



2020 REFERENDUM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the proposed referendum?

The proposed referendum will seek an increase in revenue limits for Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). More specifically, the referendum will ask voters for a four-year phase-in revenue limit increase for a total of \$87 million.

What is the revenue limit?

In 1993, the Wisconsin legislature instituted a limit on the revenue a district is entitled to receive each year from general state aid and local tax levies. The revenue limit for a district indicates the maximum amount a district can receive through the combination of general state aid and local tax levy. The revenue limit caps the district's ability to fill the gap in needed funding through additional tax levy. A school district can exceed the revenue limit through a voter approved referendum.

Why is this referendum necessary and why pursue this now?

School districts are limited by the state as to how much they can spend. MPS's revenues have been stagnant since 2010-11. As every family knows the cost of living has gone up in the last ten years. That same reality is true for MPS. Revenue has not kept pace with increased costs making it more difficult to provide students with the best educational experience. The only alternative to increasing spending is a voter approved referendum. In the last 25 years more than 400 of the state's 421 school districts have sought and passed a referendum to do just that.

When was the last time MPS sought a referendum?

The last time MPS had a referendum was 1993. This will be the first time in more than 25 years that MPS will go to referendum. Within the past two decades, many other districts in the area and the state have sought and received revenue limit increases through the passage of a referendum.

How did the referendum get approved? What process was implemented to get a referendum placed on the ballot?

State law allows school boards to seek approval for a referendum for two purposes, to exceed the state-imposed revenue limit and to borrow money for facilities. On June 27, 2019, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors adopted Resolution 1920R-004 which directed the Administration to develop and present a plan to engage stakeholders and to gather their feedback on how best to strengthen the experience for students in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Public listening sessions on these important issues were held in September in locations throughout the city.

A community task force was developed to examine the needs of MPS students and held four meetings during November and December.

The Community Task Force, in collaboration with the Donovan Group, LLC, developed and submitted a report that outlined its findings and work for the Board's consideration and informed the Board of possible next steps. This

report was finalized and submitted to the Strategic Planning and Budget Committee prior to its monthly meeting in December. After hearing and deliberating the final report of the Community Task Force, the committee directed the Administration to take immediate steps to pursue a referendum. On December 19, 2019, at its regular full board meeting, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors unanimously approved a resolution to seek the referendum to increase revenue limits for Milwaukee Public Schools.

Where can I find a copy of the Community Task Force Report?

A copy of the [Community Task Force Report](https://mpsmke.com/referendum) can be found on the MPS Referendum web page at mpsmke.com/referendum.

What type of support does the referendum have from the community?

A broad collation of community groups have expressed their support for the \$87 million referendum. One recent public opinion survey showed that more than 60% of Milwaukee residents would strongly support a referendum for \$107 million.

What will the referendum cost and how will it affect me?

The referendum will ask voters for a four-year phase-in revenue limit increase for a total of \$87 million. If you are a property owner, the estimated calculated tax impact would be approximately \$160 per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

This means the owner of a home valued at \$150,000 would contribute an additional 66 cents a day to neighborhood school in Milwaukee if the referendum passes.

If the revenue increase gets phased in over four years, will my property taxes continue to go up each year due to this referendum?

No. There should only be a one-time increase in property taxes if the referendum passes. As an example, if you own a home with an assessed value of \$100,000, there will be an estimated annual increase in property taxes of \$160 in the first year if the referendum passes. But, there will be no additional increases associated with the referendum based on the design of the phase in. Because the revenue limit is a combination of local property taxes and state aid, MPS will receive additional state aid to offset the revenue increases in years two through four. The goal is to maximize the resources available to children while minimizing the impact on property taxes. The model would then allow MPS students to receive the same level of base funding as a student in Whitefish Bay.

How does MPS revenue limits compare to other districts?

The revenue limit for MPS is significantly lower than neighboring districts. For example, in this academic year, the limit in the School District of Brown Deer is \$1,768.44 per student per year *more* than MPS. The limit in neighboring Nicolet is \$5,293.27 more than MPS. Our students are no less worthy than students from other districts.

If MPS had the same revenue limit as Brown Deer, MPS would have at least \$133 million more revenue this year; it would have at least \$400 million for this year if it had Nicolet's per pupil funding.

What if the referendum fails?

Efforts will continue to stem the effects of financial cuts. But students will be provided far fewer educational opportunities than their peers in other districts. Moreover, much more will be expected of MPS teachers and staff than of those in similar positions in other districts. This will result in a greater migration of outstanding Milwaukee Public school educators to other Wisconsin school districts.

