Educational Programming Operational Referendum Information and Frequently Asked Questions

UPDATED 10/13/2026

Introduction

The School District of Sturgeon Bay is proud of who we are, the people we serve, and the people who provide this service. We believe strongly in offering a wide range of opportunities within the classroom and beyond the classroom walls to help our young people learn, grow, and have the most and best options available to them after high school.

It does take quite an investment to educate every student, and we are committed to bringing that service and value to not only our students and the families we serve, but the entire community. We realize that the investment we need to make requires resources in the form of time and money. Frankly, we take our fiscal responsibility very seriously—just as we take asking for financial support very seriously.

This also underscores the appreciation we have for the overall community support we receive in an ongoing way—not just at the ballot box as educational programming operational referendums have passed in 2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, and 2022, although that has been critically important. We work hard to continue to earn your trust. As part of this effort, we work to inform the community through a variety of avenues.

The following information has been updated to reflect the current context; it also builds off past questions and information for those individuals who would like more detail than can be included in a different venue or presentation. Thank you for your interest and for taking time to be informed. Please see the Referendum Information page on our website for more information and resources, monthly updates, presentation slides, and more.

Sincerely,
Dan Tjernagel, Superintendent

FAQ continues on the next page

Frequently Asked Questions regarding Educational Programming Revenue Limit Override Operational Referendum

The following questions have been raised during discussions of educational programming operational referenda. We will continue to answer questions as they come up, update this document, and post the updated document to our website. If you have specific questions that are not answered in this document, or if you need more information on any question, please email Superintendent Dan Tjernagel at dtjernagel@sturbay.k12.wi.us or call him at 746-2801. Thank you for taking some time to be informed on this important topic.
Note: If you have not already seen it, a Fall of 2026 Update & Referendum Presentation will also be available on the district website in early October.

1. **When is the election?** *The educational programming operational referendum to exceed the revenue limit will be held on Tuesday, November 3, 2026.*

2. **Where do I vote?**
   The City of Sturgeon Bay has three different polling places:
   - *City Hall/Municipal Building, 421 Michigan Street – Districts 1, 2, & 3*
   - *Bayview Lutheran Fellowship Hall, 340 W Maple Street – Districts 4 & 5*
   - *ADRC, 914 N. 14th Avenue – Districts 6 & 7.*

   All Town of Sevastopol eligible voters vote at the Sevastopol Town Hall (including Town of Sevastopol residents living in Sevastopol Ward 1/Sturgeon Bay School District).

3. **How do I get an absentee ballot?**
   To have an absentee ballot mailed to you, go to myvote.wi.gov and complete the information. October 20, 2026, is the first day that electors can go to the City Clerk's office to vote. Regular City Hall hours are 7 A.M. – 4:30 P.M. Monday through Thursday and 7 AM - 11 AM on Fridays. October 29, 2026, by 5:00 P.M. is the last day for electors to request an absentee by mail. October 30, 2026, by 5:00 P.M. is the last day for electors to vote absentee in the Clerk's Office. To vote absentee ballot for Sevastopol, contact Municipal Clerk Amy Flok at 746-1230.

4. **What will the actual wording of the referendum be on the ballot?**
   "Shall the School District of Sturgeon Bay, Door County, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statues, by $3,750,000 per year for five years, beginning with the 2027-2028 school year and ending with the 2031-2032 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of operational expenses, including funding educational programming for students and teacher and staff compensation."

   A "Yes" vote would be in favor of passing the referendum and authorizing the school district to exceed the revenue limit by the amounts stated for the years listed, while a "No" vote would not be in favor of passing the referendum or authorizing the school district to exceed the revenue limit.

