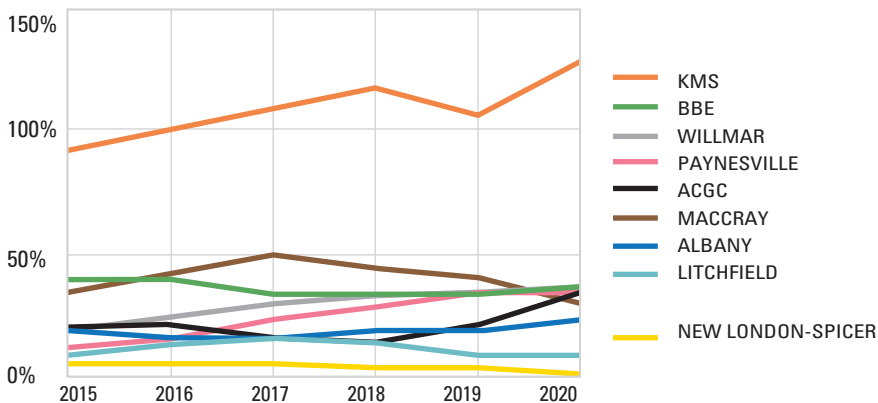


“If we want to educate kids to become contributors to our community, the state should keep school revenue in pace with inflation. There is always something that has to give, but I don't think education should be put on the list to cut or to come up short.”

*Nikki Train*  
parent,  
New London  
resident

# We Have the Lowest Fund Balance of Our Neighbors at 1.26%

## AREA FUND BALANCE COMPARISON



"The school is an important part of our community. It is something we should all be proud of."

*Leon Duchene*

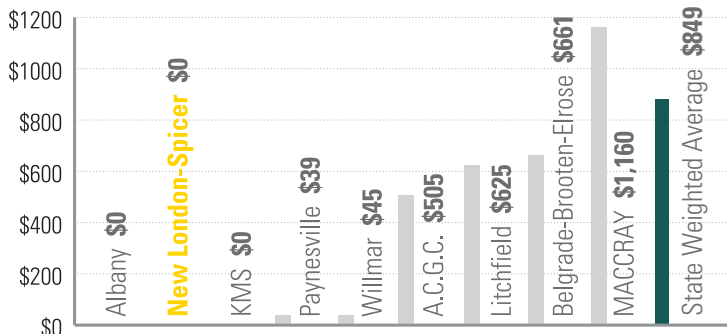
parent, agricultural professional,  
task force member, Spicer resident



# We Do Not Have a Voter-Approved Operating Levy – Most of Our Neighbors Do

Our district does not currently have a voter-approved operating levy in place and our situation is worsening, despite our efforts. Districts around the state have been turning to operating levy referendums to address the lack of funding in state aid, and to meet the demand for more robust programming. Most of our neighboring districts have a voter-approved operating levy in place with the state average at \$849 per pupil.

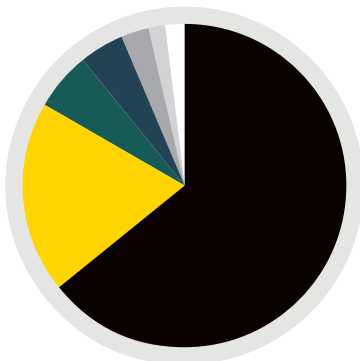
## VOTER-APPROVED OPERATING LEVY COMPARISON



Source: MDE Operating Referendum Phaseout January 2020

## Budget Cuts Are a Band-Aid – Not a Sustainable Solution

Since 2006, we've made significant cuts to our budget, reducing programs, people, and salaries \$3.5 million. But our situation has not improved. And our enrollment continues to grow.



### TOTAL REDUCTIONS SINCE 2019

- **64%** Teachers  
\$976,026.01
- **19%** Support Staff  
\$288,851.26
- **6%** Accounting
- **4%** After School
- **3%** Transportation
- **2%** Tech
- **2%** Programs

“That the state revenue hasn’t kept pace with inflation is unconscionable. Rural schools haven’t received the same stipends as urban schools, and yet they are tasked with providing the same education and services.”

