

13. How will this affect my taxes?

The estimated cost for a homeowner (\$200,000 home value- Ashland average home value is ~ \$195,000)

\$186 in year one, \$72 in year two, \$42 in year three, \$32 in year four, Year five could return to current year tax values or see a slight decrease.

14. How will the community be informed about the progress and use of funds?

Transparency and communication with the community are crucial for maintaining trust and support. The school district can keep the community informed in several ways:

- A. **Regular Updates:** Providing regular updates through the district's website, newsletters, and social media about how funds are being used and the progress of funding.
- B. **Public Meetings:** Holding public meetings and forums where community members can ask questions and provide feedback about the use of referendum funds.
- C. **Annual Reports:** Publishing annual reports that detail the financial status of the district, how referendum funds have been spent, and the impact on educational outcomes.
- D. **Independent Audit:** Conducting independent audit of the district's finances and making the results publicly available to ensure accountability.
- E. **Community Engagement:** Engaging with community members through surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees to gather input and keep stakeholders informed.

15. How will the district use referendum funds to improve student outcomes?

The referendum funding amount is selected to maintain current programs, staff levels, and improve staff compensation. There are no new programs included.

We wish to maintain a well trained and stable staff. This is a main predictor of student success.

Currently, Ashland Schools teachers have an average of 11 years experience in our district and 13 years total teaching experience. Our teachers do stay in Ashland longer than in other Northern Wisconsin districts but do have a lower total experience in teaching.

Higher wages improves the likelihood of longer careers in the School District of Ashland and increases our opportunities to hire teachers with higher levels of experience.

16. What work has the District done to date to address its financial challenges?

The School District has a long history of maintaining financial prudence and responsibility, even in challenging times. We are proud of our ability to budget conservatively, spend wisely, and ensure that we are getting the most out of every dollar. This has, however, resulted in lower staff wages that make working for our district financially less attractive than other local districts.

Most recently, SDA has used the allotted federal funds (ESSR) very wisely to maintain balanced books through no state education funding increases or increases that did not match inflation.

The budget approved for the 2024- 25 school year has less staff. Support positions were reduced. The budget also reduced expenditures in technology, materials, and co-curricular activities.

17. SDA just passed a referendum in 2017. Why is the District even considering the possibility of another referendum already?

The most recent SDA referendum project was a facilities, or "capital," referendum that was approved by the majority of the Ashland community for the public purpose of paying the cost of a districtwide school facilities improvement project to address needs in the areas of safety, security, site and ADA improvements and renovations; construction of additions at the High School, Elementary Schools and the Middle School; and acquisition of furnishings, fixtures and equipment.

An operating referendum is different from a capital referendum in that it allows districts to raise their revenue limit authority in order to sustain recurring operational costs. Revenue generated by an operating referendum does not go toward new or additional projects, but allows the district to cover the costs that have increased due to rising inflation and stagnant state funding.

18. SDA has never asked the community to vote on an operating referendum before. Why is that an option being considered now?

The state of Wisconsin continues to provide school districts with inadequate sustainable funding and our district is forced to do more with less as we work hard to provide the programming and resources our students deserve and provide the excellent educational experience that our community expects.

Over the next five years the budget shortfall will continue to grow without additional revenue.

Beginning with the 1993 funding model, when the state of Wisconsin implemented revenue limits, public school districts were funded primarily with a combination of state aid and local property taxes.

Unfortunately, revenue limits have not kept pace with inflation and since then, 85% of public school districts across the state of Wisconsin have approved operating referendums in order to maintain adequate programming.

19. Are referendums rare? Have any area school districts recently passed an operating referendum?

Referendums are not rare, they are actually the norm across the state. About 85% of public school districts across the state of Wisconsin have approved operating referendums in order to maintain programming.

Due to the funding model created in 1993, when the state of Wisconsin implemented revenue limits, public school districts have been funded primarily with a combination of state aid and local property taxes.

Revenue limits have not kept pace with inflation over the last decade.

20. If this is a state issue, what is the school district doing to fix it?

Our staff does meet with state and federal legislators regularly. We request that the state funding formula be fixed. The state has had 31 years to fix this issue and they have not. We do not take a tax increase lightly but do not feel it is in our students best interest to continue to wait on the state legislature to act.

21. Where is the district getting sources for this information?

The WI Department of Public Instruction (DPI) releases [statistics on funding and staffing](#)

The SDA Financial Advisors Baird helps us gather data

The Local CESA 12 School Districts share information on staffing, salaries, and funding

DPI releases [funding by district and over time](#) and [Wisconsin School Funding Video](#)

Questions? Get in Touch

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Referendum 2024

✓ VOTE November 5



SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ASHLAND
— EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION —



Ashland High School

School District of Ashland

Operational Referendum

Frequently asked questions

1. What's an Operational Referendum?

An operational referendum is a ballot question that allows voters in a school district to decide whether to approve additional funding for the district's operating expenses. These expenses typically include salaries for teachers and staff, utility bills, maintenance of school facilities, and educational materials.

Operational referendums are different from capital referendums, which focus on funding for building projects or significant renovations.

2. Specifically, what is the operational referendum in Ashland?

Up to \$2,000,000 each year for the next five years. This is called a non-recurring operational referendum. It automatically expires after five years.