5. **How much money is the referendum for?** *The referendum is a non-recurring revenue limit override referendum to be used for educational programming consisting of up to $3.75 million a year for five years, which includes $250,000 toward teacher and staff compensation.*

6. **I realize school funding can be complicated, but what is the referendum money for?** *The educational programming operational referendum will provide dollars for educational programming for students. It is very difficult to articulate exact positions that the educational programming referendum supports without communicating some sort of threat or giving the impression that those positions would be the exact positions cut if a referendum would not pass, or that cutting positions is a suitable alternative (see next paragraph). Such a list could cause people, programs, departments, and grade levels to be pitted against each other thereby fracturing our school community, rather than bringing it together which is what is needed for the benefit of children, families, and the community as a whole.*

   To put this in perspective and explain what the referendum money is for (also see the slide of the District Update Presentation that visualizes how many positions this is as an example), $3.75 million is the equivalent of 27 teacher positions (out of a total of 103), 18 support staff positions (out of a total of 66; includes teacher aides, secretaries, custodians, & food service), and three administrator, director, and/or non-represented district office positions (out of a total of twelve)—and that would be just in year one of the five referendum years. There would have to be additional cuts in year two, three, four, and five.

   Neither the Board of Education nor the Administration can imagine being able to meet the growing needs of children and continuing to bring value to the community with cuts of this magnitude.

7. **I received a community survey from the school district this past summer. What were the survey results?**
   As with our previous educational programming referendum, the District worked with survey firm School Perceptions to conduct a community survey. The survey communicated some information and asked a few key questions. Respondents were invited to respond either online or via a paper survey. In the end, 857 total survey responses were received. Of survey respondents, 50% are age 65 or older, 14% are age 55-64, 15% are age 45-54, 14% are age 35-44, 6% are age 25-34, and 1% are age 18-24. 96% of respondents are City of Sturgeon Bay residents and 4% Town of Sevastopol residents.

   School Perceptions reports the overall results of the survey, then focuses specifically on staff residents, parent residents, and residents who are not staff and don't have children in our schools. From there, School Perceptions utilizes an additional level of analysis

with a <u>weighted projection focusing 20% of the projection on resident parent responses</u> and <u>80% of the projection on residents who are not school staff and don't have children in our schools</u>.

Here are the weighted support projections for the three specific educational programming operational referenda scenarios in the community survey:

- *$3.5 million a year for five years: 60.0% support.*
- *$3.75 million a year for five years (the base $3.5 million + $250,000 for employee compensation): 59.4% support.*
- *$4 million a year for five years (the base $3.5 million + $250,000 for employee compensation + $250,000 for additional building maintenance): 50.8% support.*

Using this survey feedback, the Board decided to pursue the scenario in the second bullet point above with $3.75 million per year for five years.

School Perceptions also gathered what is referred to as "satisfaction data" about the district. In essence, on a scale of 1-10, respondents are asked how likely they would be to recommend the District to a friend or family member. The Sturgeon Bay score was 7.21, which is above the comparison group average score of 6.56, putting our District in the 87th percentile.

8. **I saw something in the news several years ago about the Blue-Ribbon Commission on School Funding which was looking at funding for schools in Wisconsin. Will the state be changing school funding, which would eliminate the need for having a referendum?**
   The Blue-Ribbon Commission had a series of meetings and hearings around the state in 2018. While aspects of that work held promise, some pieces have been acted on while others have not. Additionally, the Commission's work did not lead to an overhaul of the school funding system as some thought it might. School districts in the operational referendum cycle continue to have the need to override revenue limits to provide the type of programming and staffing their communities have come to expect.

9. **What is a non-recurring referendum?** *A referendum that is "non-recurring" means that the money is received only for the years for which it is specifically approved. The Sturgeon Bay School District's revenue limit may increase only during the five fiscal years specifically listed because of this non-recurring referendum.*

10. **What is the difference between a recurring and non-recurring referendum?** *School districts can run two types of operational referendums: recurring and non-recurring.*

    *A **recurring referendum** means a school district will continue to get the amount of money. When a school district runs a recurring referendum for $1,000,000, if the referendum passes, the school district's revenue limit will be raised by $1,000,000 on a continual basis.*

*A **non-recurring referendum** means a school district only gets the money for the time for which it is requested. If a school district asks for a 5-year non-recurring referendum for $1,000,000 each year for the five years and it passes, the school district's revenue limit will be increased by $1,000,000 for each of the five years. At the end of the five years, the school district's revenue limit goes back to the revenue limit set by the state, unless another referendum is approved.*

11. **How are the schools in the School District of Sturgeon Bay doing?**
Our school district understands the importance of employing quality people to work with our young people. Additionally, our district believes in providing support and opportunities to our students not only within the classroom, but also through other programs and opportunities that impact a student's learning and overall growth.

