



Tosa 2075 Long Range Budget Planning Recommendation

The Wauwatosa School District has an annual operating budget of \$100M. District administrators anticipate a budget shortfall of \$61M over the next five years. The anticipated shortfall is due to projections that District operations will increase by 4% annually, yet revenue will grow by just 2% per year.

Simply put, school finance provides a community with two distinct pathways for determining the standard of care for the children it serves. One pathway includes aligning operating costs to the minimal revenue limit authority granted by the state of Wisconsin. This fiscally-conservative approach would require ongoing, annual reductions in programming, services and staffing. Another pathway is for a community to determine that the revenue limit authority granted by the state does not align with its values and vision for the services, programming and staffing that it wishes to afford its children. As such, the community may support revenue generation via an operating referendum.

This current structural funding gap does not only impact the Wauwatosa School District. In fact, over the past several years, a record number of school districts across the state of Wisconsin have sought referendums due to the school funding crisis. In short, this is a statewide public school issue that is caused by a lack of funding - not by irresponsible spending at a local level.

School funding, while very complex, is also extremely straightforward. To close the funding gap and balance the budget, the Wauwatosa School District must either (1) increase revenue, (2) reduce expenditures, or (3) a mix of 1 and 2.

Increase Revenue

Considering the scope of the anticipated budget shortfall, an operating referendum is the recommended route to maintain existing curricular programs, recruit and retain high-quality employees, and continue to make the Wauwatosa School District a destination for families.

It is recommended that the Wauwatosa School District seek an operating referendum of \$48,400,000, funded over a four year period.

Please note that the recommendation of a \$48.4M operational referendum will not fully close the looming budgetary shortfall, and will necessitate some of the reductions listed below. It is incumbent on District administrators to make difficult financial decisions and demonstrate responsible fiscal management within the District, while working to maintain the District's recent positive trajectory including [increases in academic performance](#) and [decreases in student disciplinary issues](#).

Reduce Existing Expenditures

Upon entry into the District, Dr. Means was charged by the Board of Education to conduct a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the school system. The Board of Education would often ask Dr. Means to expose areas for improvement. Additionally, through the listening and engagement tour that Dr. Means held with the community upon his hire, a desire to increase academic performance and to curb the increase in alarming and distracting student behaviors was communicated.

The development of the audacious Strategic Plan, which was constructed with the active participation of the community, charted an ambitious vision for the District. It is unrealistic to assume that the significant changes necessary to achieve vision that the entire Wauwatosa community articulated would not come with a cost.

The vision that Dr. Means has for the Wauwatosa School District is that we become a lighthouse district, demonstrating how a racially, culturally, and socio-economically diverse community can excel in academics, athletics, fine arts, and socially. This vision *cannot* be fully achieved with the current level of funding granted by the state legislature. The vision of the current Strategic Plan is to turn away from the inconsistent, disjointed, and inequitable approach that has historically marred the District's operational approach.

Historically, the Wauwatosa School District has been a low-spending school system. The ability to reduce 10% to 12% of expenses to fully close the ongoing funding gap is daunting and highly unlikely to be accomplished without having a disastrous impact on the programs and services offered to students and the attractiveness and reputation of the Wauwatosa School District. District administrators consistently seek financial efficiencies, and there are few - if any - expenditures that could be easily reduced without recognizing a significant impact on the student experience. In short, making reductions to cover the anticipated budget shortfall caused by the state legislature would require draconian measures that may forever damage the foundation of the Wauwatosa School District.

Proposed Reductions

The Wauwatosa School District administrative team is fully prepared to address the possibility of an operational referendum not passing in our community **or** the possibility of the District seeking a referendum that does not completely cover the projected budget shortfall. Over the past two years, we have celebrated significant positive changes in [academic achievements](#) and [student behavior](#). These advances will be at risk if reductions are implemented due to (1) lack of adequate public school funding by the state legislature and/or (2) the potential of an operating referendum not being passed by the greater Wauwatosa community.

The mere mention of a reduction list will have a negative effect on the Wauwatosa School District community. To maintain the stability of our exceptional staff, we have made a concerted effort to avoid announcing a list of reductions. School districts often use such lists as a strategic tool to provoke an emotional response from staunch advocates to prompt voting efforts in favor of an operational referendum.

