

Benson Public Schools - ISD #777

Fall 2026 Operating Referendum

Key Messages & Talking Points



5-Second Message

- Benson Public Schools is facing on-going financial challenges.
- The school board voted unanimously to ask voters to consider an operating levy referendum for \$700 more per student annually during the Nov. 3 General Election.
- This referendum benefits all residents by protecting existing academics and programs and retaining quality staff.
- For the average homeowner, this increase will cost roughly \$15 a month.
- Without it, district reserves will drop dramatically within a few years, forcing more cuts.

5-Minute Key Messages

The Need

- Like many school districts across Minnesota, Benson is facing financial challenges.
- State funding increases haven't kept up with rising costs, and unfunded mandates make it worse.
- Student enrollment has declined, which directly impacts school funding.
- The district made \$300,000 in budget cuts for the 2026-27 school year.
 - We've cut more than \$1 million total over the past three years.
- We have some healthy savings (fund balance) built up right now.
 - That savings will shrink dramatically over the next few years, dropping from \$2.1 million to just \$105,000, if we don't increase operating revenue.

The Request

- More dollars for students and learning. Specifically, \$700 more per student, per year.
 - This equals an additional ~\$500,000/annually for the school district
- Cost to homeowners: \$15/month on an average value home, if approved.
- The school board voted unanimously.
 - Every board member (with different backgrounds and perspectives) agreed this was the right step.
- Nearby districts are asking their communities for \$1,359 to \$1,500 per student.
- This referendum asks voters to revoke the current \$710.70/student operating referendum and replace it with a \$1410.70 operating referendum.
 - It will be in place for 10 years (unless it is replaced); and adjusts with inflation.
- There is a second school question on the Nov. 3 ballot related to the Permanent School Fund. This is a statewide question, impacting all learners.
 - It has a small effect on our district (~\$20,000/annually total).

The Plan

- This referendum will protect the strong academics and programs that Benson Public Schools has worked hard to grow, reduce the need for future cuts, and maintain a healthy fund balance.
 - A healthy fund balance is like a savings account; it helps a school district cover unexpected costs and stay financially stable during tight years, without having to make sudden cuts or borrow money.
- With increased operational funding, programs will continue to support offerings for students to become enrolled, enlisted, and employed after graduation.
- Additional revenue allows us to retain and recruit quality staff as well as preserve student educational programs.
- Benson Public Schools have a proud past, hopeful future, and facilities ready to serve all residents.

The Lesson

- A similar referendum request didn't pass last year.
- Looking back, we simply didn't communicate enough.
- This time, we're committed to a robust plan to educate all stakeholders with clear and timely communications.
- We are coming to you, to explain the need, the plan, the real costs, and show and tell everyone about the exceptional opportunities Benson Public Schools has for every student's success.

We Are Proud

- High school math scores are outperforming the state average.
- Students are earning 55 college credits before graduation; impressive for a school our size (360 students).
- We have strong hands-on programs - both in-school and co-curricular activities, including: shop and trade classes, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Business Professional of America (BPA), and e-sports.
- Elementary school teachers with extensive literacy training.
- Our Discovery Kids provides Infant care beginning at 6 weeks old. We have a toddler and preschool program. We also have voluntary PreK (VPK) run by licensed teachers.
- Our staff remain dedicated to our kids through good years and hard ones alike.

Strong Schools = Strong Communities

- Strong schools help local businesses find and keep good workers.
- They help families choose to put down roots here, supporting local businesses.
- A strong school system supports the town's overall economic and community health.