An important Board of Education-endorsed initiative going back several years deals with literacy. As some community members and parents are aware, this has been a hot topic in the State of Wisconsin in recent years and is something districts need to address for the benefit of our students and community. Our district has been called on as a model and staff have been invited to present at the State level.

We realize that external indicators are another source of information regarding how we are doing. As the Fall Update Presentation points out, our school report cards range from "Meets Expectations" at Sunrise Elementary to "Exceeds Expectations" at SBHS to "Significantly Exceeds Expectations" at TJ Walker Middle School. As a result, our district report card rating is "Exceeds Expectations" as identified by the State of Wisconsin.

Additionally, **TJ Walker Middle School was recognized this past school year as one of only eight Blue Ribbon Schools in Wisconsin—and the only school of the eight identified in both recognition categories: Gap Closing AND High Performing**. This is an outstanding achievement and reflection of the work our students and staff members have been putting in.

12. **Why does the district have to go to a referendum in the first place?**
The state uses a four-step process to set the revenue limit, which is basically a limit as to how much the district can tax the local community. This local tax limit does not make up the remainder of the school budget that is not covered by state funding. While the district has worked hard to contain and reduce costs to maintain a low budget of expenditures, there is still a shortfall between the amount of state and local funding and what it takes to run a quality school district. That is why the district is asking the local community to approve a Referendum which allows the district to set a tax rate above the state's formula or "revenue limit" for local taxation.

In a sense, a referendum allows the local community to support their local schools to the extent that the state funding does not cover the school's expenses. The good news is that local tax goes directly to our local schools whereas higher state taxes would not necessarily mean that additional tax dollars would find their way to schools here in Sturgeon Bay.

For those interested in additional history, revenue limits imposed by the state are the driving force behind school districts running operational referendums. Revenue limits have been in place since 1994. Governor Tommy Thompson made revenue limits permanent with the introduction of two-thirds funding, although, the state never did fund every school district at two-thirds and eventually gave up two-thirds funding of K-12 education, although there is talk of two-thirds funding returning at the state level. The Qualified Economic Offer (QEO) was the third of three pieces put into place in 1994, and the QEO has also been eliminated. Of the three major changes put into place in 1994, revenue limits are the only one in place currently.

In the early years of the establishment of revenue limits, our district did make cuts to become more efficient, as well as cuts that impacted educational offerings. Additional cuts have continued over the years, as have shifted more costs to our employees. In recent years, the school district has made additional changes and cuts and has gone to referendum since 2007 to avoid crippling cuts to the remaining quality education we provide to our students and community.

13. **Why do we need to go for another operational referendum?** *Like most districts in Wisconsin, the school district's revenue limit set by the state and aid associated with our enrollment will not cover current educational programming levels for our students, families, and community. Historically, we ran three-year non-recurring operational referendum cycles (2007, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, and 2022) and then based on feedback and survey results we switched to a five-year cycle in 2022. The referendum approved in 2022 expires on June 30, 2027. Our next fiscal year begins on July 1, 2027.*

15. **What efforts has the district taken to make the referendum amount as low as possible?** *In general, the Board and administration have looked over past and current information, looked for budgetary savings, and made the changes we feel can be made without a major impact on the quality of education. We utilize a financial projection program (through Baird Financial Services) to consider many factors.*

    More specifically, the district is implementing a long-term staffing plan that utilizes attrition to reduce the number of staff positions over time as our student enrollment reduces over time. Both Sawyer Elementary and Sunrise Elementary Schools have matching daily schedules so staff can be shared now and in the future. Beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, both secondary schools are on the same 8-period day schedule

to position the secondary campus to continue to meet the needs of our students into the future but also utilize fewer staff members over time. The 8-period day also allows graduation requirements at SBHS to continue as they have, without lowering the number of course opportunities for students or total credits required for students to graduate.