Rest assured that this conceptual list is not meant simply to garner support for an operational referendum or to be leveraged as a scare tactic. Instead, in an effort to proactively address questions from the community, the following has been constructed to provide insight into the reductions that would need to be made to close the projected budgetary shortfall. If a referendum does not pass in November 2024, this conceptual list would be implemented over the next four years (2025-26 to 2028-29 school year).

District Office Administration and Staff

In response to external audits conducted in the 2021-22 school year, in an effort for Dr. Means to make the improvements charged by the Board of Education and the community, a new District leadership structure was developed. The structure can be found in the table below. If there is a need to make reductions, the positive momentum that has been achieved through this innovative structure will most certainly be stalled. Further, the vision that the community espoused just a few years ago via the District's Strategic Plan will once again become merely aspirational.

The Wauwatosa School District has maintained a District Office administrative leadership staff of 13 FTE for years. To better meet the needs of schools, staff, and students, the number of District administrative leaders employed by the Wauwatosa School District has increased since the 2021-2022 school year, as articulated on page one of [this document](#).

Although District Office staff do not typically serve in student-facing roles, they directly support teachers and principals, allowing them to focus on serving students. It is incumbent upon these individuals to address the increased concern around the mental health of our students, the need to significantly improve school culture, and the critical improvement of universal instruction for all students. These are not small tasks, and it is reasonable and appropriate for a robust team to address this work comprehensively and systematically.

The table below details a comparison of administrative positions at the start of the 2021-22 school year and the current 2023-24 school year.

Number of District Leaders

Division	2021-2022 SY	2023-2024 SY
Academic Performance	2.5	5.0
Pupil & Family Supports	2.5	5.0
Human Resources	3.0	2.0
Business Services	4.0	5.0
Superintendent Office	1.0	2.0
Total	13.0	19.0

* Four (4.0) FTE existed during the 2021-2022 SY, as coordinator positions were elevated to director positions (Communications, Safety, Buildings & Grounds, and Data Quality & Analytics).

At this time, reducing District Office staff is not suggested as it would be harmful to the academic and behavioral gains achieved over the past two years.

If an operating referendum is not successful in November 2024, the superintendent is committed to **reducing the number of district administrators from 19.0 FTE to 15.0 FTE by July 1, 2025. This will result in a reduction of 4.0 FTE.**

Academic Programming

The Wauwatosa School District offers a robust menu of academic programs not mandated by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. A full accounting of academic programs offered in the District can be found here: [Academic Programming Analysis Data](#).

While core courses are essential to each student's academic journey, elective courses are often a driving factor in students' daily attendance and engagement in learning.

District administrators' specific recommendations regarding academic programming can be found [here](#).

If an operating referendum is not successful in November 2024, **District administrators would assess and consider for reduction all currently-offered programming that is not required by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction** (identified in column B of the [Academic Programming Analysis Data document](#)).

At the secondary level, all electives not required for graduation would be assessed and considered for elimination, and graduation requirements would be reduced from 24 (the requirement for the class of 2028) to 15 (the minimum required by the Department of Public Instruction).

Employee Compensation and Benefits

Employee compensation and benefits represent approximately 80% of the annual expenditures in the District.

Wauwatosa School District employees must have reassurance that their salary and benefits will continue to be a priority for the community. Recognizing that Wauwatosa teacher salaries are still in the lower quartile of Milwaukee Metro school districts, any consideration to freeze salaries or to reduce benefits will undoubtedly harm the District's ability to attract and retain high-quality employees (as noted in *Strategic Goal #4: High-Quality Staff* in the District's [Strategic Plan](#)).

At this time, freezing salaries and/or reducing benefits is not suggested as it would reduce the District's ability to attract and retain high-quality educators.

Curricular and Instructional Support

The District has grounded its continuous improvement efforts in supporting teachers and other educators through a coaching cycle model. District administrators constantly encourage educators to try new instructional methodologies and strategies to make learning experiences more engaging for children.

This philosophy includes providing instructional coaches to support educators in their implementation of new curriculum and instructional materials. With new curriculums slotted to emerge annually as a result of the seven year curriculum cycle, the role of the coaches to ensure implementation integrity will be paramount. The support provided by instructional coaches allows principals to address acute and urgent behavioral issues, and provides the bandwidth for the principal to serve as a true instructional leader.

Simply put, in the best case scenario, the model that was in existence ***prior*** to the 2022-23 school year resulted in “just-in-time” leadership that paralyzed the entire organization and made it reactionary. Typically, the model was unstructured, resulting in uneven implementation of new curriculum and siloed approaches to instructional methodology - depending on the school building. The strategic approach now in place allows content experts to support educators, the classroom, the school environment, and curricular implementation in a describable, predictable, measurable and effective manner.

