

Operational Referendum FAQs

Updated 3/21/2024

Why is an Operational Referendum Necessary?

The District The proposed 5-year \$4.75 million operational referendum will close the revenue gap and allow us to maintain our high-quality educational services.

How Did We Get To This Point?

School districts in Wisconsin have two main sources of revenue: state equalization aid (money the state distributes to each school district) and local revenue (from property taxes). Federal funds account for a very small portion of our budget and are mostly limited to paying for specific programs.

In 1993, Wisconsin legislators placed a limit on the amount of revenue a school district can receive each year. The limit applies to both main revenue sources. School district budgets can not exceed state revenue limits. When revenues no longer cover costs, a school district must go to a referendum so the community can decide if additional funds can be levied.

While De Pere's enrollment has grown by 25 percent during the past 18 years, the state has not increased the revenue limit. In addition, the money we receive from the state (equalization aid) has significantly lagged behind inflation, and state aid specifically for special education only covers about one-third of the actual cost.

What is the Difference Between Operational and Capital Referendums?

Operational referendums allow school districts to exceed their state-imposed revenue limits. These referendums can be nonrecurring, meaning the funding lasts for a specified period of time, or recurring, meaning the funding lasts for an unlimited amount of time. The District's referendum is non-recurring and will end after 5 years. Capital referendums allow districts to borrow money for construction, renovation, or other building projects.

What Are the District's Financial Needs?

Are These Challenges Due to Poor Financial Management?

No. Over the years, District leaders and the School Board have worked to keep achievement high and costs to taxpayers low. The challenges we face are largely due to insufficient state funding increases over the past 10 years, as well as revenue limits that don't account for increased enrollment and inflation.

To help control costs in recent years, we have:

- Changed insurance benefit administrators
- Negotiated salary increases that are far less than what other districts have implemented
- Pursued and received grant funding for essential student support staff and programs
- Implemented energy measurement, control and processes at all buildings
- Relied on grants and fundraising for essential programs, athletic fields and playground equipment upgrades

How Will The Operating Referendum Affect My Taxes?

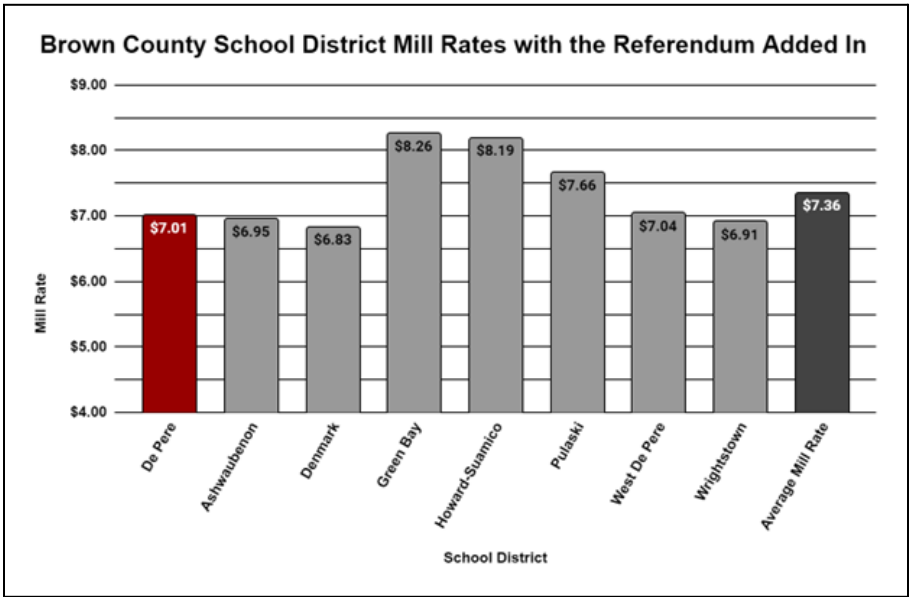
This is how the school district's portion of your property tax bill is calculated:

Mill rate x each \$100000 of assessed property value = school district's portion of your tax bill

The District is asking taxpayers to allow us to increase the mill rate by \$1.34 so we have enough revenue to maintain current services and programs. Here is an example of the tax impact:

	Mill Rate	Per \$100,000 of Assessed Value
Mill rate for 2023	\$5.67	\$567.00
Increase if \$4.75 million non-recurring Operational Referendum is approved	\$1.34	\$134.00
Total with approved Operational Referendum	\$7.01	\$701.00

Even if the referendum is approved, De Pere's mill rate will still be lower than several other Brown County school districts.