17. **Why can't we consolidate school districts in Door County?** *This is a topic that gets discussed from time to time—and is also a topic some people can have very strong feelings about. While some people say this topic is not relevant as one district looks at a referendum others say it is relevant, so we continue to include it in our materials.*

    The reality is that one school district cannot force another school district to consolidate with it. As in any personal or business partnership, it takes at least two willing partners to make things work.

    The Sturgeon Bay and Sevastopol School Districts studied consolidation back in 2007-2008. The property valuation difference was reported to have caused the Sevastopol taxpayers to have an increase in their taxes, while the Sturgeon Bay taxpayers were reported to see a decrease in their taxes. Even if both communities and districts had decided to consolidate, there would still have needed to be a referendum at some point.

    While there are a wide variety of district dynamics one can consider, how consolidation impacts property taxes, and more, a page on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction gives an overview of the consolidation aid addressed in Wisconsin State Statutes. (Here is a link to that page: https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/support/reorganization/consolidation/incentives)

    In a nutshell, consolidation aid is provided in the amount of "$150 per pupil attending school in the consolidated district for the first five years after the consolidation. In the sixth year, districts qualify for 50 percent of the amount received in the fifth year after consolidation. In the seventh year, districts qualify for 25 percent of the amount received in the fifth year after the consolidation."

    There is certainly more reading you could do on the topic, but wrapping this up for now, if the Boards of Education from two different school districts wanted to work together to begin to study consolidation, they could do so.

18. **If the referendum fails, which programs will be impacted?** *If the referendum fails, the Board of Education, Administration, and Staff would have to look further at options that could have very serious implications. The district could further reduce staff positions which would then impact a number of educational programming offerings, reduce or eliminate departments and programs, raise class sizes, and/or utilize fund balance until a referendum would pass.*

However, the impact of these cuts would likely cause our district to lose students to our neighboring districts through open enrollment and make the financial situation even more challenging than it already is or would become. Plus, as noted by the visual late in the Fall of 2026 Update & Referendum presentation, cutting approximately 48 positions would be devastating to the district and would only address one year of the five-year referendum. Therefore, the Board and Administration do not believe that level of reductions and related actions are a viable and sustainable option.

There is no prepared or specific "list" of exactly what positions and programs would be eliminated since this is often viewed as threatening and causes a great deal of consternation that may or may not be necessary following the results of Election Day.

In summary, the Board and administration would work together to generate next steps and inform the community accordingly. Additionally, the Board could choose to go to referendum again in April of 2027.

20. **Have other school districts been going to referendum?** *In April of 2026, there were 73 Wisconsin school districts that went to referendum for a total of 75 school referendum questions: 9 of the 12 questions to issue debt passed (75%); 32 of the 57 operational referendum questions to exceed the revenue limit on a non-recurring basis passed (56%); and five of the six operational referendum questions to exceed the revenue limit on a recurring basis passed (83%).*
Source: Baird Public Finance Referenda Results

In 2025, there were 94 ballot questions, with a reported 53 referenda approved by voters (56.4%). The total of 94 questions was the most in an odd-numbered year since 2007 (there is no fall general election in odd-numbered years), and 62 operating referenda were the most in an odd-numbered year since 2001. The 2025 data followed a record-setting 148 operational referendum questions posed to voters back in 2024.
Source: Wisconsin Policy Forum

21. **How bad is the declining enrollment situation and how does the district plan for future enrollment?** *Declining enrollment has a negative impact on revenue limits. Our school district, like a majority in the state and region, has declining enrollment.*

In a nutshell, our enrollment has gone down roughly 1% per year (more some years and less others), which matches the statewide trend reported in the news media and through legislators last spring. This fall, we fell below 1,000 students.