Unfortunately, the model we have collectively built would be disassembled if cuts are made to staffing. This will again result in the uneven implementation of a guaranteed and viable curriculum. In many cases, these reductions would also reintroduce the practice of every school operating independently from a curricular perspective. In other words, the curriculum and how content is taught at one school will very likely vary by school. The consistency and organizational obligation to ensure all our students receive the same educational experience would no longer be guaranteed. As a result of this model, a student’s learning experience would be completely dependent on the teacher and the school that they were assigned. This is the antithesis of educational equity.

If an operating referendum is not successful in November 2024, **2.0 FTE in curriculum coordinators would be reduced**. This will result in curriculum revision cycles being delayed. As a result, educators would likely use dated materials to teach children in the classroom.

School Culture

A major concern expressed by community members and teaching staff was the perceived decline in student compliance and overall student behavioral issues in the schools. One strategy that was implemented was the introduction of Dean of Student positions, which have made a significant positive impact on the four secondary schools they serve. The model has been so successful that the role of Dean of Students has been implemented at Eisenhower Elementary School.

The Dean of Students positions have been lauded as allowing principals and associate principals time to complete teacher evaluations, which are central to providing valuable feedback and support to educators. The Deans of Students have also had a significant impact in introducing systems that establish greater order for student behavior. If an operating referendum is not successful in November 2024, **the five Dean of Student positions will be eliminated by the start of the 2025-26 school year.**

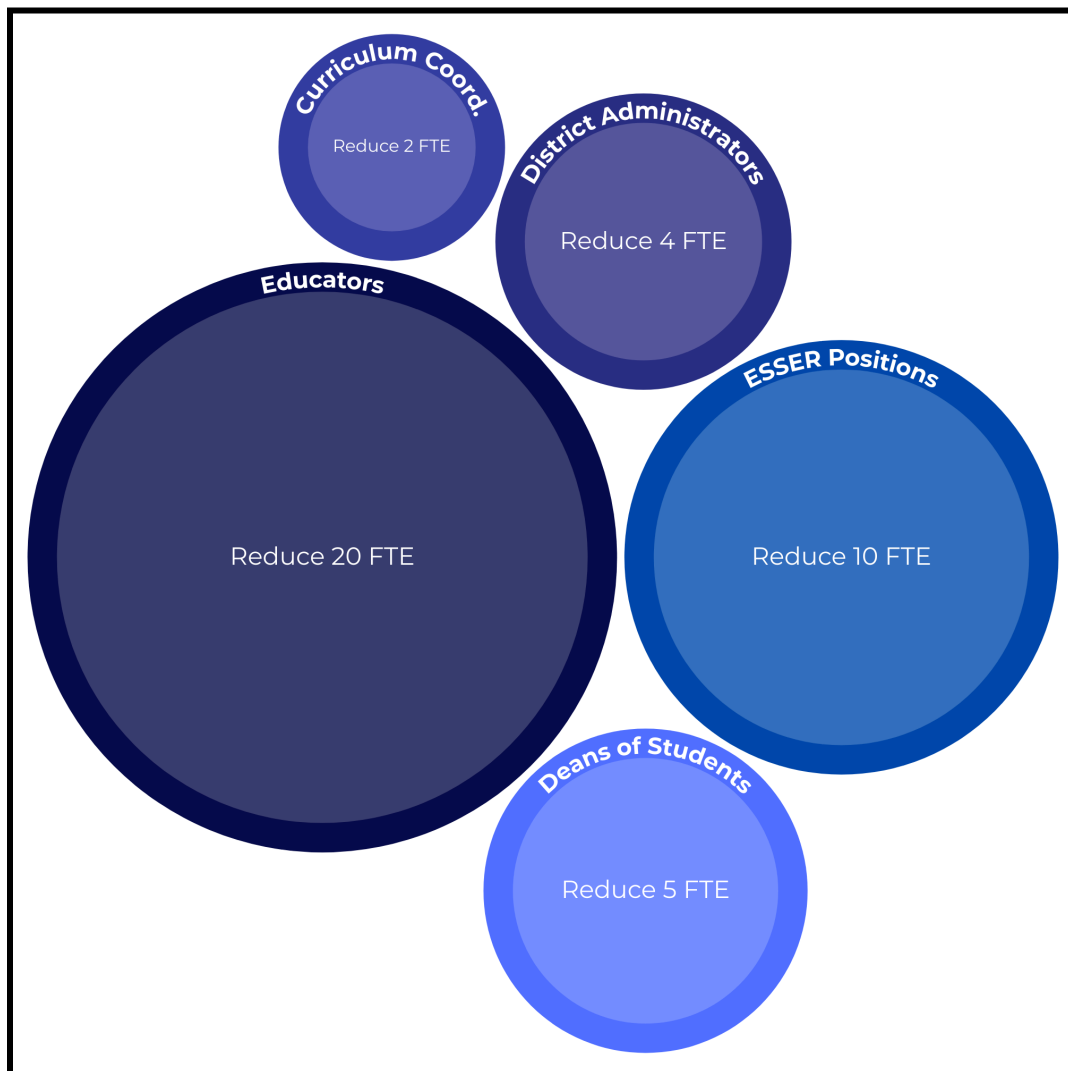
Additionally, if an operating referendum is not successful in November 2024, **the ten (10) FTE for social and emotional positions that were initially introduced to the district through ESSER funding would be eliminated.** This recommendation is the antithesis of our standard of care for children in Wauwatosa. In short, if an operating referendum does not pass, we will be unable to adequately meet the social and emotional needs of our students.

