



Berlin Journal Article  
Point of Focus  
Berlin Area School District

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The citizens of Berlin and the surrounding municipalities that make up the Berlin Area School District have been funding the building of schools and their operation for over 160 years. For all that time they have proudly supported the education of our children and have placed value on a high quality, publicly funded school system, available to all. This investment in our children and schools has been a point of pride for our community.

This support for our local public school system experienced a setback on April 4, 2023 when the citizens voted down both referendum questions that the school board had decided to place on the spring ballot. This was the first time a school referendum question had failed for our school district. As a reminder, in April 2023 there were two questions on the ballot. The first question was a five year operational referendum question to exceed the revenue limit and fund the day to day operations of the school district. The second question was a capital referendum question, asking for additional funding to upgrade school facilities.

When reflecting on the last failed referendum, I identified a variety of reasons the referendum failed. One of the key reasons was that immediately prior to the election, property values had skyrocketed, leading to larger than expected tax bills for everyone. The public was skittish about approving additional taxation for anything, even our local public schools. In addition, it was the first time the school district had gone to referendum for an operational funding request on top of a capital request. That was a lot for the district to explain and the public to understand.

Since the failed referendum in April 2023, the school board and district administration have been working tirelessly to reduce expenses and plan for a modified referendum that voters would support. I am hopeful that the hard work we have done since then will be appreciated by the public and help them understand the importance of financially supporting our public schools.

On June 26, 2024 the Berlin Area School District school board voted 9-0 to bring one referendum question to the voters on the November 5th general election ballot. The board had been researching and deliberating on the needs of the school district for many months. They have taken their decision seriously, making sure they balanced the need for ongoing investments in children and schools with the costs of these investments on the taxpayers. In the end, they felt additional operational funding in our schools was necessary to avoid cuts to services that would significantly negatively impact our students and the mission of our district.

The following is the referendum question that will appear on the November 5th ballot:

***"Shall the Berlin Area School District, Green Lake, Waushara and Winnebago Counties, Wisconsin, be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$802,156 for the 2025-2026 school year, by \$1,263,061 for the 2026-2027 school year, by \$2,125,956 for the 2027-2028 school year, and by \$2,874,340 for the 2028-2029 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of operational costs to maintain instructional programs, staffing, technology and facilities?"***

In the coming weeks I will expand on various aspects of the referendum in my articles in the Berlin Journal. I have also prepared responses to frequently asked questions (FAQs) and those will appear this week on our new *Referendum 2024* webpages on the Berlin Area School District website. Please check it out.

The question I am most frequently asked in regards to the referendum is *Why now?* The shortest answer is related to state funding. For the past thirty years, the state funding formula for public schools has put a cap on tax revenue that has not kept up with costs. This has produced significant gaps between expenses and revenues for most school districts across the state. In fact, over 85% of all school districts in Wisconsin have already been forced to go to the public with an operational referendum question. Over the past twenty years, the Berlin Area School District school board and administration have worked hard on behalf of our taxpayers to avoid an operational referendum, by keeping costs low and managing budgets with frugality and practicality. Unfortunately, at this point, any further cuts will significantly impact the quality of the educational experience students receive.

I encourage everyone to learn more about our schools, inform yourselves regarding the referendum question, and then get out to vote on November 5th. In the coming weeks there will be mailers, social media posts, webpages, articles in the Berlin Journal, and community meetings. Since all taxpayers in the district boundaries support our schools through property taxes, it is important to learn more about our schools and the value they bring to the community.

Thank you for your continued support of our children and community.