We have worked with the Applied Population Laboratory from UW-Madison to do school enrollment projections for us. The most recent projection series was done as part of the

capital referendum project in 2019 (which in part involved the closing of Sunset Elementary School and a 4K addition at Sawyer Elementary School). The report, entitled Planning for the School of Tomorrow, and done specifically for our school district, is available on our website. To see the roughly 30-page report go to the District Information tab and select Referendum Information from the drop-down menu. Then select Facility Referendum Info 2019-2020 and click on the School Enrollment Projections Series 2019 link near the bottom of the list of resources.

22. **Why can't the school district apply for grants and donations to help cover increased cost?** *The district actively seeks and receives grants and donations to help support education, programs, materials, special projects, and what we can offer students, families, and the community in general. We have received many grants and donations over the years. Among other things we have been able to update to more secure elementary and middle school office entrances, have updated technology infrastructure, technology available to students and staff, wireless connectivity, phone servers, replaced high school lockers, replaced middle school bleachers, built a new greenhouse, built a modernized play space behind the middle school that is accessible to children of varying abilities, and built a new accessible playground behind Sunrise Elementary School.*

23. **Why can't the school district use its fund balance to make up the deficit?** *A common misconception is that a school's fund balance is money in a long-term savings account being stashed away for a rainy day. The way it is talked about sometimes, this is a very easy mistake to make. Very simply, fund balance is a snapshot of the district's equity position on June 30th (the last day of a school's fiscal year) and changes daily. To figure out our equity position, we subtract our liabilities from our assets. Our June 30th assets are generally made up of our current cash (in our checking account), plus the taxes we will receive in August, and any grant payments we are expecting by the end of September (for expenses paid in the previous fiscal year). Our liabilities include payments yet to be made, such as utilities (from the month of June) and insurance over the summer for our staff members.*

    From the final tax payment for the year, which we receive in August, the district receives no major funding until the first Monday in December every year in the form of state equalization aid. That means, for us to avoid short term borrowing (using a line of credit to make sure we can pay bills and payroll on time), we need to have a fund balance on June 30th that will not go negative before that first Monday in December. After a lot of planning and belt tightening, School District of Sturgeon Bay was able to avoid the extra expense of short-term borrowing for the first time in over twenty years in 2018. Prior to the passage of the first three-year operational referendum in 2007, this short-term borrowing was costing the district over $90,000 a year.

If the district were to use fund balance (which would mean running a deficit) to make up this deficit, we would be at $0 before the end of the second year of the next five-year referendum cycle. This would mean having to borrow money on a long-term basis, costing the district hundreds of thousands of dollars more every year, thus having to continue to cut teachers and staff. This is not something that is fiscally sound or sustainable for any school district.

24. **Is it true the district needs to go to referendum to maintain benefits for the employees?** *Most of any school district's expenses are related to their employees. Education is a student-centered business that requires people to educate students and maintain our district facilities. The school district has continued to work towards controlling salaries and benefits for all staff. We have made changes to our insurance providers, benefits, and deductibles; our employees pay 50% of the cost of their retirement. Our employees have seen a decline in benefits and take-home pay because of the changes over the years.*

    That being stated, we also need to be aware of attracting and retaining quality people and employees in the current climate. Our country has known for some time about challenges such as more workers leaving the workforce than entering it. Not only are we hitting this point after years of the data predicting it, but COVID-related factors in recent years accelerated and exacerbated the problem. We need to be fiscally responsible, but we also need to attract and retain staff members. In addition to the budgetary assumptions built into the five-year projection, note that in addition to the base referendum amount of $3.5 million per year for five years, $250,000 is being included for a total of $3.75 million per year for five years, to put additional resources into competitive wages for teachers and staff.

