

# Referendum FAQs

## **I heard schools received “historic funding” from the state government during the most recent session. Why is that not enough?**

While the funding laid out for the next two school years (2.45%, 2%) is a step in the right direction, it is merely that - a step. While we are grateful for the investment from the State of Minnesota, it doesn't begin to close the growing education funding gap that exists. This gap has been fueled by inflation and salary matrixes for school districts and multiple years of 0 percent funding increases from the state government. While this year's bump puts a slight dent in that gap, there is still a significant difference in the funds school districts receive versus the funds they need just to maintain current programming. [Learn more in this video.](#)

## **What steps has the district taken to reduce expenses?**

During the three years prior to the COVID-impacted 2020-21 school year, Monticello School District made \$3.2 million in budget reductions.

## **Speaking of COVID - what about all of that additional government funding the district has received?**

We are very appreciative for the funding received through ESSER and CARES. However, it is one-time funding that was provided to help districts fund positions, technology, and other applications to help keep students safe and immediately address learning loss created by the ongoing pandemic. That funding is all set to run out at the conclusion of this school year.

The one-time funding did allow the district to stave off more than one million in budget reductions last school year, but with the funding running out, the district is now facing \$3.1 million in budget reductions without the passage of a referendum.

## **Have there been any other COVID-related impacts that led to this point?**

Yes. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Monticello, and almost all other school districts, saw decline in enrollment. This, on top of a general plateau in enrollment in our school district, has a huge impact on our funding. Districts are funded per student enrollment, and when enrollment stays level (or dips), it makes it increasingly difficult to expand programming or offer new opportunities for students. With Monticello's enrollment growing slower than most surrounding communities during the past two decades, it has forced us to be more creative and opportunistic in our additions and to run leaner than many other school districts.



### **Why are there three questions on the ballot?**

Good question. We realize this is a unique looking referendum ballot, and we want to do our best to make clear the reasons behind it.

Scientific strategic planning survey work that the district did with Baker Tilly showed that for an operating referendum, the district had the support of the majority of the community near the amount that Question 1 is set at. That level of support came \*prior\* to community members knowing our full story and fully understanding our ask. It is our hope that once the community fully understands the issues and the needs, that they will not only support Question 1 but Question 2 as well to help provide the funding that the district needs to support all programming.

Lastly, Question 3 is necessary because the district has major technology needs. While CARES helped allow the district to make the necessary switch to a 1:1 student to device ratio, the district does not have the technology budget to sustain that switch without additional long-term funding. Even more importantly, the district has seen increasing technology needs that impact all students and staff ranging from: classroom technology, network needs, infrastructure, security support, and more. There is currently money in the budget to cover these increasing needs without reducing expenses elsewhere (e.g. staff). Question 3 allows the district to bookmark money specifically for technology purposes. The one additional benefit to running a technology levy is that a lower percentage of the burden of the levy is placed on homeowners in the school district.

### **Why is the School District asking for this Referendum after the 2020 Referendum failed?**

Simply put, because we need the funding now. If the referendum fails, we will be making \$3.1 million in budget cuts this year. The Monticello School Board and Monticello School District Leadership believe we owe it to our staff and students to continue to seek out the funding needed to maintain the programming, current staffing, and excellent education that our students, staff, families, and community deserve.

Monticello School District also has done a lot of listening and communicating with families, community members, and stakeholders since the 2020 Referendum failed. What we've heard over and over is to provide more information, be more transparent about why the money is needed, and to not ask in excess. Which is why we are asking for exactly what we need to eliminate budget cuts from the five-year forecast (as well as to sustain our current technology capabilities across the district).



## **What happens if the referendum fails?**

These are some of the potential impacts of a failed referendum, pending further School Board discussion and action:

- Significantly increased class sizes (K-4 = Upper 20s, 5-12 = 30-40)
- Reduction or elimination of programming, including Nature Based and Online Programming
- Reduction or elimination of activities and athletics
- Phasing out of 1:1 technology devices
- Reduced K-12 elective opportunities for students
- Cuts to all employee groups
- Increases to student fees
- Reduced 1:1 student support capabilities

## **How could you afford that stadium if there is such a lack of funding?**

The Multi-purpose stadium was funded by a bond referendum, which was proposed (and subsequently supported by the community) to deliver building and facility upgrades across the district. While the stadium is a visible piece of the 2015 referendum, the large majority of the funding went toward upgrading education spaces and building security. In addition to secure entrances at all district buildings, the bond referendum funded major renovations at Eastview Education Center, kitchen/cafeteria and commons area upgrades at Monticello Middle School, media center, lab, shop, and auditorium renovations and upgrades at Monticello High School, and much more. These projects were necessary for creating a safe and healthy culture as well as equipping learning spaces to meet 21st Century needs.

Additional bells and whistles that the community may see at the stadium, including the video scoreboard, have been funded through Activities Department fundraising and not through taxpayer dollars.

## **When will this levy expire?**

The operating referendum on the ballot this November is for a five-year levy. It will expire at the conclusion of the 2026-27 school year, matching the conclusion of the levy that is currently on the books from the 2015 referendum. While most school district levies run for 10 years, we thought it was important to community members to shorten this levy to match the existing one, allowing the community to start fresh in five years in deciding what level of funding they want to provide the district.