*Alysa Dwsman* alumni parent, former teacher, senior citizen



## Budget cuts directly impact our students:

- Eliminating programs and activities
- Increasing class sizes
- Significantly reducing the number of experienced teachers and staff

These cuts are jeopardizing the quality of education our children receive and their preparedness for life after graduation. Without additional revenue, more significant budget reductions are on the horizon.

- 2022-23 proposed cuts total another \$935,475
- As long as expenses continue to increase more quickly than revenue, more budget cuts will be needed in future years



Although we have been aggressive in making cuts to our budget to address our financial situation, if it continues to worsen, the state of Minnesota may get involved in district operations. The state gets involved when a district cannot turn its fund balance around and continues deficit spending. This is called Statutory Operating Debt (SOD). When this happens, a district can lose state and federal aid.

**Last year our average class size was 22.7. Our average class size is now 24.57 while the state average is 23.7. Proposed cuts will increase class sizes if the referendum is not approved.**

Following the 2020 referendum which was not approved by voters, New London-Spicer Community Schools began an extensive community engagement process including a community-based task force and a community survey that provided feedback to the school board on how to address our financial situation. An operating levy referendum was decided as the best option to keep costs low to the taxpayer, while directly addressing the educational programming and financial future of New London-Spicer Schools.

*"A basic principle of public education is access. Every student is entitled to a quality education. If a student is struggling and having problems, help should be available to ensure their success."*

*John Bergman* Mayor, New London



INVESTING IN OUR

*Future.*

## WHAT IS THE NEW PLAN? Simplified And Less Expensive.

After an extensive community engagement process, we listened to community members who said last year’s referendum was confusing and expensive – and we heard you. The New London-Spicer School Board voted unanimously to put forward a two-question operating levy referendum to voters on the November 2, 2021 ballot. It’s a simplified request that increases revenue – but by \$3.1 million less over 10 years than last year’s referendum question – and is less expensive for taxpayers.

If approved, Question 1 would provide the district with a voter-approved operating levy of \$1,020 per pupil for assistance for mental health, real-world experiences, and college prep. In addition, the district can keep staff and maintain class sizes. **Right now the level of funding is \$0 per pupil.** Some of the recent cuts made by the district will be able to be reversed and we will continue to diligently evaluate our expenditures yearly and make necessary reductions while stabilizing our fund balance (savings account).

**QUESTION 1** Asks for an increase from \$0 to \$1,020 per student - to provide revenue for everyday operations including teaching and learning, programming, and student supports.

**QUESTION 2** Asks for the voter-approved operating levy to increase each year by the rate of inflation.

Question 2 can only pass if Question 1 passes.



# HOW WILL THE MONEY BE SPENT? Sensibly.

If voters approve the plan, the funds would provide for:

**Struggling students and mental health** – Paraprofessional staff will be available to help struggling students, as will counselors and other resources for students facing mental health challenges. The addition of interventionists will assist with academic needs.

**Real-world experiences and college prep** – Programs such as Agriculture, Welding, Personal Finance and other Career and Technical Education options will be maintained to provide real-world experiences for students, as will courses that provide students with college credits like College in the Schools.

**Keeping staff, maintaining class size** – We'll avoid cutting teachers and staff which will allow us to maintain current class sizes, meaning students get more time with teachers.



● **60%**  
Keeping staff,  
maintaining  
class sizes

● **25%**  
Struggling students  
and mental health

● **15%**  
Real-world  
experiences and  
college prep

"NLS is an affluent community and most can't see the families who may at times be struggling. Unless you are a parent of a student who needs extra help or whose student's needs are not obvious, you don't see how thin our school staff is spread."

*Christy Donmott* parent, Executive Director of The Link, New London resident



# WHAT WAS THE PROCESS? Extensive.

New London-Spicer Public Schools has been working at length with community members to review, understand, and address the challenges facing the school district over the last year and a half. In November 2020, the district put a tiered operating levy approach on the ballot which would have allowed for three increases to residential property taxes over the course of ten years. The plan was based on extensive community engagement with over a hundred community members participating in meetings and providing feedback on the district's situation. The referendum was not approved by voters.