25. **Doesn't the school district receive aid from the state? Why are the local property owners being asked to fix the funding issues?** *As discussed in an earlier question, the School District of Sturgeon Bay receives about 34.95% of its budget from state aid (see 16-year trend of State aid for Sturgeon Bay below). Property valuation is another critical component (see 11-year trend of property values for Sturgeon Bay below). We also have the least amount of property valuation of the four mainland school districts in Door County (see county comparison near the end of this FAQ for additional information).*

Fiscal Year	*Equalization Aide from State*	*Equalized Property Value*
2011-2012	*$3,810,834*	*$835,099,661*
2012-2013	*$3,458,435*	*$813,307,219*
2013-2014	*$3,435,817*	*$790,159,078*
2014-2015	*$3,404,464*	*$791,483,410*
2015-2016	*$3,744,986*	*$774,745,554*
2016-2017	*$3,963,621*	*$782,767,967*
2017-2018	*$4,274,704*	*$788,013,114*

2018-2019	*$4,344,299*	*$821,611,564*
2019-2020	*$4,384,251*	*$848,646,646*
2020-2021	*$4,448,596*	*$900,772,391*
2021-2022	*$5,159,198*	*$929,172,534*
2022-2023	*$4,385,318*	*$1,002,889,959*
2023-2024	*$5,146,203*	*$1,164,744,336*
2024-2025	*$4,706,715*	*$1,418,002,211*
2025-2026	*$4,000,708*	*$1,539,114,239*
2026-2027	*$3,400,602*	*$1,737,714,355*

26. **According to my tax statements, some years the school district portion of my property taxes has increased, and some years the school district portion of my property taxes decreased. How come those changes don't fix the funding issue?** *As referenced in other questions and materials available on our website, revenue limits are a critical component of school funding in Wisconsin and school districts need to get permission from our voters to set a tax rate above the state's formula or "revenue limit" for local taxation.*

    While there are districts (such as Gibraltar, for example) that have recurring referenda in place (see an earlier question) and this could be an option for our district at some point in the future, our district has historically used non-recurring referenda which means we need to go to our voters every time the next referendum is needed. We had used 3-year non-recurring referenda cycles in the past and shifted to a 5-year non-recurring cycle.

    Additionally, as noted in the presentation Mike Barry from WASBO gave on September 2, as well as information in the District Update & Referendum Information presentation on October 7 (as well as available on the website starting October 8), one of the reasons school taxes don't necessarily decrease as enrollment decreases and we eliminate some staff positions, is that General School Aid (also known as Equalization Aid) is decreasing. In addition to the State not adding any additional dollars into this area as part of the last State Budget, our property values are increasing faster than the State average, which also causes the State to provide less funding than it did previously.

27. **Speaking of taxes, what is the projected impact of this educational programming operational referendum if it is approved by voters and how does it compare with taxes if not approved by voters, as well as how it would compare with this year– the last year of the previous educational programming operational referendum?**

School tax scenario	Mil rate	Per $100,000	Per $300,000
2026-27 current referendum	**7.14**	**$714**	**$2,142**

2027-28 with replacement referendum	**7.00**	**$700**	**$2,100**
2027-28 without replacement referendum	**5.30**	**$530**	**$1,590**

28. **If the school district quit funding athletics or co-curricular activities in general, would they have enough money for educational programming?** *The school district's total expenses for co-curriculars (athletics, band, student council, etc.) are typically less than 2% of our total budget–or approximately $450,000. While this is a substantial amount of money, the expense is quite low considering the positive impact on a student's education, as well as overall percentage of the district budget.*

    Like it or not, athletics and extra-curricular in general are also a major priority for a number of students and families—and attract some families to our school district as well. Eliminating these programs would cause us to lose families to other districts and would make the funding situation worse.

