



Please direct inquiries to:

Matthew Zimmerman, Superintendent
920-967-1401 | mzimmerman@mjsd.k12.wi.us

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Menasha Board of Education Approves Operational Referendum Question for April 7 Election

MENASHA, WI — On Monday evening, January 12, 2026, the Menasha Joint School District Board of Education approved an operational referendum question that will appear on the ballot Tuesday, April 7, 2026.

Operational referendums require a simple majority to pass. The non-recurring referendum proposal seeks authority for the district to exceed its state-imposed revenue limit by \$6 million per year through the conclusion of the 2031-32 school year.

“The operational referendum is about maintaining the quality of education our community expects and our students deserve,” said Superintendent Matthew Zimmerman. “Due to rising costs and state revenue limits that have not kept pace with inflation for decades, we face budget deficits that could result in spending reductions that directly affect classroom learning and educational opportunities. We believe it is important for our community to understand the challenges we are facing and to have the opportunity to decide how best to support our schools now and into the future.”

Wisconsin school districts are primarily funded by a combination of state aid and local property taxes. Each district has a revenue limit based on factors largely beyond its control, such as enrollment and inflation. Voter-approved operational referendums are the only funding tool available to exceed the limit.

State financial support has not kept pace with inflation for several years. If state aid had risen in line with inflation since 2009, the Menasha Joint School District would have received more than \$3,500 more per student in the current school year, which equates to an additional \$11 million of spendable revenue.

An approved referendum would have an estimated average annual school district property tax increase of \$5.00 for every \$100,000 of property value. This would equate to an average increase of approximately \$12.50 per year above the current tax rate for a property valued at \$250,000.

Facing a budget deficit for the 2025-26 school year, the board chose to apply federal funds on hand from the Inflation Reduction Act to cover the shortfall. The district is projecting annual average deficits of \$7 million for the next six years.

Steps have been taken in recent years by the Menasha Joint School District to reduce spending. This includes the closure of two elementary schools, eliminating the equivalent of 39 full-time staff positions, ending some staff stipends, and modifying health benefits for district employees.

District officials have engaged with residents about the budget challenges, including through a community survey last fall. Among the results, 56.5 percent of respondents said they would support a non-recurring operational referendum with an annual revenue limit increase of less than \$7 million.

The board and administration will explore budget cuts without an approved operational referendum in April. This could include eliminating programs and services, reducing staff, increasing class sizes, and delaying maintenance.

Operational referendums are common in Wisconsin, as about 87% of school districts have attempted them to date. More than half of all districts statewide have received voter approval to exceed their revenue limits in the past decade.

A website will be created to share information about the operational referendum and the Menasha Joint School District's financial needs. Updates will be shared on the district's social media pages and through emails and direct mailers, and community meetings will also be held before election day.

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