## SURVEY SAYS

In a community survey, more than **75% of residents** with an opinion gave the school district an A or B rating compared to **44% nationwide**.

"I worked at a school district. When class sizes are 20-25 students it is much more manageable than 25-30 – that is a lot of little kids."

*Nikki Threin* parent, New London resident

## Setting A New Direction

The district aimed to set a new direction in April and May of 2021 with a process to gather information and feedback from faculty and staff, as well as parents. This feedback was used for a community-based task force that held meetings throughout May and June to review the history of the district, current budget situation, and educational offerings, in order to provide feedback to the school board. Four community meetings were held in June to share more information with community members with both in-person and virtual options being offered.

A community survey was conducted by phone in May when 288 community members were asked about their thoughts on how to address the current financial situation. A majority of respondents said that the district should go to voters with an operating levy to address the issues.



### Respondents said that the most important issues were:

- Providing help for struggling students
- Providing mental health supports
- Maintaining options for real-world experiences
- Avoiding cutting teachers and staff
- Maintaining options for college credits
- Maintaining class sizes

# WHAT WILL IT COST ME? Less Than A Dollar A Day.

The New London-Spicer community has a long history of making substantial investments in our schools and we thank you for your support over the years.

If approved, the voter-approved operating levy would increase from the current level of \$0 to \$1,020 per pupil. The cost to the taxpayer on an average home valued at **\$200,000 would be \$308 annually - or \$26 per month - or less than \$1 per day.**

An operating levy impacts agricultural properties (**home, garage, and one acre only**) at the same rate as residential and business properties, but does not impact recreational properties.



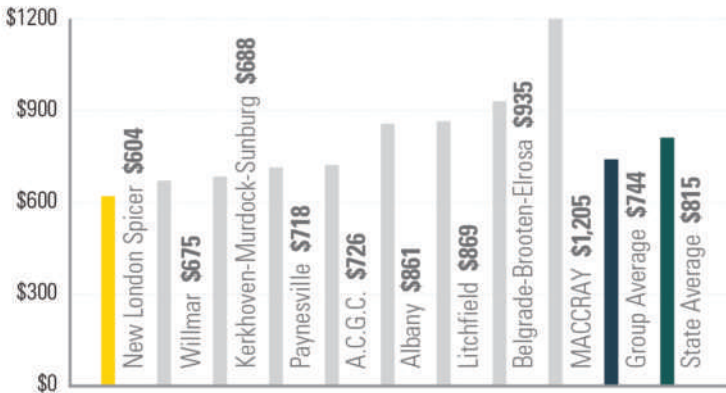
TAX IMPACT ON THREE HOME VALUES		
Home Value	Year	Month
\$150,000	\$231	\$19
<b>\$200,000*</b>	<b>\$308</b>	<b>\$26</b>
\$250,000	\$386	\$32

Visit the School Referendum website at [www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum](http://www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum) for a tax calculator for your property.

## How Do We Compare with Our Neighbors?

Our district has the lowest school property taxes of all of our neighbors at \$604 in 2021 on a \$200,000 home. We are also below the group average of \$744 and the state average of \$815.

### TOTAL SCHOOL PROPERTY TAXES, PAYABLE 2021



Source: Pay 2021 School Tax Report

"Having a variety of classes available in the appropriate sizes so teachers have the ability to focus on the students is important."

*Leon Duchene* parent, agricultural professional, task force member, Spicer resident

# JUST WONDERING...

## Have COVID-19 Dollars Helped the District?

Yes, these dollars have helped the district when it comes to COVID-19 expenditures. It is anticipated we'll see a net negative impact to our budget after final calculations are complete.

- In-flows forecasted to be \$1.6 million.
- Out-flows forecasted to be \$1.9 million.
- These expenditures were necessary in order to keep our schools open and our children safe.

## Why is the school district asking for more revenue per pupil than the state average?

Our business manager and financial planning consultant worked with us to find the revenue amount that would allow us to fund the educational priorities identified in our community engagement process. This level of revenue will allow us to reduce our class sizes to their original sizes, add back elective courses for students, reduce bus route times, improve teaching and learning by reinstating professional development for staff, provide additional mental health supports, and increase financial stability.