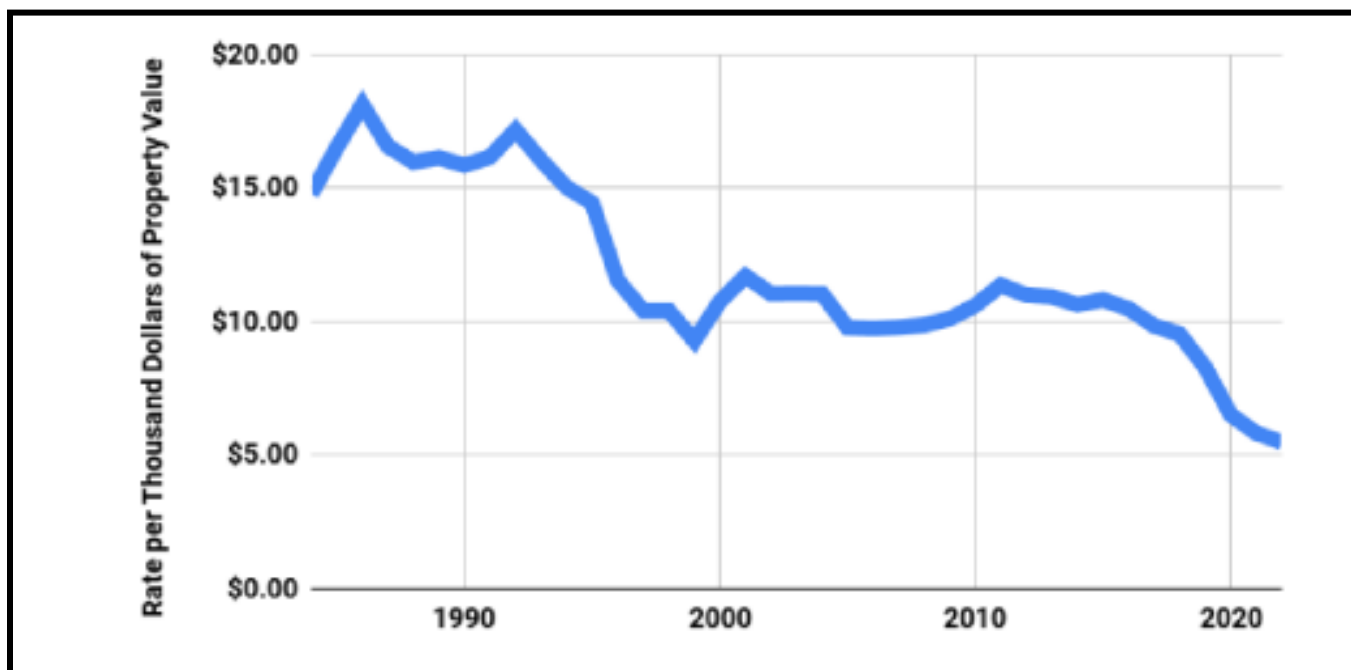


My Home's Assessed Value Went Up Over the Past Few Years. Doesn't That Mean More Money For The District?

No. While the assessed value of homes in the district has gone up, the actual dollar amount you pay for school taxes has dropped because we have worked to keep the mill rate low. Keep in mind, school taxes are only one part of your total property tax bill. Depending on which community you live in, the type of property you own and other factors not related to our schools your total property tax bill will vary.

In addition, your school tax money is paid to the state which distributes it to all 400+ Wisconsin school districts based on the equalized aid formula. District tax money does not come directly to the district.

**Unified School District of De Pere
Mill Rate Over Past 30 Years**



Is the mill rate a fair straight comparison? The equalized value of our district seems like a more fair measurement for comparison.

School District	2023 District Equalized Value
Ashwaubenon	2,645,114,374
Denmark	1,194,276,297
De Pere	3,471,671,452
Green Bay	13,240,500,164
Howard-Suamico	4,558,822,952
Pulaski	2,825,825,777
West De Pere	3,214,950,969
Wrightstown	1,059,114,248

How Will The Additional Funds Be Spent?

5-Year Recommended Operational Referendum Spending for USDD					
	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Employee Compensation (incl. Extracurricular Salaries) and Benefits	\$914,000	\$1,621,600	\$2,329,200	\$3,036,800	\$3,844,400
School/Student Technology	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000
Building Maintenance & Funds to Open a New/Renovated School and/or Classrooms	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Curriculum & Instruction	\$629,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Interventionists/Instructional Coaches	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000	\$300,000
Mental Health/Social Emotional Learning	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000
Transportation	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000
Utilities	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
TOTAL	\$3,018,000	\$3,596,600	\$4,304,200	\$6,011,800	\$6,819,400
Total Operational Referendum Amount Over 5 Years				\$23,750,000	
Amount Recommended for Each of Five Years				\$4,750,000	

- The Employee Compensation funding (including extracurricular salaries) was determined based on review of the pay scales of area school districts, and approved pay increases in those districts. De Pere's pay increases for the 2023-24 school year were below the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and in several cases less than half of the amount negotiated in other local school districts. Pay for our extracurricular staff has lagged other school districts significantly for several years.
- The School/Student Technology funds will be used to replace Chromebooks and desktop computers which range in age from 4 to 9 years old. The amount also accounts for necessary cybersecurity upgrades districtwide.
- Curriculum & Instruction funds will help pay the cost of online learning materials which, for the most part, have replaced hardcopy textbooks.