Without needed funding, MPS will lag behind in areas that research has shown to stimulate the brain and improve achievement, such as music and high-quality early childhood education.

After family members, teachers and other professional staff in school are among the most important adults with whom our children engage. However, without additional funding, recruiting and retaining outstanding psychologists, therapists, social workers, nurses, counselors and safety staff will be even more challenging.

Other programs, including college and career advancement, could be put in jeopardy. In addition, further reductions in staffing and programming may be necessary.

What has MPS been doing to reduce costs now?

For every dollar MPS receives, 90-cents is spent in the classroom. Over the past 20 years the district has cut costs by millions of dollars. Just like a business, MPS has also worked to maximize returns on the investment that taxpayers have made in the schools.

However, unlike a business that can get rid of any product or service that is not profitable, the school district cannot eliminate basic educational offerings, nor turn away any of the students it serves.

How will this funding be spent? Is this a referendum to increase wages of teachers and administrators?

If passed, the additional funding will help MPS attract and retain high-quality, certified teachers; offer more career and technical education programs; and expand art, music, physical education, and language programs.

All budget allocations are approved by the elected members of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors after public input.

How does MPS assure accountability and transparency with funding and what does MPS do to prevent over spending?

Milwaukee Public Schools believes that transparency and accountability is very important, and this is demonstrated through our annual audit and the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report that is published with the auditor's statement. Milwaukee Public Schools has been awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting each year from the Government Finance Officers Association.

MPS presents its proposed budget every year near the end of April. The proposed budget includes line-by-line budget reporting. Meetings of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors allows for public input, amendments and a final approved budget.

Wisconsin Policy Forum reviews and [reports on MPS's budget](#) each year which provides an objective analysis for the public.

Budget and expenditure reviews for departments and schools are conducted monthly utilizing reports generated from Financial Planning & Budget Services. In addition, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors established the Office of Accountability and Efficiency (OAE) in 2010 to enhance transparency, oversight, and accountability to the financial operations.

Accountability can be measured through credit ratings. The City of Milwaukee has authority under Chapters 67 and 119 of Wisconsin Statutes to issue municipal obligations for specific school purposes. All issuance of debt, whether short-term or long-term, is approved by the MBSD. The City of Milwaukee continues to maintain high bond ratings from three major agencies. This, along with favorable reviews of the district's financial management, allows for borrowing at competitive rates that minimize costs. The link provides the most [current bond ratings by rating agency](#) for all issues.

How will the referendum be worded on the ballot?

The following will be used on the April 7, 2020 ballot:

Shall the Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee and Washington Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$57 million for the 2020-2021 school year; by an additional \$20 million for the 2021-2022 school year; by an additional \$7 million for the 2022- 2023 school year; and by an additional \$3 million (for a total of \$87 million) for the 2023-2024 school year and thereafter, for the recurring purposes of sustaining and expanding educational programming, including, offering more career and technical education programs, attracting and retaining certified educators, and expanding art, music, physical education, and language programs?

Why is Washington County listed on the ballot question?

Milwaukee and Washington Counties are listed in the ballot question because the City of Milwaukee has parcels of land in both counties that pay taxes on behalf of Milwaukee Public Schools. We will note that the City of Milwaukee also has parcels of land in Waukesha County, but those parcels do not pay taxes on behalf of Milwaukee Public Schools.

There is only one parcel of land in Washington County that is also in the City of Milwaukee – that lovely little triangle in the northwest corner of the city – and the parcel belongs to Waste Management. So, there are no city residences in Washington County, but we do need to list Washington County in the ballot for clarity since some taxes will be levied on a property in that county on behalf of Milwaukee Public Schools.

When, where, and how do I vote?

Polls open at 7:00 AM and close at 8:00 PM on Tuesday, April 7, 2020.

In order to vote by absentee ballot, voters must be registered to vote no later than March 18, 2020 (if registering by mail or online) and no later than April 3, 2020 at 5:00 pm (if registering in-person at the municipal clerk's office).

The last day to submit an absentee ballot request by mail is April 7, 2020 at 8:00 pm and the last day to submit an absentee ballot in person is April 5, 2020. Hours for in-person absentee ballots vary [contact your municipal clerk](#) for more information.

To learn more about [registering to vote](#), [where to vote](#), or [absentee ballots](#), please visit [My Vote Wisconsin](#).

Who may I contact for more information:

Please feel free to share any additional feedback and questions with us at feedback@milwaukee.k12.wi.us