



MOUNT HOREB AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Board Approves an Operational Referendum

One of the BOE's most important roles is financial governance. Regular readers of the news know about the increasing struggles school districts, including the Mount Horeb Area School District, are experiencing when attracting and retaining staff; maintaining programs; and paying for increasing costs. These struggles are exacerbated by the legislature's approval of a \$0 increase per student for 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years.

After significant study, the Board approved the following referendum question to go before voters on November 8:

Shall the Mount Horeb Area School District, Dane and Iowa Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$4,820,000 beginning with the 2023-2024 school year and continuing indefinitely, for recurring purposes consisting of operational expenses related to attracting and retaining staff, maintaining current programs and services and paying for increasing costs?

This is a bit legalese. It may be helpful to unpack the ballot question. Because we are an "area school district" we have students in 9 different municipalities, in two different counties (Dane and Iowa). If a majority of voters approve, the money would be used to do things like:

- maintain many of our current programs and current class sizes;
- permit staff members wage enhancements that are commensurate with the job market;
- chip away at a projected 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 budgetary shortfall;
- maintain some of the student support positions funded with one-time dollars given by the federal government (like a Speech and Language teacher, a Math Interventionist for struggling students, or an additional English Language Learner teacher for the growing population of students attending school whose native language is not English);
- implement a revised student Chromebook Replacement Plan;
- get "back up to speed" with staff members' Computer and Monitor Replacement Plan;
- address major technology infrastructure needs;
- fund an increase in buildings' instructional/supply budgets;
- meet our bus replacement schedule; and
- address escalating utilities costs.

Because the vast majority of the proposed dollars will be compensation-related to compete with private industry and regional school districts, the requested funding is recurring. Wages and benefits rarely go down so the needs are indefinite. The approximate tax impact would be \$75 on each \$100,000 of equalized property value.

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Conversely, what a “yes” vote does *not* mean is compounding \$4.82 million annually. Said another way: If approved by voters, it does not mean the District would receive \$4.82 million in year one and receive \$9.64 million in year two, and in 2025-2026 \$14.46 million, etc.

In the coming weeks, we will highlight why there is even a need for a referendum, steps already taken by the District to be even better stewards, open community forums, and where you can find additional information about the referendum. In the meantime, I welcome your telephone calls or emails. You may reach me at 608-437-7010 or salernosteve@mhasd.k12.wi.us .

Sincerely,

Dr. Steve Salerno
Superintendent