

Referendum talking points 2022

Renewal – not an increase

The School Board unanimously decided in June 2022 to seek an extension of the 2018 referendum, which voters overwhelmingly supported by a margin of 60 to 40%.

The board determined that with this referendum:

- We will be able to continue making some necessary investments to prepare our students for success – although school funds do not go as far due to inflation.
 - Example: Our long-term facilities maintenance budget's spending power is down 30%.
- We will *not* be raising the burden on local property taxpayers. ISD 256's portion of the property tax bill will *not* increase. In fact, it is expected to *continue* decreasing each year because the Red Wing population is aging and school enrollment is declining:
 - Example: When we lose 50 students at \$1,650 each, \$82,500 comes off the next year's property tax bill.
- We made investments from early childhood through graduation and want to continue supporting all students as much as possible in their learning.
- The community made clear in 2018 that it wants us to invest in its future – namely, in our children's education.

NOTE: The renewal will not answer every need. The district continues to trim through attrition first, but cuts have been necessary from 2019-2022. Example: Even with the current referendum, we had to address \$1.4 million in aid and levy shortfalls for 2022-2023.

One question on the ballot

Passage of a single question will give the Red Wing Public Schools the most flexibility in addressing issues in the rapidly changing educational landscape.

In contrast, dividing the \$1,650 per pupil funding into two or three questions for specific purposes would lock in monies to certain projects and areas that might become obsolete or fall lower on the priority list over time.

A 7-year levy term

State law allows voter-authorized operating levies of up to 10 years. The School Board decided that a 10-year term was too long, but a 7-year term has several advantages over another 5-year term:

- Stability. This will allow more time for strategic, long-range planning.
- Perception. "Didn't I just vote in a referendum?" Time flies.
- Timing. The 7 years will begin with taxes payable in 2024. Since there is one year left on the existing levy, a renewal will carry us to taxes payable 2030.

Voting in 2022

This is a midterm election year. Since an election is already taking place, the District added its levy renewal request to the ballot instead of waiting a year because:

- The levy is expiring soon.
- Federal and state school funding is not keeping pace with the mandates they impose or inflation.
 - Example: Minnesota falls \$3 million short in special education funds for Red Wing Public Schools. We must make up the difference using general funds, so all students are affected. If the state met its annual obligation, the district could seek a smaller operating levy.
- A levy renewal passage now would save money, because the District would have to fund its own election in 2023 for \$15,000 or more.

Promises from 2018

So what has Red Wing Public Schools delivered or what does it continue to implement through the 2018 referendum funds?

- Maintain class sizes. We had a student-teacher matrix. The pandemic led to disruptions in that plan, but a return to grade level centers this fall means a return to uniform class sizes. This is especially important for the youngest students.
- Add technology. We have 1-to-1 devices. Implementation actually occurred at a faster pace than expected due to the pandemic. Passage of the renewal operating levy will help to keep us on a regular schedule for replacement and upgrades.
 - RWPS has been able to provide each student with a Chromebook. Thanks to referendum funding, as well as COVID-related funding through ESSR and ECF, all students currently have devices no older than 3 years old.
 - Our goal is to continue to replace Chromebooks on a cycle of about 20% per year, assuming the same level of referendum funding. This would ensure students never have a device more than 5 years old.
- Improve safety. All buildings have safer entry points than in 2018. We continually assess safety and intend to implement measures and plans.
- Advance career & college readiness. The Winger Flight Paths program has taken off since fall 2019. Thanks to our community partners, we already have graduates who have entered key local careers – in manufacturing, trades and health care – to fill vital needs in Red Wing. The goal remains to be a local answer to a global workforce problem.
- Invest in Industrial Technology and Art classrooms. State-of-the art equipment for our metals classes, for example, has students learning on the same tools that they will use if they eventually work for local manufacturers. This is helping to address the workforce shortage in the Red Wing area.
- Mental health services.
 - We increased internal counseling
 - Added a partnership with Fernbrook, bringing services to our buildings.

If levy funds end in 2023

Red Wing Public Schools will cut \$4 million in addition to the \$500,000-\$1 million we've been cutting annually.

What does \$4 million look like (example)?

- 34 teachers
- 15 education assistants (paraprofessionals)
- 2 administrators
- 5 secretaries
- 6 custodians

OR

- The entire supplies and equipment budget – everything from paperclips to toilet paper.

Additional things to know:

- The extra federal COVID money merely put off the inevitable cuts.
- This tax levy can only be used for operating budget – staff positions, curriculum, programs, etc.