

Oconto
Unified School
District
Referendum 2021

**Frequently
Asked
Questions**

Remember to Vote!

Tuesday, April 6th

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why should we do a capital/building referendum now?

School districts must maintain their buildings, just as homeowners do. Similar to a home, when a building ages, the cost to maintain it often increases. The district has recognized the need of a long-range facilities plan to ensure properly maintained schools for the future. With community input, it has been determined necessary to bring all three buildings into a future ready environment.

How were the needs determined?

In January of 2019, the District began a study of enrollment, facilities, and long-range planning. Sitelogiq was contracted to provide enrollment and community growth projections for the District. They also helped determine facility needs. A district-wide assessment of the facilities was completed in August of 2019. Sitelogiq was contracted for pre-referendum services to provide conceptual solutions and referendum planning assistance. Baird was contracted for pre-referendum services to provide assistance with project scope and budget consultation. School District personnel have been working with these collaborative partners to assure long-range planning solutions and fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers during the referendum process.

Does the project take into consideration long range planning and possible growth?

Yes. However, the scope of our work for maintenance and improvements for our students is never fully completed. We know that we have projects and needs that will arise as equipment expires or students' needs change or increase. Therefore, the projects that are being established within the operational referendum are those that can be built upon with ease and may need future funds.

I have not heard of this referendum until now, how long has the Board talked about the needs of the school district?

The facilities planning process began in 2019 to assess and address Oconto schools, with a goal to provide:

- *Safe and accessible buildings*
- *Flexible and collaborative learning spaces*
- *Cost-effective buildings that maximize taxpayer investment*

From 2019 through 2021, various groups worked on a comprehensive facilities review, culminating with the work of the community-based survey. The plan is designed to:

- *Allow the district to provide the appropriate level of academic and support services for students by having staff and resources more easily accessible*
- *Create modern and flexible spaces that will help deepen the level of learning*
- *Allow the district to not only keep pace with but exceed surrounding districts and make Oconto a destination community for people to live and work*

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What projects are included in the referendum (by School)?

Learning Environments	Safety, Security, & Grounds	IAQ, HVAC	Infrastructure
<p>High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renovate Cafeteria• Expand and Update Kitchen Serving Line• Renovate Media Center in Learning and Tech Lab• Renovate Computer Lab into STEAM Lab <p>Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renovate Classrooms into Spec Ed W/Sensory Rooms• Renovate Main Office into Learning Lab• Renovate Computer Lab into STEAM Lab• Create Collaborative Learning Spaces on 1st and 2nd Floor• Renovate Weight Room into Industrial Learning Lab with Exterior Overhead Door. <p>Elementary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Full 21st Century Flexible Learning Renovation for Grades 1&2 and 3&4• Renovate Special Education Classrooms and Sensory Room• Furniture Allowance	<p>High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No Work <p>Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Secure Main Entry• Main Office & Special Ed Renovations <p>Elementary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upgrade Fire Alarm• Secure Main Entry Upgrade• Main Office & Nurses Office Renovation	<p>High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommissioning• Data Analytics Overlay <p>Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommissioning• Data Analytics Overlay• Replace Gym & Multi-Purpose Room AHU <p>Elementary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommissioning• Data Analytics Overlay	<p>High School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exterior Window Replacement• Exterior Door Replacement• Asbestos Abatement and replacement at Cafeteria & Kitchen• Domestic Water Fixture Efficiency Improvements• Plumbing Fixture Upgrades with Auto Controls <p>Middle School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exterior Window Replacement• Exterior Door Replacement• Asbestos Abatement Tile• Domestic Water Fixture Efficiency Improvements• Plumbing Fixture Upgrades with Auto Controls <p>Elementary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exterior Window Replacement• Domestic Water Fixture Efficiency Improvements

How will the new improvements impact learning?

With the structural improvement we have found that research suggests that having a variety of learning spaces available to personalize learning to diverse needs actually improves overall student engagement and achievement. How a learning environment is designed can promote more cooperative learning and problem-solving, key skills students will need for career and life. In addition, active learning environments have been shown to increase teacher-student interactions, student engagement, improve class attendance rates, and reduce failure rates in both the overall and at-risk student populations.

What is a “secure entryway”?

A secure entrance can prevent unauthorized entry by presenting a more positive security image. When prevention fails, the entrance should mitigate an intruder's ability to enter the school. This should create a delay that provides staff time to call 9-1-1 and implement intruder response plans

I own a farm, how much will this cost me?

A tax calculator is available on the referendum website: www.gooconto.com

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I own a \$100,000 home, what will the bond referendum cost me?

The average equalized home value (fair market value on your tax statement) in Oconto is \$100,000 (according to CityData, 2019). The tax impact on an average assessed home value is \$2.58 per month, or \$31.00 per year.

