

Media Release - Potential Referendum Update
11/16/23

Dear Community,

The School District of Mellen offers students “big school opportunities” in a “small school setting.” This is only possible because of our dedicated staff, engaged parents, and supportive community. Thank you!

Our focus will always be on ensuring students graduate with the best education possible. At the same time, we have financial challenges ahead. We are concerned that we will not be able to maintain our current programs and services.

As we develop a budget and plan for the future, we need input from our taxpayers through the community-wide survey sent out on November 10th. Additional copies of the survey will be available in the main office. Please complete the survey by December 1, 2023.

Additionally, I share with you a new report from Forward Analytics, K-12 On The Ballot: Using Referenda to Fund Public Schools, (<https://www.forward-analytics.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/school-referenda-final-report.pdf>) affirms that Wisconsin’s K-12 schools are increasingly forced to rely on dollars approved at referenda to fund local public education needs. Forward Analytics is led by Dale Knapp, former Research Director with the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance. Forward Analytics was created in 2018 and is a division of the Wisconsin Counties Association.

Report Highlights:

- During 1997- 2010, 44% of all operating referenda were approved. After 2010, the rate increased to 76%.
- The amount of referendum-approved dollars funding K-12 schools has grown rapidly. This funding increased from \$32 million in 2000 to \$180 million in 2010 and to \$650 million in 2023.
- Of the 434 unique school districts during the revenue limit era, 356 (82%) have used the referendum option at least once. Most used the option three times or less: 65 have used it once, 67 twice, and 68 three times. By contrast, nearly 20% of districts used the referendum option six times or more, with 15 using it at least 10 times.

I share this information with you to put into context the deficit financial projections the School District of Mellen is facing in the upcoming school years. Of note is the fact that Mellen has not gone to referendum since 2000 which was to issue debt for boiler upgrades. Furthermore, overall, the Mellen Community has had a decreasing mill rate since 2017 at \$10.84 to \$6.25 in 2023.

There will be a special meeting of the school board tentatively set for December 13, 2023 to review the results of the community survey. I encourage you to attend.

If you have any questions please contact Superintendent Rhonda Elmhorst-Friemoth at 715-274-3601.

Respectfully submitted,

Rhonda Elmhorst-Friemoth
Superintendent
Mellen School District