

Frequently Ask Questions?

1. Didn't we just approve a referendum in the fall of 2016?

Yes, that was a \$14.5 million Building Referendum *specifically* for renovation of the Florence County School District's campus. **None of those dollars can be used for general operations. They can only be used for "brick & mortar" of the facilities.**

2. Why didn't you put this referendum on that same ballot?

Most importantly, a year ago school districts statewide had no idea of what the next two-year Wisconsin state budget would be. Even this year, the 2017-19 state budget was signed very late. Only in recent weeks were school districts informed of what their revenue authority and other state aids would be. When the state budget was finally approved, the District had a much better idea of its financial position and could be more accurate in projections, hence asking for what was truly needed in the best interest of students and taxpayers.

The District also wanted the community to focus completely on the needs of the facility. From the recommendation of the communities Facility Task Force, two proposals were brought forward on the 2016 Building Referendum to renovate the facilities.

3. Why another 3 year Operating Referendum? Why not ask for a longer referendum?

Although the community would go to the polls less often, and the School Board and Administration would spend less time on this matter, the District could not be as accurate in its projections (the anticipated need) in years 4 and 5 of a longer referendum. A 5-year referendum spans three (3) state budgets, where a 3-year operating referendum only spans two (2) state budgets.

4. Do you still receive the 0.5% Florence County sales tax revenue?

No, the County has not distributed the 0.5% County sales tax to the District since January of 2012.

5. What is our enrollment, isn't it decreasing?

The District's enrollment this year is 383 students, up 14 from the prior school year. Florence County School's current enrollment is only 21 students less than it was in 2013. With the renovated building along with growing opportunities for employment in the county and the region, it is anticipated that enrollment will continue trending upward. *A quality school is paramount to attracting new families and residents.*

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF FLORENCE COUNTY

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Transportation Facts & Questions

- The District's eight (8) bus routes travel nearly 600 miles daily; more than a round trip to Madison, averaging 6 mpg, contributing in student transportation costs well above state averages and that of many of our neighboring schools.
- The District had 11 routes at one time; the District has explored all route options and simply cannot reduce further as some students already board and depart buses as early at 6:35 AM and 5:00 PM.
- **Has the District considered subcontracting the bus routes?** The Board has bid this service out in the past; each time it's found to be more cost effective to keep our transportation services in house...we run the operations as a *non-profit* versus that of private transportation contractors.
- **Why all the big buses? Wouldn't we save money with smaller, more fuel-efficient buses?** The price differential of a 72 passenger vs a 45 passenger bus is minimal. The extra capacity is used for extra-curricular trips, field trips and other school functions (we can utilize one bus in some situations vs otherwise using two). Also, smaller buses are no more fuel efficient than a larger bus...fuel ratings are the same for either size bus, as their drivetrains are identical.

Voter Reminders:

1. State law requires all voters to provide photo identification at polling locations.
2. Absentee ballots can be easily requested at myvote.wi.gov or through your municipal clerk. The application must be received by November 2, 2017.



We Positively Affect
the Lives of Children



Accolades and Student Accomplishments

• US News & World Report - Best High Schools in America, Florence County High School

Bronze Recognition (Recognized in Top 30% of All High Schools in America, 2016)

• Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction -

School of Recognition Awards

Florence Elementary - 2004, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2016
Florence Middle School/High School - 2005, 2012

• WI School Report Cards "Exceeding Expectations"

District Score Exceeds State Expectations - 2015
Elementary School Exceeds Expectations - 2013, 2015

**No state report cards in 2014. District scores "met expectations" in 2012 and 2013. High School scores "met expectations" in 2012, 2013 and 2015.*

How Do Florence Schools Positively Affect the Lives of Children?