## Has enrollment for special education increased or has the cost to provide special education increased?

Both have increased. NLS has a strong special education program with high quality staff and that reputation is well known.

## How did you pay for the turf field and Performing Arts Center?

Schools have multiple ways they can finance construction projects. The Performing Arts Center, turf field, and the replacement of the running track, were each completed using different funding sources.

The bond levy approved by voters in Nov. 2015 paid for facility improvements at Prairie Woods Elementary and at New London-Spicer Middle and High School, including the Performing Arts Center. This long-term project was completed in May of 2018. The running track and synthetic turf field were completed in summer of 2017. The school district sold bonds to raise money to pay for the running track and turf, but the bonds are short-term and are being paid off with different funding sources. State aid for replacing worn out facilities (called Long-Term Facility Maintenance funds) are repaying the bonds for the track.

A lease levy, a funding mechanism approved in state law to allow schools to add or replace educational space, is paying for the turf. The track was unsafe and needed to be reconstructed.

The school board decided to replace the field turf at the same time so the track would avoid possible damage if the turf was replaced later. Synthetic turf significantly increases the number of uses of the field, as it can be used for varsity and junior varsity games, practices for many sports, physical education classes and community uses. Prior to that the grass field was reserved almost exclusively for varsity sports.

# EVERY VOTE COUNTS. Where And When Do I Vote?

**Election Day is Tuesday, November 2, 2021.  
Polls will be open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

COMBINED POLLING PLACE: Green Lake Township  
(also known as Prairie Meadows School – ISD No. 345)  
650 County Road 10  
Spicer, MN 56288

This combined polling place serves all communities in Independent School District No. 345 located in Dovre Township; Green Lake Township; Harrison Township, and the City of Spicer all of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota.



COMBINED POLLING PLACE: New London Township  
16151 County Road 9 NE  
New London, MN 56273

This combined polling place serves all communities in Independent School District No. 345 located in Arctander Township; Burbank Township; Colfax Township; Irving Township; Lake Andrew Township; New London Township; Norway Lake Township; Roseville Township; and the City of New London all of Kandiyohi County, Minnesota.

## **BE AN INFORMED VOTER. Need More Information?**

Visit: [www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum](http://www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/NLSSchoolDist345](https://www.facebook.com/NLSSchoolDist345)  
Contact: Superintendent Bill Adams 320.354.2252 Ext. 2101  
or [AdamsW@nls.k12.mn.us](mailto:AdamsW@nls.k12.mn.us)

# SAMPLE BALLOT

The cost to an owner of a home valued at \$200,000 would be \$26 per month – or **less than \$1 per day.**

## School District Question 1 Approval of Referendum Revenue Authorization

The board of Independent School District No. 345 (New London/Spicer) has proposed to increase its general education revenue by **\$1,020 per pupil**. The proposed referendum revenue authorization would be applicable for ten years unless otherwise revoked or reduced as provided by law.

**Shall the increase in the revenue proposed by the board of Independent School District No. 345 be approved?**

**YES**       **NO**

**BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.**

## School District Question 2 Approval of Inflationary Increase to New Referendum Revenue Authorization

If School District Question 1 is approved, the school district has also proposed to increase its general education revenue by having the proposed authorization in School District Question 1 **increase each year by the rate of inflation.**

**If School District Question 1 is approved, shall the increase in the revenue proposed by the board of Independent School District No. 345 be approved?**

**YES**       **NO**

The passage of School District Question 2 is contingent on the passage of School District Question 1.

**BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.**

# WILDCAT PRIDE

INVESTING IN OUR  
*Future.*



2021 REFERENDUM  
New London-Spicer Schools

**Independent School District 345**  
101 4th Ave SW New London, MN 56273

“Strong Schools do mean strong communities. There is a positive synergy between our local community and the school district. Together, we can continue to make this a great place to live.”

*John Bergman* Mayor, New London

**VOTE NOVEMBER 2 | Be An Informed Voter.**  
Information at [www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum](http://www.nls.k12.mn.us/2021referendum)

This required mailing is prepared and paid for by Independent School District No. 345 (NEW LONDON-SPICER SCHOOL DISTRICT) 101 4th Ave SW New London, MN 56273