



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Eau Claire Area School District Operational Referendum

**November 5, 2024**

**1. How are public schools funded in Wisconsin?**

Revenue limits on public school funding were set by our state legislature in 1993 to control property taxes and state aid. Now more than 30 years later, with the state having failed to keep up with inflation for the past fifteen years, referendum remains the only tool districts can use to address funding shortfalls.

**2. Why is ECASD going to referendum?**

The ECASD began the 23-24 school year with a deficit of just over \$9 million. There is a projected deficit for 24-25 of \$12,975,616 million. Pandemic ESSER funding provided to the ECASD ends September 30, 2024. The ECASD used its funds prior to June 30. The district is asking for additional funding to continue educational programs, including elementary reading; behavioral and mental health resources for students; school safety initiatives; and sustaining optimal student to staff ratios. The additional dollars will allow the District student learning and inflationary increases during the operation.

**3. Do other school districts go to referendum?**

Yes! Referendum is the only tool given to public schools throughout the state of Wisconsin to exceed revenue limits. From spring of 2024 to the November 5, 2024, election date, more than 155 out of 421 school districts in Wisconsin have pursued referendum to cover funding needs.

**4. What is an operational referendum?**

An operational referendum allows school districts to exceed the limit on revenue imposed by the state by asking communities to help fund ongoing costs to operate the day-to-day functions of the school district, such as instruction and materials, technology, safety, supports for students, staff salaries and benefits, and supplies.

**5. How did you plan for this referendum?**

Our school board and administration has been discussing an operational referendum for the past year, knowing that school funding in our state remains below 2009 levels of spending. As we have done in the past, our District conducted an in-depth community survey to determine our community's values toward its public school and its willingness to help fund our schools, for how much and for how long. Please click [Community Survey](#) for more information.

**6. How is this referendum different than the November 2022 Capital Referendum?**

The capital referendum in 2022 specifically supported only capital improvements to multiple schools in the ECASD, including a complete renovation of the aging South Middle School.

**7. How is the ECASD's referendum question different from the statewide referendum question also on the November 5 ballot?**

Voters will see two referendum questions on the November 5 ballot. The ECASD referendum provides critical support for Eau Claire public schools. The other referendum proposes an amendment to change the state constitution and is in no way associated with the ECASD. Here is the wording of the statewide question: *Eligibility to vote*. "Shall section 1 of the article III of the constitution, which deals with suffrage, be amended to provide that only a United States citizen age 18 or older who resides in an election district may vote in an election for national, state, or local office or at a statewide or local referendum?"

**8. What is the operational referendum question?**

"Shall the Eau Claire Area School District, Chippewa, Dunn and Eau Claire Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$18,000,000 for the 2024-2025 school year and for each of the succeeding 3 school years thereafter, for non-recurring purposes to fund operating costs to ensure stability of educational programs, including elementary reading; behavioral and mental health resources for students; school safety; and sustain students to staff ratios."

**9. What does non-recurring mean?**

Non-recurring means “non occurring repeatedly or occurring one time only.” In a non-recurring referendum, the amount of dollars is added on a temporary basis for the number of years specified.

**10. What will happen if the referendum doesn’t pass?**

The ECASD will operate significantly different if the referendum does not pass.

The following items will be delayed or negatively impacted:

- The current level of funding for educational programming
- Funding for elementary reading to meet state mandated reading requirements
- Funding for behavioral and mental health support and resources
- Safety and security updates
- Technology updates
- Sustaining student to staff ratios

**11. What has the ECASD done to manage its budget?**

Budget management strategies include:

- Active management of health insurance costs – 0% increase
- 2022 Capital Referendum projects on time and under budget
- Managing class sections based on current enrollment
- Reduced spending on materials and supplies
- Updated budget planning documents to accurately reflect what was reduced

**12. What is a fund balance?**

A school district’s fund balance represents the fund’s total assets minus its liabilities (what a fund owns minus what it owes). A district with an appropriate fund balance can avoid excessive short-term borrowing which avoids associated interest costs and demonstrates financial stability to preserve or enhance its bond rating, lowering debt issuance costs.

**13. What is the cost to taxpayers for the operational referendum?**

Good schools maintain property values. The yearly property impact of the referendum is estimated to be \$99 per \$100,000 of property value\*.

*\*Projections are based on current projections, fluctuations are possible*

**14. Where and when can I vote?**

The referendum question will be on the ballot for the November 5, 2024, election. Please visit <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Find-My-Polling-Place> for a one-stop location for voting in Wisconsin.

**15. If there is extra money from the Capital Referendum left over from 2022, can that be used toward operational needs?**

No. The Capital Referendum funds can only be applied to projects, items and schools listed in the approved referendum question.

**16. Do our legislators know that the funding formula is a concern for Eau Claire and so many other districts?**

Yes, the District has and will continue to engage the legislature on how the current level of funding is impacting how ECASD operates. We regularly inform regional and state legislators about our challenges and successes.

**17. What types of results are you seeing from positions that were initially funded with federal pandemic funds?**

The ECASD now has positions dedicated to interventionists who work directly with students who need something more and different. Many of our students need intervention to assist with math or reading. Recognizing the unique educational journey of each student, we provide diverse programming options, ensuring they will become college, career, and life ready. We continue to strive to staff the pupil services departments in each building at the recommended ratio for these positions so that buildings have the resources and support to help our students and families. Our school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers work directly with students and collaborate with community partners to get students and families what they need. The need for behavioral and mental health support among our students has never been greater, and we are committed to continuing this support.

**18. Do you connect with other local districts to combine services?**

ECASD has and will continue to collaborate and explore future collaboration with area school district on projects.

**19. When will the state legislature's Joint Finance Committee release funds for the Act 20 literacy initiative for Eau Claire and the other districts across the state?**

Act 20 was passed in July of 2023. Governor Tony Evers included \$50 million in the 2023-2025 budget for implementation of the mandated literacy program, which began with the 24-25 school year. To date, the Joint Finance Committee has not released funding to implement Act 20.

**20. If the referendum passes, what happens in four years when this non-recurring referendum expires?**

The ECASD funding is lowered by \$18 M unless other funding sources increase, or another referendum is passed.

September 30, 2024