



Superintendent's Corner...

Community-Wide Survey Coming Soon

As everyone is aware, Merrill Area Public Schools has been dealing with operational issues, in addition to facilities needs, and has been unable to pass an operational referendum. In response to two operational referendums being rejected last year, MAPS was forced to cut 30 staff positions, eliminate programs, reduce bussing, and cut other expenses. This summer, a favorable state budget provided the district with the necessary funds to maintain programs and operations at the new, reduced level and eliminated the need to consider an operations referendum for the next couple of years. That's good news.

It's important for the community to understand our financial situation, how we have responded, and the impact it has had on our staff, students and community as those reductions have had a significant impact on those we serve.

MAPS also has needs in our school buildings, and since initiating a long-range facilities planning process in fall 2022, the district has been diligently working to identify the areas of greatest need to phase into distinct projects to make this affordable to MAPS taxpayers. What started as a study exploring the future of the vacant Jefferson Elementary building led us to evaluate all of our buildings in order to make the best use of our best facilities. This study included significant community focus group input during the summer of 2023, and several recommendations have emerged from that work on how and when to address these needs.

The next step in our long-range facilities master plan is to conduct a district-wide survey to gather valuable community input. The survey, which is being conducted by an independent, third-party consultant, will be mailed to every household in the district and emailed to all staff in late October and early November. The purpose of this survey is to explain our challenges and get community input on what to do next. Data gathered from the survey will assist our School Board in making a decision on whether or not to go to a capital projects referendum in April or November 2024—the survey results will be presented to the board in December. Please watch your mailboxes for this survey and take some time to respond to the survey questions as your input is very important to our district.

If you have questions about the survey, we encourage you to attend our Community Listening Session on November 7 at 6 PM. Join us at Jefferson School to hear about the long-range facilities master planning process thus far, and to get your questions answered. No RSVP is necessary.

Types of Referendum Questions in Wisconsin

There are two main types of public school district referendum questions in Wisconsin:

- **Operational Referendum:** referendum used to fund daily operations, including programs and services. This type of referendum proposes to raise the district's revenue limit. While MAPS has pursued several operational referendums over the past few years, the budget reductions that were made going into this school year, combined with a favorable budget from the State over the summer, mean that we will not need to pursue an operational referendum over the next few years.
- **Capital Referendum** (debt issuance referendum): referendum that allows a district to issue debt (take out a loan) to pay for major facility improvements and is typically financed over a 20-year period. Wisconsin school districts can issue up to \$1 million in debt before triggering the need to pass a referendum. Debt issued under this \$1 million threshold must be paid off using funds within the district's revenue limit. Any other debt must be approved via a referendum.

School districts in the state of Wisconsin have the opportunity to ask two referendum questions per calendar year, whether those questions are successful or not. During even-numbered years, like 2024, there are two election cycles in Wisconsin—April and November—and during odd-numbered years, only an April election.

For additional information on Wisconsin referenda, the Wisconsin DPI is a great resource: <https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/reporting/safr/referendum/overview>. I would also encourage MAPS district taxpayers to reach out to the District Office, as I am more than happy to answer questions you may have.

Shannon Murray