

Dear Community Members,

In true form, the Ashland Daily Press once again misrepresents Mellen School District by leading the article covering the Community Forum held on Wednesday, March 13th with a stock photo of the Districts **Grant Funded** OST program, despite the fact that the ADP reporter took several photos at the Forum.

The article goes on to state that community members are being asked to “voluntarily increase their taxes by 50%” which is also **incorrect**. The current mill rate for the District is \$5.11 per \$1,000 of property value. The projected increase is approximately \$2.46 per \$1,000 of property. For example:

- ❖ Town of Ashland \$100,000 home x 0.01834 (property tax rate) = \$1,834
  - \$246/\$1,834 = 0.1341 or **13.41%** increase
- ❖ Town of Morse \$100,000 home x 0.01691 (property tax rate) = \$1,691
  - \$246/\$1,691 = 0.1455 or **14.55%** increase
- ❖ City of Mellen \$100,000 home x 0.02292 (property tax rate) = \$2,292
  - \$246/\$2,292 = 0.1073 or **10.73%** increase

In fact, recent projections indicate that the projected mill rate increase, if the referendum passes, could potentially be less than forecasted.

Also of note is the fact that for the April 2 Spring Election, in addition to the federal election primaries, and school board races, 91 local school district referendums will be on the ballot in 85 districts. Overall, 42 of those referendums will ask for temporary (or non-recurring) authority to increase the district’s revenue limit, while 19 will ask for permanent (or recurring) authority to increase the district’s revenue limit. In addition, there will be 30 borrowing referendums on the ballot across the state. Borrowing referendums ask voters for approval to issue bonds for major construction, remodeling or maintenance projects for school facilities. A few of the districts close to the size of Mellen are:

- Birchwood: RR \$2,600,000 Operational Referendum to Cover Ongoing Expenses
- Brighton: NR \$950,000 Operational Referendum School Years 24-25, 25-26, 26-27
- Drummond: NR \$4,800,000 Operational Referendum to Cover Current Programs and Services
- Frederic: NR \$4,280,000 Operational Referendum to Cover Staffing and Maintenance Costs SY 24-25, 25-26, 26-27, 27-28
- Green Lake: NR \$7,400,000 Operational Referendum to Maintain Instructional Programs, Staffing, Technology and Facilities
- Luck: NR \$2,500,000 Operational Referendum to Maintain Current Levels of Educational Programming
- Prentice: RR \$1,800,000 Operational Referendum for District Operations, Student Programming, Facility Maintenance, Staff Salaries and Benefits
- Washington-Caldwell; NR \$1,800,000 Operational Referendum SY 24-25, 25-26, 26-27, 27-28 for Operational and Maintenance Expenses
- Mercer: NR \$4,000,000 Operational Referendum SY 24-25, 25-26, 26-27, 27-28, 28-29 for Staffing Costs, Instructional Materials, Deferred Maintenance, Facility Upkeep

The School District of Mellen is definitely not alone in its efforts to provide a quality education for its students while facing fiscal shortfalls.

Last year (2023), 82 referendums were on the ballot statewide. This year's total of 91 represents an increase from last year's level, even without counting referendums on the February ballot or upcoming referendum in November. There were 10 referenda, in 7 districts on the February 20th ballot. Data on the districts holding referendums in November is not yet available.

Why are so many Wisconsin Public School Districts going to referendum this spring? Ask your state legislators; for the past sixteen years, aid to public schools has not kept up with inflation. In addition, \$702 million has been lost to unaccountable private voucher and independent charter schools this year alone. Not to mention the fact that the current reimbursement rate for Special Education expenses is a mere 33%; a significant decrease from the 70% reimbursement rate of 1973, even as the cost of Special Education Services continues to rise. For the 2022-23 school year, the District's operating transfer from Fund 10 to cover the shortfall in Fund 27 was \$370,623.11 with a projected operating transfer of \$410,661.00 for 2023-24.

Thirty one years of unfair and gap-widening spending caps, meaning some funds, disguised as aid, can't actually reach kids. Yet, the State surplus of an estimated \$7 billion, sits in the state coffers, when it should be supporting our public schools (WPEN). It is becoming increasingly clear that this is **NOT a spending problem** due to fiscal irresponsibility. If that were the case, then it would need to be said for these 91 school districts as well. This is a **funding problem**.

I encourage you to make your voices heard. Contact your state legislators (Senator Romaine Quinn at 800-469-6562 and Assemblyman Chanz Green at 888- 34-0074) and ask them to support increasing state aid funding for schools so we can at least keep pace with annual inflation (Mellen Weekly Letter to the Editor, Jeff Ehrhardt 3/20/24). At the very least, get to the polls and vote on April 2, 2024.

As always, I welcome any feedback by phone call, email, or via the public comment link of the school website. <https://www.mellendiggers.org/district/your-questions-answered.cfm#:~:text=Click%20here%20to%20submit%20a%20question>

Sincerely,

Rhonda Elmhorst-Friemoth  
Superintendent  
Mellen School District