Operational Referendum Community Conversation

Continuing to provide excellent educational programming to meet the needs of our students.

Welcome

Denise Michaelsen, Superintendent

Agenda

- Presentation about the operational referendum
- Q&A

An Exceptional Education

The School District of Washburn is committed to providing exceptional education for all students.

District Initiatives

- Community Partnerships
- Attracting & Retaining High Quality Staff
- Green & Healthy Programming
- Service Learning
- Maintaining Small Class Sizes
- Innovative Teaching Strategies

Operational vs. Capital

Operational - Supports the annual, day-to-day costs to maintain the educational programs and services of the District:

- Staffing
- Supplies
- Programming
- Technology
- Transportation
- Food Service
- Maintenance
- Utilities

Capital -

- Bonds = Buildings
- New construction
- Large upgrades and renovations
- Additions

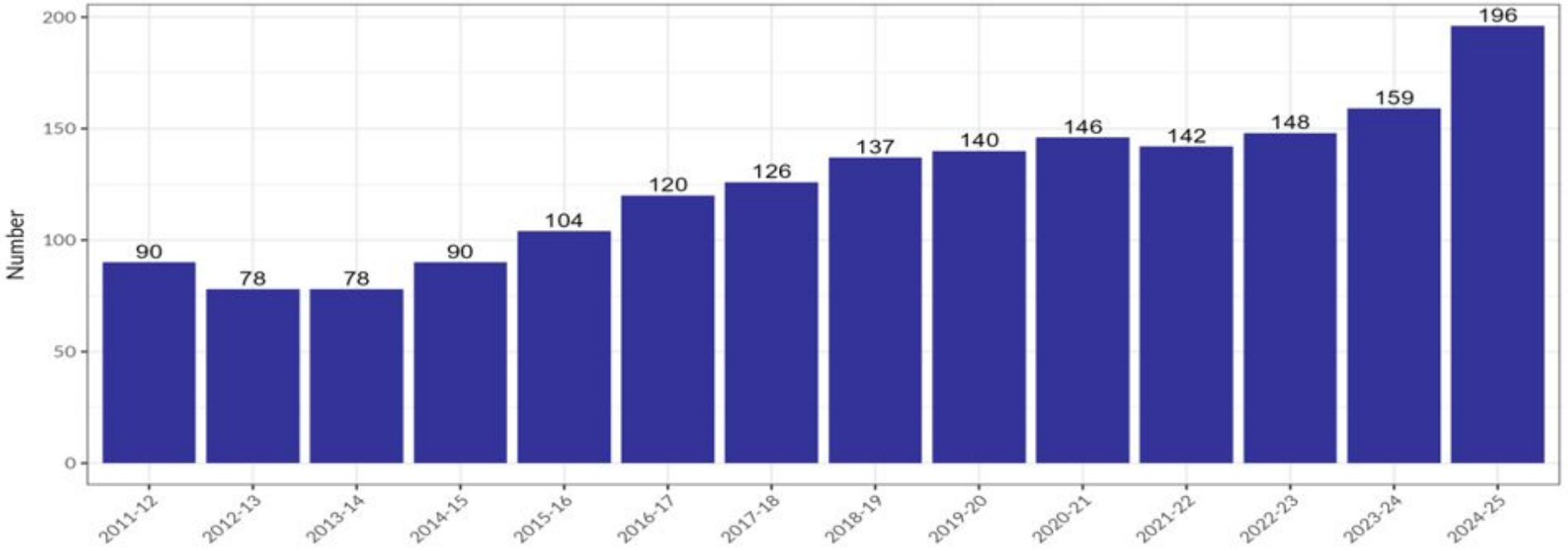
MS/HS Capital Referendum Update

School facilities influence more than daily operations. They shape school climate, support student engagement and affect how people interact throughout the day.