What will the operational referendum cost me?

The operational referendum has a tax impact of \$0.00 per year – this referendum is tax neutral.

I am a resident of Oconto, but I have no children in the schools; why should I care about this referendum?

School bonds provide a higher return on investment than the cost to pay off the bonds that will benefit the entire community, not only for students. Research shows that adults and seniors will benefit through a stronger local economy, a better-skilled workforce, and higher property values. In the short term, school upgrades generate high-quality jobs, and the ripple effects help local businesses and grow our local tax base. When completed, school improvements lead directly to better student performance—and as a result, to more valuable communities. Higher academic performance in neighborhood schools makes communities more attractive to businesses and new residents; research indicates that home values increase by \$1.50 for every \$1.00 of capital spending on schools.

Where can we get specific property tax information?

Access the referendum website (www.gooconto.com) where a tax calculator is provided by the district financial consultant, Baird. This calculator will allow you to enter equalized home and property value from your tax bill for estimated tax impact information. Contact your local assessor for information about your property assessment and your local clerk for information about your property taxes.

How do I get more information?

Please review the district webpage on www.oconto.k12.wi.us/. You may also contact the Oconto Unified School District at (920) 834-7814.

Will there be informational meetings and presentations?

Meetings are currently being held with Oconto community groups. Please check the district website and district social media for more information and a schedule. A public meeting will be held at the Oconto Middle School on March 29th in the cafeteria from 5:30PM-8:30PM.

I own property in the district but do not live in the district, can I vote in this referendum?

No, you will need to reside in Oconto to vote on this referendum.

How can we be sure the dollars are spent as promised

The bond referendum dollars (\$13,000,000) must be spent, by law, as dictated by the ballot language.

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where do I vote?

Polls open at 7:00 AM and close at 8:00 PM on Tuesday, April 6, 2021. You vote at normal polling locations in your city or township.

In order to vote by absentee ballot, voters must be registered to vote no later than March 17, 2021 (if registering by mail or online) and no later than April 2, 2021 at 5:00 pm (if registering in-person at the municipal clerk's office).

The last day to submit an absentee ballot request by mail is April 6, 2021 at 8:00 pm and the last day to submit an absentee ballot in person is April 5, 2021. Hours for in-person absentee ballots vary and contact [your municipal clerk](#) for more information.

To learn more about [registering to vote](#), [where to vote](#), or [absentee ballots](#), please visit [My Vote Wisconsin](#).

Are there cost savings for doing everything at the same time?

There are efficiencies and cost savings in completing several projects at once. When a contractor is on-site, it is more cost effective to do all necessary projects without additional costs of set-up and take-down. In addition, construction cost inflation only continues to increase each year.

Why are you asking for a capital/building referendum now?

Many reasons led to the decision to put the capital request on the April 2021 ballot:

- The plans for this referendum address priority infrastructure, maintenance and building needs that are well beyond the scope of the annual capital budget.
- The funds would address phases of a long-range facilities plan that was developed with the support of a comprehensive building study. This study was presented to the BOE and worked through the interior and exterior of all three buildings. The identified work would maintain our buildings and bring us into the future ready learning environment we want for all students.
- We are currently seeing extremely low interest rates and a competitive construction market.
- The district is paying down prior debt and approaching the end of the debt related to the 2014 referendum.
- This work helps Oconto be competitive with surrounding communities that are continuously improving their facilities while improving chances that people will choose to live, work, and play in Oconto..
- Facilities improvements will take years to implement - the longer we wait, the longer it will be until we have modern, safe, and efficient schools.
- An investment in schools is an investment in our community's quality of life - the School Board and district leaders are bringing their best judgment to the community, it's now the community's decision.

Can the proceeds of the bond issue be used to pay salaries?

All money that is obtained through the capital/building referendum cannot be used for operations. The monies can only be used for the projects associated with the purposes stated in the ballot question.

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why are you asking for an operating referendum now?

Oconto currently receives and spends less per student than both the state average and the average of similar-sized districts. If the operational referendum is not approved, the District would need to cut \$4 million from the operating budget over the next five years. Approving this funding will result in no tax increase while it:

- Continues current academic programs and support services
- Advances district's strategic plan
- Allow for continued offer of co-curriculars

OUSD has worked on budget reductions throughout many years. The reductions are within the categories of staffing, building and classroom and maintenance budgets.

Has the district made budget reductions before asking the public for money?

