

Staff Participation in the Referendum

The following Q & A should help you understand your role as a Red Wing Public Schools staff member leading up to Election Day Nov. 8, 2022.

General rules to remember:

- If you *are acting in the capacity of a district staff member*, you **should not** be advocating for or against the referendum, but you can provide factual information.
- If you *are on your own time and acting as a private citizen*, you **can** advocate in any manner you wish.

The ballot question reads:

The board of Independent School District No. 256 (Red Wing Public Schools) has proposed to renew its existing referendum revenue authorization of \$1650 per pupil which is scheduled to expire after taxes payable in 2023. The proposed referendum revenue authorization would be applicable for 7 years beginning with taxes payable in 2024, unless otherwise revoked or reduced as provided by law.

Shall the increase in the revenue proposed by the board of Independent School District No. 256 be approved?

Yes

No

BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING TO EXTEND AN EXISTING PROPERTY TAX REFERENDUM THAT IS SCHEDULED TO EXPIRE.

Q. What is the law governing information about the referendum?

A. Districts must provide information about the campaign in a neutral manner. These publications must not promote a vote for or against the issue. School boards may expend a reasonable amount of funds to educate voters of the facts pertinent to the ballot question. It is the district's job to educate voters with the facts. It is the right of citizen and employee groups to advocate for or against.

Q. What may I tell students or send home with students? What if students ask about the referendum in class?

A. You may provide information that is factual, such as when and where the election is being held and what the referendum is for. The district has factual information you can share. You may not campaign to vote "yes" or "no" while working in your official capacity as an employee (e.g., teachers at conferences, when instructing or when coaching). You may campaign to vote "yes" or "no" when on your own time as a private citizen.

Discussion regarding the referendum election is not appropriate for the classroom unless it is related to the curriculum – for example, related to discussion of citizen rights to vote, political process, etc., and/or does not attempt to persuade individuals how to vote on the issue.

Q. What may I say in classroom newsletters or tell parents at open houses or conferences or via e-mail, etc.?

A. See question above. Remember the underlying principle: school districts may not expend school district funds to support a particular vote on a proposition. Therefore, newsletters or any official communication from the school may provide only factual information about the referendum but not take a position of support or opposition.

Q. What are appropriate ways to share factual information about the referendum?

A. If you want to distribute any factual information about the referendum (all materials provided by the district will be factual), you can do so in several ways including:

- Backpacks
- Newsletters
- Emails
- School website (link the [referendum page](#) ensures consistent information)
- Events

Q. What if a community member or parent confronts me about the information we are providing?

A. We are sometimes criticized for providing any information, including that which is legal and which we are obligated to provide. Refer any concerns to the superintendent's office.

Q. May I use school email as it relates to the referendum?

A. Staff should not use district email in any way that relates to campaigning for the referendum, but staff can provide factual information regarding the referendum using district email. If staff members wish to inform parents and the public regarding the facts surrounding the referendum, the best source of information is what is available on the district website. See the upper lefthand corner: [Referendum 2022](#).

Q. What can I use school district equipment for?

A. You may use interschool mail, video equipment, copy machines, etc., to provide factual information about the referendum. You may not use school equipment to provide reasons why people should vote yes or no.

Q. When and where may I wear buttons, stickers, T-shirts, etc.?

A. You can wear whatever you'd like when you are off duty. You can always display generic positive messages about education and our schools (e.g. "Winger Pride" and "Kids First."). While you have a First Amendment right to wear buttons, stickers, T-shirts, etc., that read "Vote Yes" or "Vote No", if you are in a position of authority, that right is limited. As public employees, we may not use our position to influence the outcome of an election, so if you are in a position of authority over students, parents or other staff, you need to consider the influence you have and whether wearing advocacy items is appropriate.

Q. So the rules change when I am off-site (e.g., at a coffee shop or out in public)?

A. Yes. While staff members may not encourage a “yes” vote on school premises during the contract day, staff members and school board members may certainly, in their personal capacity, engage in political activities as they wish.

Q. Can I write letters to the editors of newspapers? What about social media?

A. Yes. You may express your personal opinion in a letter to the editor. While you may identify himself or herself as a staff member of the school district, you should also make it clear that the letter expresses your personal opinion. It should not be written on school district stationery, sent by the school email system nor should it come from a school computer. The same applies to social media. You are free to post information and your opinion on your personal social media accounts. However, your school email should not be tied to your personal social media accounts. Nor should you be posting to your social media account during the contract day.

Q. May I post a sign in my yard?

A. Yes.

Q. Am I allowed to make financial contributions to and/or participate in events sponsored by any citizen group supporting the referendum?

A. Yes.

Q. May I volunteer to work on phone banks or go door to door with literature?

A. Yes, so long as the volunteer activity does not occur during the contract day.

Q. What can schools say in parent newsletters?

A. School newsletters can provide information about the election such as where and when it is held and other factual information about the school district and referendum questions.

Q. May employee organizations send a letter or postcard to parents urging “yes” votes?

A. Yes. Employee organizations are separate entities and may campaign for or against the referendum. Employee organizations may also donate money to such campaigns. Again, no volunteer activity can occur during the contract day.