- Exterior - New windows, new doors, tuckpointing, waterproofing, roof replacement, new sidewalks, ADA accessible main entrance, parking lot drainage improvements, middle school outdoor area, outdoor classroom
- HVAC upgrades - new ductwork, air handlers, two new boilers, digital controls
- Electrical upgrades - wiring, switches, egress lighting
- Plumbing/Sanitary - upgraded sanitary lines where available, updated restrooms, new water heater, replaced domestic water piping
- Classrooms/Offices - new flooring, new ceilings, new lighting controls, updated casework, whiteboards and technology
- Paint throughout the building, asbestos abatement (mastic), kitchen upgrades (new walk-in cooler/freezer, exhaust fans with ansul system)

Districts with Operating Referenda to Exceed Revenue Limits

School Years 2011-12 to 2024-25



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF Public Instruction

The Department of Public Instruction has made a reasonable effort to ensure that the accompanying information is up-to-date, accurate, complete, and comprehensive at the time of disclosure. These records are a true and accurate representation of the data on file at the DPI. Authenticated information is accurate only as of the time of validation and verification. The DPI is not responsible for data that is misinterpreted or altered in any way. Derived conclusions and analyses generated from this data are not to be considered attributable to the DPI.

Operational Referendum

This type of referendum is necessary when the funds that districts collect for operations from state and local sources are not enough to sustain educational programs, staffing, and services.

The Operational Referendum will allow us to MAINTAIN.

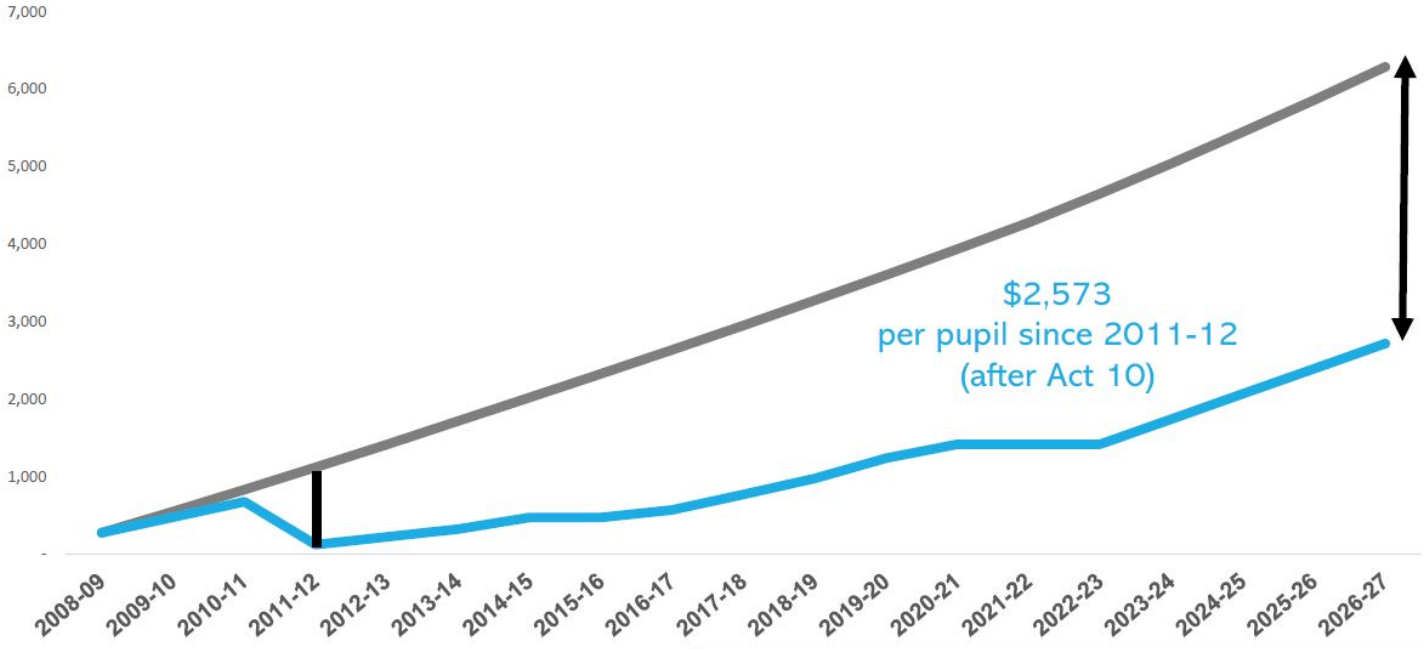
82% of schools in Wisconsin have pursued an operating referendum from their communities. (Since 2015)

Operational Referendum - Why Now?