Every year, we set out to develop a budget for our district that aligns with our goals, meeting the needs of students and staff, and is fiscally responsible in light of State mandated revenue restrictions. Our process is to:

- Collect and analyze input from students, staff and prior year spending
- Work with schools and departments to determine budgeting goals and needs
- Work within our financial forecasting model using current law and projected enrollment
- Develop a plan to fund our goals
- Create a district-wide staffing plan using enrollment projections
- Discuss and plan for compensation, including salaries/wages and benefits
- Budget expected increases, such as utilities and transportation costs, insurance
- Identify savings needed to balance the budget

With limited resources, the Board needs to make balanced investments putting equity and the district's mission and vision as a priority. Over the years we have worked to significantly reduce spending in areas that help balance our budget with minimal impact to programming. Such areas are:

- Started a Cash in Lieu of taking the district insurance plan
- Moved all paraprofessionals to a part-time status (saving the cost of benefits)
- Changed the Administration structure to reduce one full time principal
- Made staffing reductions that aligned with student enrollment
 - 3 Elem classroom teachers, HS Social Studies, HS Math and Science, Title 1 Interventionist, MS Special Ed, Alternative Ed, Phy Ed., Special Ed, IEP Coordinator
- Did not replace many staff members that retired
- Reduced staffing of the custodial department
- Reduction in District Office Staff position

The following table is a representation of cost saving measures the district has taken over the last six years.

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Oconto Unified School District Cost Savings Implemented 2016-20	
✔ Savings for 2016-2017 fiscal year	\$94,563.00
Did not replace Curriculum Coordinator	
✔ Savings for 2017-2018 fiscal year	\$440,800.00
* Two full time custodial positions reduced to two part time positions	
* District office position not replaced	
* Title I intervention position not replaced	
* All paraprofessional positions moved to part time	
✔ Savings for 2018-2019 fiscal year	\$664,800.00
* IEP Coordinator position not replaced	
* Two Elementary School teaching positions not replaced	
* Eliminated High School math/science teacher position	
* Eliminated Middle School special education teacher position	
* Eliminated two alternative education teaching positions and replaced with a current teacher	
* Eliminated one physical education teaching position	
* Eliminated .5 FTE social studies teaching positions at both Middle School and High School	
✔ Savings for 2019-2020 fiscal year	\$30,543.00
* Half time 4K teacher not replaced	
✔ Total District Cost Saving Measures	\$1,230,706.00

What happens if the operational referendum fails?

Cuts would impact academic programs, staffing and class size. Other reductions would effect classroom materials district support staff. OUSD would fall even further behind in the funding it receives and what it spends to support student learning, as compared to the state average and similar sized districts.

What happens within our budget if the operational referendum fails?

If these funds are not renewed, the district will face an estimated deficit of \$350,000 in 21-22 and that grows by \$200,000 - \$400,000 each year after that. We will need to cut expenditures such as academic and co-curricular programs and staffing.

Why is there no tax impact if an operational referendum passes?

As the district planned for the future, we were able to levy at a rate that would not increase your current taxes. In order to keep the mill rate, stable the past 4 years, we have been levying additional funds for debt service payments, so that in future years we would be able to reduce the debt service levy if the operational mill rate would increase. Over the next 5 years we will reduce the debt service levy so that the operational referendum does not impact the total school mill rate.

If the referendum passes, when will the project be completed?

Project scheduling logistics are currently being worked on. Many variables effect the timing of completion when considering all buildings will have work being completed. Items that need to be considered include contractor availability, storage for classroom furniture and equipment, and new equipment and material lead times.

REFERENDUM 2021 - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why doesn't the School District tax more instead of going to referendum?

Due to State-imposed revenue limits, the District is only allowed to collect local funds at a certain level to provide services to the students in the Oconto Unified School District. The only way the District can receive additional dollars from taxpayers is by passing a referendum. This is different from city or county governments, which can approve additional spending and increased taxes without going through the referendum process.

Why can't the district borrow money to complete the project instead of going to referendum?

School funding is limited by state-imposed revenue limits. The District cannot borrow funds and pay them back with operating budget dollars without significant reductions in staff, educational programs, and other areas. Wisconsin schools go to referendum for major improvement projects because of the state-imposed revenue limits.

What is the revenue limit?

In 1993, the Wisconsin legislature instituted a limit on the revenue a district is entitled to receive each year from general state aid and local tax levies. The revenue limit for a district indicates the maximum amount a district can receive through the combination of general state aid and local tax levy. The revenue limit caps the district's ability to fill the gap in needed funding through additional tax levy. A school district can exceed the revenue limit through a voter approved referendum.

What is the difference between an operational and a capital referendum?

An operating referendum asks permission from voters for the district to exceed the state-imposed revenue limit to generate funds for operational purposes. A capital referendum is a one-time referendum that asks voters for permission to borrow up to a maximum amount to pay for long-term capital projects and levy an annual amount to repay the debt over a period not to exceed 20 years.