- Interventionists/Instructional Coaches are a top priority at our higher level grades (9-12). These specialists allow us to raise the achievement of struggling students who have often moved into our district from other areas.
- The \$75,000 amount that will be allocated to Mental Health and Social/Emotional Learning will replace grant funding we received from the state for several years. The state has discontinued the program which provided these funds. As always, we will continue to pursue grant funding in a variety of areas to support our students' needs.
- Transportation and Utilities funds will help us address double digit price increases in both these areas.

Doesn't the teachers union have collective bargaining power to maintain staff wages and grow with inflation?

USDD does have a certified teachers union. However, the District sets the health / dental benefits. Pay increases are determined by what the District can afford. Teacher unions may collectively bargain for base wage only. If the school board offers a salary increase equal to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the offer is rejected by the union, an outside arbitrator must be brought in to the negotiations. The arbitrator will side with the District if a CPI increase was offered. Last year, the District did not have enough revenue to make a CPI offer. We were very transparent with the De Pere Education Association (DPEA- our teachers union) regarding the state of our finances. They accepted an offer of 3% when CPI was 8%, knowing that it was our best offer in light of the circumstances.

Why Is the District Asking for Funding for a New/Renovated School in the 2027-2029 School Years, When No Capital Referendum Has Been Approved?

This money will be allocated to Fund 46, part of our operating budget which can only be used to carry out our 10-year maintenance plan. Whether or not a new school is built, money in Fund 46 will go toward maintenance expenses— either at a new building or at existing buildings. It will also allow us to keep some funds in an account for unanticipated repairs that occur regularly due to the age of our buildings.

How Does School Choice (Open Enrollment) Affect USDD's Budget?

Due to space constraints at Foxview Intermediate, De Pere Middle School and De Pere High School, the District closed open enrollment to any new students (except for up to 20 4K students) at the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Prior to 2023, open enrollment was limited to 4K, 5K, and the high school for several years.

Closing open enrollment is one strategy for managing space at our buildings. However, open-enrolled students provide significant additional revenue as long as no additional staff is required. For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the district received \$413,848 less revenue from open enrollment as a result of not accepting new students.

What Happens In Our Schools If the Referendum Fails?

Without additional revenue, the District will need to:

- Increase
 - Class sizes at all schools
- Limit
 - Courses offered at the high school
 - Training and assessments needed to comply with the recently passed Wisconsin Act 20 (literacy law)
 - Ability to attract and retain high-quality staff
- Decrease
 - Staff positions throughout the district, including teachers and administrators
 - The current number of bus routes, resulting in increased student ride times
 - Extracurricular offerings

- Employee health care benefits
- Student mental health services
- Student technology (currently 1:1 device per student) and cyber security upgrades
- Building budgets (field trips, etc.)

Are Other School Districts Seeking Additional Funding Through Operational Referendum Questions?

Last year, 258 of the state's 421 school districts used voter-approved operational referendum dollars to help pay their expenses. This is an increase from 197 in 2010 and 71 in 2000 (*source: Forward Analytics, November 2023*).

Since the start of the revenue limit formula in 1993, 85% of Wisconsin school districts have pursued an operational referendum. Area district operating referendums since 2009

- Ashwaubenon (2)
- Denmark (5)
- Gibraltar (3)
- Green Bay (1)
- Howard-Suamico (3)
- Manitowoc (7)
- Pulaski (3)
- Sevastopol (5)
- Southern Door (5)
- Sturgeon Bay (5)

Source: [Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction](#)

What is On the Ballot April 2?

The referendum election ballot will ask District residents to vote "yes" or "no" on the referendum election question below.

"Shall the Unified School District of De Pere, Brown County, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$4,750,000 per year for five years, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year and ending with the 2028-2029 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of operational and maintenance expenses?"

Can I Vote Early? Where Do I Vote? When is Election Day?