This would increase funding in our schools by about \$1,081 per student.

3. Why Are Referendums Necessary?

Operational referendums are necessary because school districts often face funding shortfalls due to various reasons, including:

- A. **Inadequate State Funding:** State funding formulas do not adequately cover the rising costs of running a school district.
- B. **Revenue Limits:** WI State imposes limits on the amount of revenue that school districts can raise through local property taxes.
- C. **Inflation:** The cost of goods and services required to operate a school district tends to increase over time, outpacing the rate of increase in state funding or local revenue.
- D. **Unfunded Mandates:** State or federal governments may impose requirements on school districts without providing the necessary funding to meet those requirements.(For example, Act 20)

4. Specifically, how is state funding inadequate in Ashland?

Our state legislature has not kept pace with inflation. Over the past decade funding has not increased at the level of inflation. For several years, there was no increase at all. If state funding had increased at the rate of inflation over he last decade our schools would have about \$2,700,000 more in the annual district budget.

5. Explain the outdated funding formula

The Wisconsin education funding formula has been criticized for being outdated and not reflective of current educational needs and costs. Key issues include:

- A. **Complexity and Lack of Transparency:** The formula is often viewed as overly complex.
- B. **Equity Issues:** The formula is not standardized, pupils are not awarded the same amount of funding across the state.
- C. **Insufficient Funding:** The base level of funding provided by the state has not kept pace with inflation and the growing costs of education.



6. How does this outdated model affect Ashland Schools?

The funding model was created in 1993. It does not allow local districts to levy along with inflation and does not allow a uniform system of funding, per pupil, across school districts. In other words, students in Ashland are not granted as much funding as students in other school districts.

Funding by local district for the 2024- 25 school year	
District	Per pupil funding
Ashland	\$11,000
Bayfield	\$15,350
Washburn	\$11,466
Northwestern/Maple	\$11,000
South Shore	\$18,034
Solon Springs	\$12,450
Chequamegon	\$11,413
Hayward	\$11,994
State Average	\$12,505
State funding for students in private High Schools ...	\$12,000

7. What's at Stake? If the referendum doesn't pass

If an operational referendum does not pass, the school district may face significant challenges. The District will make extremely challenging decisions regarding ways to cut operating expenses. Some of the options that could be considered include:

- 1.Cutting extra or co-curricular programming and activities
- 2.Increasing class sizes and reducing or eliminating instructional staff positions
- 3.Reducing or eliminating administrative/other staff positions
- 4.Deferring necessary facilities and equipment maintenance
- 5.Deferring necessary technology equipment maintenance and upgrades
- 6.Increasing annual student fees and facility rental fees
- 7.Selling district-owned property or school buildings

These decisions may result in:

1. **Lower Educational Quality:** Overall, the quality of education may decline, affecting student outcomes and the community's perception of the school district.
2. **Economic Impact:** A decline in the quality of the school district can impact property values and the attractiveness of the community to potential residents and businesses.

8. How does this outdated model affect Ashland Schools?

Over the next five years the funding shortfall is about \$2,000,000 per year. Our district feels this funding crunch more acutely as the federal funding (ESSR) that was available to all schools due to the COVID pandemic expires as of September 30, 2024.

The state of Wisconsin did not increase school funding for several years as they stated that the federal government was funding schools. The state has not replaced the ESSR funding so the district is losing approximately \$1,650,000 this year.

9. How will the funds from the referendum be allocated?

This could change annually based on the area of most need. Wages, benefits, utilities, maintenance, and curriculum are all areas that will see funds.

The main expenditures will be to maintain current staffing levels and allow for increases in staff compensation.

10. Why does the district feel they need to increase staff compensation?

Our schools are already behind in compensation and staffing levels for most employee groups. The average teacher in Ashland earns about \$4,000 less a year than the average teacher in Northern Wisconsin.

Over the course of a career our teachers will earn about \$42,000 less than the average teacher in Northern WI.

We are in a highly competitive job market. The teacher supply does not match the demand for teachers. Teachers can choose to leave Ashland for higher paying districts in the area/state.

Simply put, the driving factor for the funding request is getting our staff to average compensation levels for our area.

11. Are Ashland Schools over staffed in areas such as administrative positions or teachers?

The School District of Ashland is not "heavy" on administrative costs. We are 18% below the local average for administrative costs. Our administrator to student ratio is 162 to 1. This is slightly lower than the local average of 157 to 1.

Currently, Ashland Schools have 12.5 students to 1 teacher ratio. This is below average for Northern Wisconsin, which is about 11.2 to 1.

Teachers in Ashland earn about \$4,000 less per year than the average for our area.

12. Why does the district view a referendum as advantageous?

We hope to: improve staff wages, maintain employee benefits, be able to keep up with the rising cost of utilities, busing, and food service.

Passing an operational referendum can improve operational efficiency in several ways:

- A. **Stable Funding:** By providing a stable source of funding, the referendum can help the school district plan more effectively and allocate resources more efficiently.
- B. **Retention and Recruitment of Staff:** Competitive salaries and benefits can help attract and retain high-quality teachers and staff, reducing turnover and the associated costs of recruiting and training new employees.
- C. **Preventative Maintenance:** Allocating funds for regular maintenance can prevent more costly emergency repairs and extend the life of school facilities.