- Funding Challenges
  - State Funding - Revenue Limits
  - Lack of Special Education Reimbursement
- Inflation Driving Costs Up
  - Salaries & Benefits
  - Insurance
  - Transportation
  - Building Maintenance
  - Utilities
  - Classroom Technology
- Declining Enrollment



Cumulative annual adjustments in general school district revenues per pupil lag inflation by nearly $3,600 since 2009



Implication: Buying power for each student is lower than it was in 2008-09

Source: Legislative Fiscal Bureau

Source: Kava, Russ (September 12, 2025) Legislative Fiscal Bureau Memo re: Revenue Limit Per Pupil Adjustment Indexed to Inflation; WASBO Calculations

Public school enrollment projections (4K-12)

Projected enrollment DECREASE:

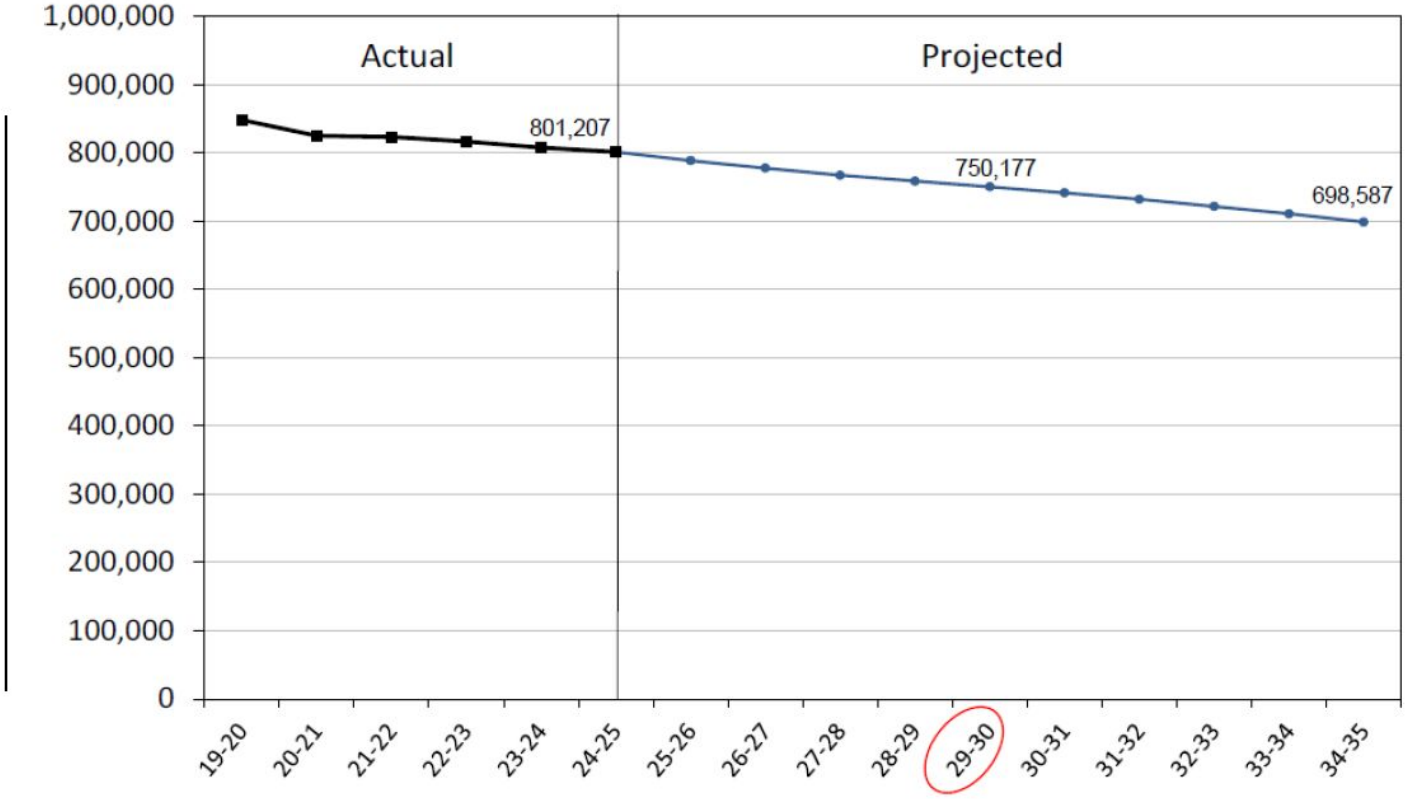
6% by 2029-30

All grade groupings to decline:

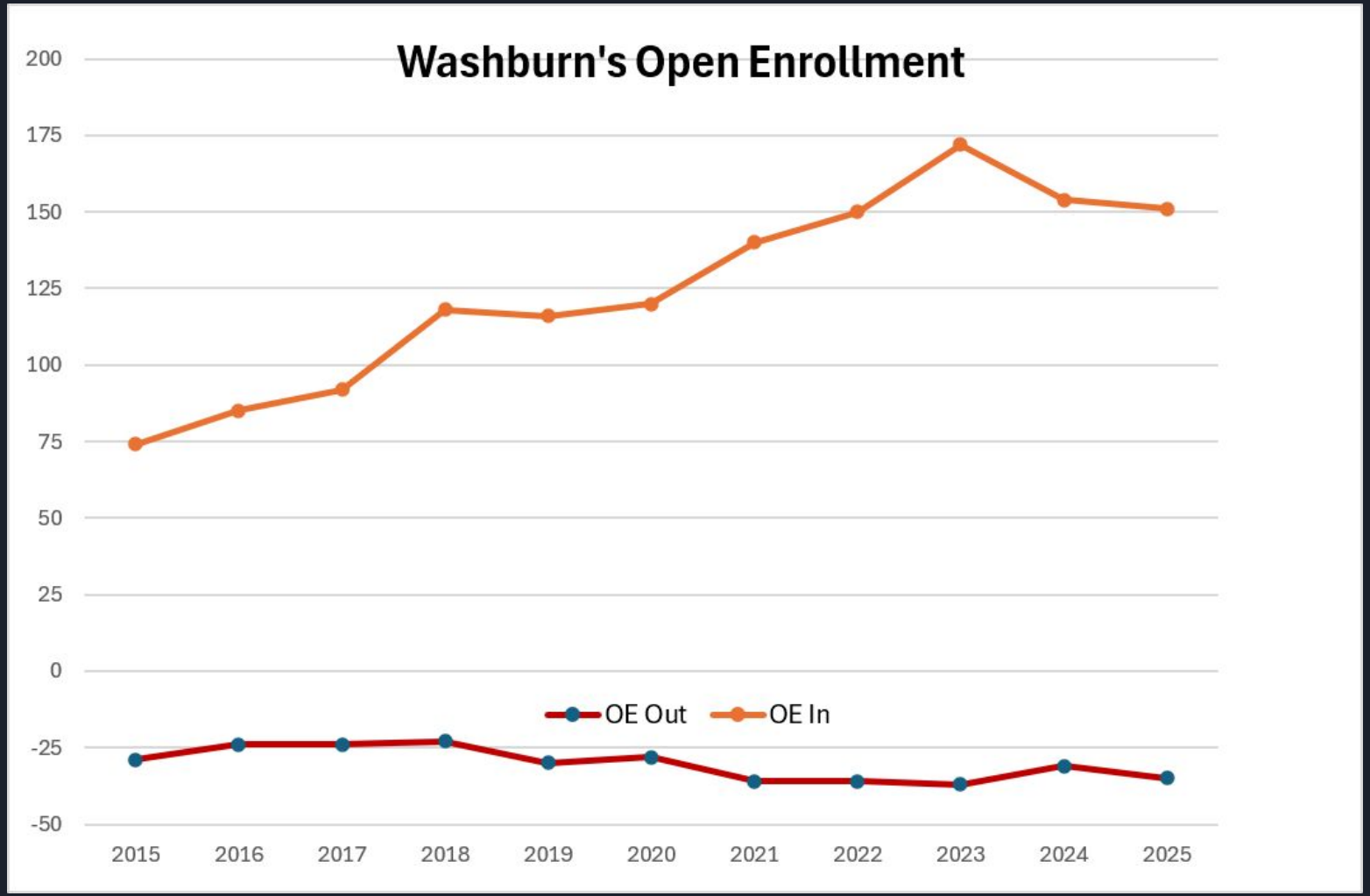
K-5 by **9%**

6-8 by **2%**

9-12 by **6%**



Source: Kemp, Sara (2025) UW-Madison Applied Population Lab


Washburn's Open Enrollment
200
175
150
125
100
75
50
25
0
-25
-50
OE Out
OE In
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024
2025