- Election information for every city, village and town in our district is available at [My Vote Wisconsin](#). This includes how to register, early voting/absentee voting regulations and more. You can also visit your community's main website for details.
- [View information on voting in the April 2 election from the Brown County Clerk's office](#)

How Can I Learn More?

Join one of our scheduled Town Hall meetings for a short presentation followed by questions and answers.

Monday, February 26	6:00 PM	In Person	DPHS Library	
Wednesday, February 28	4:00 PM	Virtual		https://meet.google.com/dgz-eeac-qxw?hs=122&authuser=0
Thursday, February 29	6:00 PM	In Person	Dickinson Library	
Tuesday, March 5	6:00 PM	In Person	Altmayer Community Room	
Wednesday, March 6	7:00 AM	Virtual		https://meet.google.com/dgz-eeac-qxw?hs=122&authuser=0
Monday, March 11	6:00 PM	In Person	DPMS Library	
Tuesday, March 12	12:00 PM	Virtual		https://meet.google.com/dgz-eeac-qxw?hs=122&authuser=0
Thursday, March 14	4:00 PM	Virtual		https://meet.google.com/dgz-eeac-qxw?hs=122&authuser=0
Tuesday, March 19	6:00 PM	In Person	Foxview Library	
Wednesday, March 20	6:00 PM	Virtual		https://meet.google.com/dgz-eeac-qxw?hs=122&authuser=0

Grounds crew, maintenance and food service are significantly underpaid, underappreciated and overworked. The 2% annual raise increase is laughable. So, while I feel teachers will never be paid enough for all they do, I am wondering specifically *which* staff will see a pay increase, and how much? We are significantly underpaid compared to other local school districts.

The Operational Referendum, if passed, will provide additional funding for all staff (and extracurricular leader) salaries and benefits. In fact, salary and benefit funding comprises the largest portion of the referendum request. The District gives the same percent increase to support staff as we do to teachers. However, support staff are on a different pay matrix than teachers. Any individual's pay adjustment will vary based on factors such as years of experience; number of years employed in the district, position held; and more. The percent of any future pay adjustments has not been determined at this time. Overall, our goal is to retain our valuable staff in all categories, including support staff. Paying support staff wages that are comparable to other districts is an important way for us to achieve this.

Once the outcome of the referendum is determined the board and administration will know what funds they have to work with and will be better able to communicate to employees in more detail.

As far as the Operational Referendum. Does this mean you are not looking to build a new high school as was asked in the last survey, or is this going to be a tax increase and then another for a new high school?

Last December, the Board of Education reviewed the Community Survey responses, work of the Community Strategic Planning group (Feb. 2023) and the Community Facilities Task Force (final recommendation submitted to Board Sept. 25, 2023) as well as input received by individual members. The Board voted 5-1 in January 2024 to place the Operational Referendum on the April 2 ballot. If passed, the funds from this referendum will be used for operating expenses only. There is no building construction involved in this referendum question.

A second referendum has been proposed for November 2024 to provide capital funds for critical building repairs and maintenance. The newest building in the district is 17 years old. The current High School is 45 years old, and Foxview Intermediate school has portions that are nearly 100 years old. Funds from a November 2024 referendum would be used to address items such as leaking roofs/windows; heating, plumbing and electrical systems that frequently break down or were not designed to support the number of students we currently enroll; safety upgrades and more. The Board has not formally approved the November 2024 referendum at this time.

Construction of a new high school was not supported by the majority of residents who completed the community survey last October. As a result, a new Community Facilities Task Force will be formed this coming fall to consider all options for handling our increasing enrollment and aging buildings. A new high school may be one of the options they consider, or they may choose a completely different alternative. Any residents of the district who are interested will be invited to join the Task Force to help determine how we should meet our facility needs.

Can I please have a specific breakdown of how each dollar will be spent. I have seen the vague breakdown in the video, but I want to see the specific breakdown of what it will actually be spent on.

- The Employee Compensation funding (including extracurricular salaries) was determined based on review of the pay scales of area school districts, and approved pay increases in those districts. De Pere's pay increase for the 2023-24 school year (3%) was below the Consumer Price Index (CPI - 8%) and in several cases less than half the amount negotiated in other local school districts. This puts us at a competitive disadvantage for attracting and retaining staff. Pay for our extracurricular staff has lagged other school districts significantly for several years.
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- Interventionists/Instructional coaches are a top priority at our higher level grades (9-12). These specialists allow us to raise achievement levels of students struggling with reading and math, and who have often moved into our district from other areas.
- The \$75,000 amount that will be allocated to Mental Health and Social/Emotional Learning will replace grant funding we received from the state for several years. The state has discontinued the program which provided these funds. As always, we will continue to pursue grant funding in a variety of areas to support our students' needs.
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