- Safe environment, small class sizes, and continuous staff professional development
- Modern, 21st Century Facility upon the start of the 2018-2019 school year
- 1:1 Technology offers all 4K-12 students a personal computing device
- Fab Lab implementing the latest methods in "STEAM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art & Math) in partnership with area businesses and UW-Stout
- Well developed, award winning, extra curricular programs including: music, drama, public speaking, and a variety of sports
- Post-Secondary Options: 739 college credits earned by last three graduating classes, saving students and families **\$107,155** in tuition, and time while attaining the necessary skills for future employment

Why is an Operational Referendum needed?

The School District of Florence County has traditionally followed a conservative operating budget. In 1993, the state of Wisconsin imposed revenue caps on all public school districts. Schools were locked into their 1993 per pupil spending levels with annual inflationary increases. The State's financial support as originally intended has decreased significantly; especially for many rural, high property value districts. Due to the complex nature of the State funding formula, and above average, equalized property values, Florence County Schools has received and continues to receive reduced State support compared to many others statewide. This creates a financial gap, especially for rural districts with conservative budgets. **(there were 27 passed operating referendums statewide in 2005; from 2006 to 2016, statewide, there have been 398 passed operating referendums)**

In 2011, Wisconsin Act 32 decreased per pupil revenue limits by an average of **\$554** per student statewide. Florence County Schools lost more than the state average, with a reduction of **\$638** per pupil. As a result of this, the District was operating in 2012 with revenue nearly equal to that of what the District had in 2009. To this day, Florence School's state imposed revenue authority lags behind the actual needs of its operational budget. The District's per pupil revenue authority in 2009 was **\$9,446**. Today, in 2017, our authority is **\$9,455** per child. A difference of just \$9 over what was allocated for each student 8 years ago.

Impacts from Economies of Scale

Like most rural schools that have dealt with declining enrollments while also serving large geographical areas, the School District of Florence County is challenged by a number of factors. Our 498 square mile County is the 10th largest school district in the state, creating above average transportation expenses. Declining enrollment has led to the elimination of five (5) teaching positions since 2005. Current staffing levels are necessary to continue offering a variety of quality programs at the high school, while also providing low student to teacher ratios at the elementary and meeting the needs for our special education students.

Student per Teacher illustration

- 2005 Students per teacher (4K-12, all program) = 13.11
- 2017 Students per teacher (4K-12, all programs) = 9.58

Just as enrollment has had a net increase of 14 students this year, the District did not hire a new teacher as the students were distributed amongst different grade levels. The same is true when there is a loss in enrollment. The District cannot necessarily eliminate a teaching position without eliminating student programming.

What has Florence Schools done to control expenses?

The District has utilized many strategies in limiting expenditures while providing an exemplary education. The following are some of the major areas of reduction:

- **Healthcare Premiums** - Healthcare has skyrocketed during the last decade, but not at Florence County Schools. The District has transitioned through three different HRA (Health Reimbursement Accounts) plans in recent years. Insurance premiums were **\$380,000** less during the 2016-2017 fiscal year compared to the 2012-2013 costs. Staff continues to share in healthcare costs via premium contributions and increasing copays for *all* medical visits and prescription drug benefits.
- **Elimination of Post-Retirement Benefits** - The District no longer offers post-retirement benefits to any classification of employee. Those that were agreed upon from prior collective bargaining agreements must be honored, however this liability diminishes with each passing year.
- **Shared Service Agreements** - The District is sharing its administrative, pupil services, food service and special education staff with neighboring districts. Last year, this generated **\$72,000** in additional revenue for Florence Schools and is projected to generate **\$83,000** this year. This provides operational funds without increasing the Florence County tax levy. These agreements have also allowed the District to reduce similar purchased services from CESA 8, from **\$70,933** in 2013 to just under **\$19,870** last fiscal year.

Food Service expenses have seen a decrease of nearly **\$70,000** annually due to staff reductions.

The District has been served by a half-time business manager for the past two years.

- **Additional Benefits** - Overall maintenance expenses are anticipated to decrease by at least **\$20,000** annually due to the reduction of nearly 10,000 square feet and updated utilities. Less dollars should be needed for both general and emergency repairs of aging, inefficient systems...some that are nearing 100 years of age. Secured **\$720,000** in an interest free loan (QZAB), in addition to an AA- bond rating from Standard and Poor's due to a solid fund balance and fund balance policy. This will collectively save Florence County taxpayers **\$1,230,000** in interest over the duration of the new building debt.