ENROLLMENT FIGURES

	ELEM	MS	HS	TOTALS
2017-18	298	87	168	553
2018-19	298	96	178	572
2019-20	322	98	178	598
2020-21	301	92	189	582
2021-22	331	97	191	619
2022-23	319	82	198	599
2023-24	302	84	189	575
2024-25	285	80	182	547
2025-26	277	77	178	532

Wisconsin's ranking has fallen relative to the nation on per pupil spending on K-12 education

11th in 2002

11% above national average

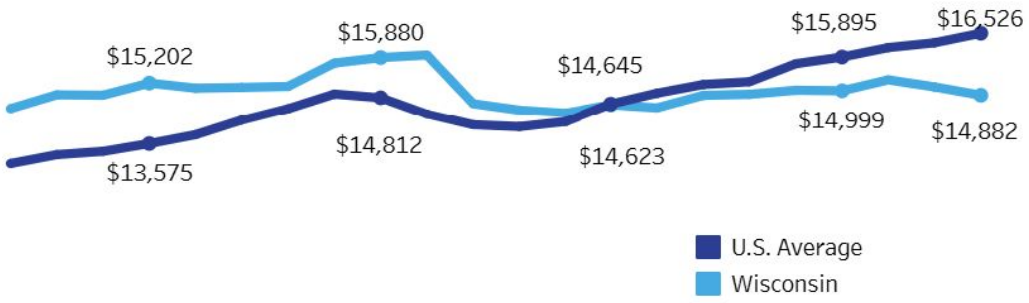
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26th in 2023

9.9% below national average

- **Even this ranking is precarious – rests on accelerating growth in the use of operating referendums**
- **How far is state willing to fall?**

Per-pupil spending on K-12 education (2023 dollars)



Since 2002 education spending per pupil…

- Increased 2.4% in Wisconsin
- Increased 21.1% nationally

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Sources: 2023 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data. Summary Table 11. U.S. Census; Wisconsin education spending falls further behind national average (July 2025) Wisconsin Policy Forum

What Has Been Done to Balance the Budget?

2024-25

- Health insurance benefit change - reduced costs by 26%.
- Salary/wage increase at 2%, CPI published at 4.12%

2025-26

- Staff reductions resulting in $450,000 of savings.
- Salary/wage increase at 1.5%, CPI published at 2.95%

2026-27

- Implementation of energy-efficiency projects as a part of the MS/HS capital referendum.
- Reduced bus routes from five down to four.
- Reduced 4K from 5 days to 3 days per week.

Ongoing

- General budget transparency and reductions at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- Deferred building and grounds maintenance, including the elementary school.
- Utilization of grant funds for purchases (WCEF, Special Ed., Mental Health, etc.)

What if the Referendum Fails?

Estimating the district will be short $700,000 for 2026-27

Areas that may be reviewed and impacted:

- Increased class sizes
- Reduced academic programming - AP classes, CTE, Arts, etc.
- Reduced athletic opportunities
- Difficulty attracting and retaining staff impacting student learning
- Reduced transportation - Field trips and summer school opportunities

*If the vote fails in November, we will ask again in April 2027. Eventually the school district will have to look the possibility of closing without community support.

Maximum Estimated Tax Impact

	Estimated 2026-27 Impact
Property Value	
$100,000	$123
$200,000	$246
$300,000	$369
$400,000	$492

The 2027-28 tax impact will be an additional $13.00; in 2028-29, $54.00, and in 2029-30, $21.00.

Note: The district will levy only the dollars needed to balance the budget

*You will always pay school district taxes

Tax Impact Example

Fair Market Value	Years	Tax Impact	Monthly Amount
$250,000	1	$307.50	$25.63
	2	$340.00	$28.33
	3	$475.00	$39.58
	4	$527.50	$43.96

Ballot Question - November 3, 2026

Shall the School District of Washburn, Bayfield County, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by $900,000 for the 2026-2027 school year, by $1,100,000 for the 2027-2028 school year, by $1,300,000 for the 2028-2029 school year, and by $1,500,000 for the 2029-2030 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of operational and maintenance expenses?

What Comes Next…

- Vote: November 3, 2026
  - Talk to your neighbors
  - Ask questions



Thank You!

Questions?