Educational Experience

If there is a need to reduce expenditures, the final lever the district can control is to increase the student-to-teacher ratio in classrooms. The District would accomplish this task by **increasing class sizes**. Additionally, the District would be forced to **modify the school day schedule (e.g. educators teaching six out of seven periods) at the secondary level to facilitate staffing reductions and having remaining staff teach more sections than they currently do**. The increase of class sizes and workloads would surely have a demoralizing impact on the District. However, these increases would be necessary to meet the financial shortfall caused by the current level of state funding.

One of the goals the superintendent had upon the start of his tenure was to lower class sizes. Dr. Means has stated that, "It is no secret that when there is a lower class size, students are able to be seen by their teacher, teachers are able to address the needs of students more effectively, and the school-home partnership is more connected."

An overview of the reductions necessary to close a budgetary shortfall of \$4M is articulated below.



The Impact of Reductions

At a time when the District has witnessed such promising positive improvement in both the academic and student behavioral aspects of the organization, it would be difficult to implement any of the reductions outlined in this proposal. In fact, to fulfill the promises made to the Wauwatosa community in the Strategic Plan, District administrators have articulated increases in the areas of instructional coaching, academic specialists and instructional technology. [Details of those increases can be found here](#). To be clear, these increases are *not* being recommended at this time due to the financial challenges facing Wisconsin public schools.

The reductions articulated here are *not* preferred by District administrators. In fact, Administrators believe that implementing this proposal would adversely impact children. Further, the proposal falls short of supporting educators, and does not lead us forward in realizing the vision or fulfilling our promises outlined in the strategic plan.

In a moment in time when it is difficult to recruit and retain quality educators, this proposal would tarnish the reputation of the Wauwatosa School District. Educators have the ability to work anywhere. It was the goal of Dr. Means to make Wauwatosa a distinction district for educators based on the compensation package offered, working conditions, access to high-quality curricular materials, and strong district support.

In short, it would be a disservice to the children, the team that we have assembled, the progress we have made as an organization, and our promise to the students of the Wauwatosa School District to implement any element of this proposal. We would revert back to an inconsistent, inequitable District that [promotes islands of excellence](#) and denies students the [opportunity of academic and social success](#).

Moving Forward: Beyond 2029

School funding in Wisconsin is broken. The current school funding model limits the amount of revenue that local school boards can generate to fund the programming their communities deem important and vital to the children they serve. Further, the state legislature has purposely decided to underfund traditional public schools since 2009, refusing to align funding with inflationary increases.

Many in the Wauwatosa community have asked, “Will this be the last referendum request?” In truth, it depends on the state legislature. If the state legislature continues to underfund public schools, then district administrators and school boards will need to follow their moral compass and determine if the available funding meets the aspirations of the community and the standard of care they wish to provide. It is likely, given the current school funding climate, that the Wauwatosa School District will need to request operational funding in three to five-year cycles in order to simply maintain the current level of programming and staffing.

At this time, Wauwatosa School District administrators can emphatically state that the current level of funding in Wisconsin does not meet our goals of closing opportunity gaps and increasing achievement for all students.