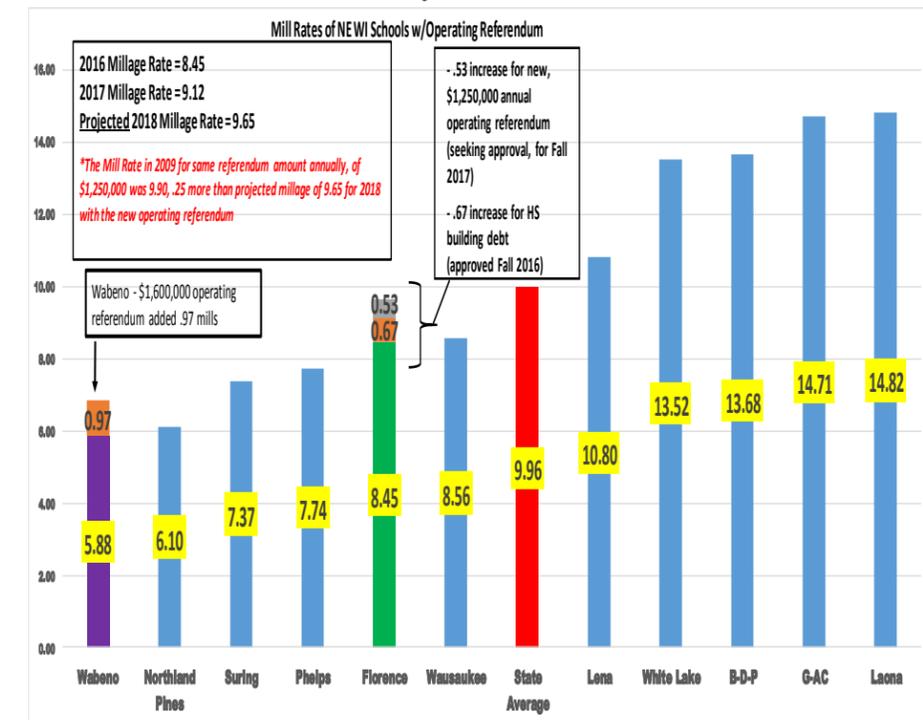
District staff have pursued and received grants and gifts of **\$502,000** since 2015. This work continues to sustain and enhance student programming.

What is the tax impact of the proposed 2018-2020 Operational Referendum?

The District's portion of property taxes would increase 0.53 mills, or \$53 annually on a \$100,000 property (equal to \$4.42 per month).

In 2014, voters approved a three-year Operating Referendum that will expire upon conclusion of this current school year. Last year's mill rate was 8.45. The passage of the Building Referendum in November of 2016 added, 0.67 mills, totaling a 9.12 millage rate for 2017. The School Board is seeking taxpayer approval November 7, 2017, of a subsequent Operating Referendum. This will replace the current Operating Referendum with a necessary 0.53 millage increase for 2018-2020 school years.

- The School Board has levied for what it truly needed, levying a total of **\$2,089,332** less than voters have approved since 2005.
- Again, the 2015 - 2017 Operating Referendum will sunset at the end of the current school year.



Did You Know? In 2009, the annual operating referendum was \$1,250,000, the same as the proposed 2018-2020 referendum.

The mill rate in 2009 was **9.90**, higher than the projected mill rate for next year with the passage of a new operating referendum at 9.65. With voter approval, the projected mill rate of **9.65** for the next 3 years will still be below the state average and several of the surrounding school districts.

Additionally - The state has eliminated the "Forestry Mill Tax" from property taxes beginning with 2018; this equates to a .17 millage reduction. Along with an increase in the school levy tax credit (a discount from the state that reduces net school taxes), the proposed .53 mill rate increase to property owners will net out as less.