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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: **September 2, 2026**

School District of Wisconsin Dells Board Approves Operational Referendum Question for November 3 Ballot

WISCONSIN DELLS, WI — At its August 10 meeting, the School District of Wisconsin Dells Board of Education approved a recurring operational referendum question for the November 3 ballot.

If the referendum is approved by voters, the district will have the authority to exceed its state-mandated revenue limit by $1.8 million per year. The funds would address rising operational expenses, reduce budget deficits, and prevent potential cuts to programming and services.

“This proposed operational referendum is an investment in the future of the School District of Wisconsin Dells and the students we serve,” said Superintendent Terry Slack. “Our district has relied on this funding tool for many years to help provide the means we need to sustain academic programs and activities, support our teachers and staff, and continue to be a regional leader in education.”

Last April, an operational referendum proposal seeking $2.4 million per year was not approved by SDWD voters. Following that outcome, the board and administration engaged with community members and moved forward with a new proposal requesting approximately $600,000 less per year.

All Wisconsin school districts operate under a revenue limit—originally established more than 30 years ago—that restricts the amount of revenue each can receive in general state aid and local property taxes. Revenue limits are influenced by a variety of factors beyond a district’s control, such as enrollment and inflation.

If state aid had simply kept pace with inflation since 2009, districts like the SDWD would have received over $3,500 more per student during the 2025-26 school year.

The district has taken steps to reduce spending in recent years, including nearly $1.3 million during the 2025-26 school year. Budget savings included the closure of Lake Delton Elementary School, which produced approximately $386,000 in operational savings.

Per-pupil spending at the SDWD was about $2,300 below the state average in the prior school year.

An approved referendum will not raise property tax rates. Instead, the district is projecting a decrease in its next mill rate, to $5.82 per $1,000 of estimated fair market property value—an all-time low for the SDWD. The mill rate is expected to continue to fall annually through 2029-30, reaching as low as $5.20, with a new referendum in place.

Operational referendums are the only way for a school district to raise its revenue limit. These funding mechanisms are common, with about 87 percent of school districts attempting one since 1993. More than half of all districts have received voter approval to exceed their revenue limits in the past decade.