28. **Why can't Door County have just one superintendent? Green Bay has just one?** *Door County has five school districts. Each school district has its own school board. One superintendent for Door County would not be able to provide the attention each community, school board, and school district is currently accustomed to. To effectively operate with one superintendent, Door County would likely need to become one school district. Green Bay also has many layers of administration and departments. They have positions like associate/assistant superintendent, executive directors, and so forth. Green Bay has positions and departments that schools in Door County wouldn't want to pay for.*

    Put another way, school boards would need to agree to share a superintendent position. As noted in an earlier question, Sturgeon Bay and Sevastopol did study consolidation at one point, but that did not move forward. As in any personal or professional undertaking, it takes two or more parties to come together and agree to partner—whether in consolidating, or sharing a superintendent, or sharing something else. Thus far, sharing a superintendent is not something two or more school boards have decided to do, but two school boards could choose to have a discussion in the future.

    Additionally, as noted later, for the 2026-2027 school year the district is going without a high school principal position. The superintendent is overseeing grades 11 and 12, the middle school principal is overseeing grades 9 and 10, and we reallocated the physical education teaching duties of our athletic director into a dean of students role.

29. **How did Act 10 help save money for the school district?** *The school district has been able to save money because of Act 10. We changed benefits for teachers and staff, which includes post-retirement benefits. All employees are also paying 50% of their*

retirement. Employees pay a larger portion of the insurance premium cost. The Board of Education now has more authority to make changes for future savings.

30. **Why does the school district still need to go to referendum now that Act 10 has been in place for a number of years?** *Even though Act 10 provided savings to the school district in a couple of different ways, it does not provide enough savings to overcome the shortfall caused by revenue limits. As previously discussed, benefit levels have been reduced, staff now pay half of their retirement contributions, and the district can make changes to insurance, for example, whenever needed. We all know that it is important to provide a quality education to the students of Sturgeon Bay. Put another way, Act 10 has allowed districts to save money by reducing benefits for our staff members. As labor market challenges escalate, we need to take a cautious, responsible approach that also keeps in mind the long-term fiscal and educational effects of decisions we make now.*

31. **Has the school district really cut enough? Plus, if enrollment is less than it used to be, why aren't there more cuts?** *To account for elementary class sizes that are smaller than they used to be years ago, teaching positions have been eliminated in recent years. As we look ahead to the elementary enrollments projected for next year those are expected to range from about 52 - 67 students at the 4K-grade 5 levels. While we used to have four or five sections of elementary grades, for example, we now have three sections of elementary grades, with the exception of 4K which we've worked to keep at four sections, although this could certainly change in the future.*

    Secondary staffing levels are more difficult yet to grasp, especially in terms of averages while considering the courses and educational programs offered in the various areas. TJ Walker Middle School grades range between 73 and 83 students. High school grades range between 73 and 99 students. We currently have secondary departments ranging from one to four members. Further reducing any elective area jeopardizes the entire program. Reducing teaching positions to part-time reduces our ability to attract and retain quality staff.

    As part of our long-term staffing plan, we plan to utilize attrition to reduce the number of positions over time without having to lay staff members off—and with being able to meet the needs of students. This strategy will allow the district to reduce from one to three positions per year across the district.

    Daily schedules have been aligned at both elementary schools, and beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, an 8-period day schedule is being implemented at both the middle school and high school to be ready to accommodate shared staff members as future reductions through attrition occur.

As one practical example, we moved from having three Art teachers across the district to two beginning in 2026-2027. One Art teacher serves both elementary schools and one Art teacher serves both secondary schools. (This is similar to the model we have used in Choral Music for a period of time.)

Moving beyond enrollment issues and related staffing plan information to reduce the number of staff over time, there is another key factor that Mike Barry discussed in his presentation about TIDs and school funding on September 2, 2026, in our special community session. Mike also created a visual on this within his presentation and we added the visual to the Fall of 2026 District Update & Referendum presentation. The visual shows enrollment (specifically 3-year membership because of how the State views enrollment along the lines of a 3-year rolling average) and it also shows General Aid from the State. In a nutshell, while we know enrollment has gone down, General Aid has gone down as well–and by a substantial rate in particular the last couple of years.

