



## 2019 REFERENDUM: ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### ***The referendum question on the April 2 ballot will read:***

Shall the Tomah Area School District, Jackson, Juneau and Monroe Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$1,500,000 for each of the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022, and the 2022-2023 school years for non-recurring purposes to maintain and enhance educational and technology programs, school safety and security, school facilities and to maintain current levels of operational expenses?

### ***Why does the school district have to go to referendum?***

A 1993 law limited how much the Board of Education can raise property taxes to fund our schools each year. While additional funds for education were included in the last biennium budget by Governor Walker and the legislature, per pupil student increases for spending are still below 2010 levels. In order to continue to offer quality programs, it is necessary to seek approval for continuation of the previous referendum. This is not a problem unique to the Tomah Area School District. In the November 2018 election, there were 82 schools that held referendum questions on ballots around the state of Wisconsin. Bangor, Hillsboro, Holmen, Onalaska, and Wisconsin Dells all passed referenda in November. In addition, both the Sparta and West Salem School Districts are seeking voter approval of operating referenda this April.

### ***What is a referendum?***

A referendum is a process in which the public has the opportunity to directly vote (through a ballot question) at the election polls. A school district must get voter approval through a referendum if it wants to exceed the state revenue limit.

### ***What does non-recurring for four years mean?***

Non-recurring means that the money requested expires after four years.

### ***How does a "yes" vote affect me?***

The question on the April 2 ballot will ask voters to support the renewal of a non-recurring referendum for an additional \$1.5 million for the next four (4) consecutive years for additional revenues to maintain current educational programming, technology and operating expenses.

- The additional yearly cost to the taxpayer over the next four years (48 months) will increase from \$2.00 in year one to \$12.00 in year two and then decrease \$8.00 in year three and have no change in year four.

\$2.00 increase on \$100,000 property or 17 cents per month for 2019-20

\$12.00 increase on \$100,000 property or \$1.00 per month for 2020-21

\$8.00 **decrease** on \$100,000 property or -66 cents per month for 2021-22

\$0 increase/decrease per month for 2022-23

- Over four years, the estimated total tax impact would be approximately \$1.50 per year for every \$100,000 of property value on average. That is equal to an increase of approximately 13 cents per month for that four year period.
- The Community Survey conducted with residents of the Tomah Area School District supported the concept of a \$1.5 million non-recurring referendum in order to maintain a strong school district and community.

***How does Tomah School District spending compare to neighboring districts?***

The Tomah School District is committed to providing a high quality learning environment for every student and works hard to leverage funds to help each student reach his or her full potential. Our spending is the lowest in the area and is **\$200 lower than the state average** (\$946.00) on a \$100,000 property. In 2019, the Tomah School District’s mill rate is \$745.00 on a \$100,000 home. If you lived in Black River Falls, you would pay \$898.00; in Sparta, you would pay \$880.00, in New Lisbon, \$847.00; in Norwalk-Ontario-Wilton, \$1054.00; in Mauston, \$1100.00; and, in West Salem, \$889.00.

***How will the referendum money be used?***

Operating referendum funds will be used to help the district maintain quality programs and course offerings for students, preserve current class sizes, and continue the District’s maintenance of current facilities so that we are preparing our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace. In addition, priorities for the Tomah Area School District over the next five years **based on the October 2018 community survey results** will include: helping students with career planning, hiring and keeping high-quality staff, keeping technology up-to-date, providing support services when students are having difficulty learning, and increasing school safety and security.

***Will these referendum funds be used immediately?***

Yes. The funds the District collects from the operating referendum will be used each year to support instruction, technology and the general operations of the district.

***What happens if the referendum doesn’t pass?***

An unsuccessful referendum means that the school district will not be able to maintain the quality instructional programs and course offerings currently in place. Delays in the District’s technology upgrades, facility maintenance, and school safety and security initiatives would most likely occur.

***How was the community involved in the referendum planning?***

The Board of Education was committed to engaging all members of the community before going back out to referendum. A community survey was conducted in the fall of 2018 that provided significant input on what the priorities of the community were as well as how much money the community was willing to support. This referendum reflects that input. The community survey results and district finances were reviewed by the Board of Education and the decision was made to seek a continuation of the previous referendum for an additional \$1.5 million for four years.

In addition, the community survey showed a high level of satisfaction with the work being done in the Tomah Area School District with 79% of respondents indicating that they were satisfied or very satisfied. The highest ratings of good to great were in regard to maintaining school facilities, building pride in the community, providing a welcoming and safe environment, delivering a high quality educational experience, and partnering with area business.

The community survey results showed that 75% of all residents (this includes staff who are residents, and parents and nonparents who are residents) responded to the survey supported renewing the District’s \$1.5 million operational referendum.

***With the election of our new Governor, is there still a need for the referendum?***

While Governor Evers has indicated that he is committed to increasing funding for public education, he must work with our elected legislators in the Assembly and Senate to pass a budget. There are additional competing priorities which will also require funding by the state. We are not able to predict what the budget will look like and need to be able to prepare for the 2019-20 school year and beyond. We are a low spending school district and the only way to increase our spending beyond what is provided by the state budget is through the passage of a referendum. Without additional funds, we are not able to maintain our current levels of spending for existing programs, let alone make improvements to curriculum and facilities.

***How were the funds from the last three year non-recurring referendum spent?***

The funds from the last referendum were spent on supporting instruction, improving technology, maintaining our facilities and for the general operation of the school district. In particular over the last three years, we have provided all students in grades 6-12 with a Chromebook, and began a pilot project with iPads for our 5<sup>th</sup> graders. We have also maintained our career-technical education classes and rigorous Advanced Placement coursework, purchasing additional online resources and materials for use. Furthermore, we have purchased thousands of books to enhance our reading curriculum at the elementary level. We have also added special education teaching positions, a school counselor and a school social worker to assist us in better meeting the needs of students with disabilities, assisting high school students in career planning, and providing resources for families in need of support. Facility improvements were made as well. We were able to make improvements to Miller Elementary School by remodeling a storage area for classroom space, the office, and the food service area. The District has been proactive in replacing HVAC controls and mechanisms which improve the classroom environment and provide savings through energy efficiency. We were also able to continue maintaining existing facilities by updating the playground at Lemonweir Elementary School, adding a concession stand in the commons area at Tomah High School and contributing to the new press box which was largely built from community donations. These funds have also assisted us in making improvements in the area of school safety and security.