As is shown in other materials, substantial drops in General Aid combined with factors such as the State not including any additional dollars in the General Aid bucket as part of the most recent State Budget shift more of the tax burden onto local property tax payers and less burden on the State. On a related note, since our property values are increasing at a faster rate than the State average, the State then sees our district as being more "property rich" per student than other districts in the State and this relates to the large General Aid drops we are seeing.

32. **Why is Sturgeon Bay School District's tax rate higher than other districts in the county?** *The tax rate is determined by land value. The more land value a district has the lower the tax rate will be because the district has more value covering the expenses of the school district paid through property taxes. Membership (Note 1: 2025 figures are included below) deals with the number of students living in your school district. (Note 2: The revenue limit figures are prior to private school vouchers being calculated in.)*

District	Property Valuation	September Membership	Base Revenue Limit per Member	Revenue Limit per member after referendum	25 Mil Rate
Gibraltar	$7,222,292,258	510	$25,599	$25,652	$2.31
Sevastopol	$3,063,142,280	511	$12,317	$21,180	$3.95
Southern Door	$2,281,409,307	994	$11,975	$14,877 (estimate w/referendum included, but election results are pending)	$6.98
Sturgeon Bay	$1,737,714,355	1,020	$11,975	$15,945 (estimate w/referendum included, but election results are pending)	$7.19
Wash. Island	$557,922,000	65	$26,699	$28,699	$3.04

Source: Department of Public Instruction revenue limit worksheets.

33. **If the district doesn't need all the revenue limit override money from this educational programming operational referendum the next five years, what would the district do?**
The school board gives final approval to the school budget and sets the tax levy every October as part of the annual business that needs to be done once we receive some key information from the State on approximately October 15. If all the projected dollars amounts for the fiscal year are not needed, the school board can choose to levy less money than they have the authority to levy, by funding projects that would not have to be deferred to future years, by funding projects that would not to be added to a potential future referendum question, coming up with other responsible uses for dollars as they deem appropriate at that time, or a combination of these options.

As pertinent history and to show that our Board of Education actually has under-levied here are actual examples from recent years with a projection for 2026-2027:

- *2019-2020 Under-levied by $275,000*
- *2020-2021 Under-levied by $540,000*
- *2021-2022 Under-levied by $813,147*
- *2025-2026 Under-levied by $100,000*
- *2026-2027 Projecting an under-levy of $325,000.*

34. **Is the school district planning to cut administrative positions?**
Yes. While not a long-term strategy the Board currently wants to continue, our superintendent, middle school principal, and athletic director are sharing the principal duties at Sturgeon Bay High School for the 2026-2027 school year. In the short term, this means we will have one less administrative position in 2026-2027 than we did in 2025-2026.

As we look at the next few years and the planned retirements of a few administrators, the district plans to utilize attrition to reduce the number of administrators, just as the number of support staff positions and teacher positions will decrease over time.

35. **Is the school district planning to help fund the Memorial Athletic Park Project I have heard about? Is the project part of the referendum?**
No. While the school board has voted to adopt the Master Plan for Memorial Athletic Park and greatly appreciates the investment of the City of Sturgeon Bay and the time current and past volunteers have given to the effort, the school board does not plan to contribute any capital project dollars for Phase One or potential future phases of the project—nor does it plan to use any operational referendum dollars for the Memorial Park project.

The school district does plan to continue to share maintenance costs with the City and based on the study that was done and information presented to the school board most recently in May of 2026, projected maintenance costs would be equal to if not less than what they were prior to the potential Phase One project being constructed and becoming operational.

The school board supports giving the project a chance thanks to fiscal support from the City of Sturgeon Bay and grants and donations being pursued by community volunteers who are part of a project steering committee. Please see the May 26 Press Release regarding athletic field improvements that is posted to our Referendum Information page on the district website.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and attention. If you have an idea or additional question that could be added to this document to help inform our residents, please contact Superintendent Dan Tjernagel at 746-2801 or dtjernagel@sturbay.k12.wi.us . Thanks in advance for your assistance.