

Focus on Tosa: Real cost of Wauwatosa schools referendum estimated to exceed \$311 million

Posted on Wednesday, Oct 24, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Contact: info@focusontosaeducation.com

Referendum Propaganda Fails to Inform Taxpayers about \$114 Million Loss in State Aid

Wauwatosa, WI – The Wauwatosa school campaign to persuade voters to approve a \$124.9 million school referendum – [the second largest such request](#) on the ballot in Wisconsin this

fall – could actually cost Wauwatosa taxpayers more than \$300 million. If the referendum passes, it could be [one of the five largest](#) in Wisconsin in the last decade, as the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel has noted.

According to figures released by [Focus on Tosa Education](#), a volunteer group of concerned residents opposing the referendum, the campaign to push it forward is not being forthright about the total cost of the referendum. According to the Wauwatosa School District's [own documents from Robert Baird](#), bonding, interest costs, and loss of state school aid will cost Wauwatosa taxpayers an estimated \$311 million in combined cost.

Bonding: \$124.9 million

Interest: \$71.7 million

Loss in state funding: \$114.8 million (Negative Tertiary Funding)

TOTAL Cost to taxpayers: \$311.4 million

Why a loss in state funding? The proposed referendum will increase spending within the Wauwatosa School District above state imposed limits ([Negative Tertiary Funding](#)). This overspending will cause a reduction in state aid to the Wauwatosa School District by an estimated \$5.4 million per year or a \$114.8 million loss in aid over the life of the referendum. Where will the \$114.8 million reduction in state go? It will be redistributed to other school districts throughout the state.

The Wauwatosa School Board acknowledged that a referendum would lead to lost state aid, and as a result, would cost taxpayers more. [In a letter to the Wisconsin State Association of School Boards](#), the Board stated that, “the 116 districts in the negative tertiary aid category currently lose state aid if they pass a referendum. As a result, a \$10 million referendum for facilities improvements, for instance, could actually cost the local taxpayers much more than \$10 million, thus creating a disincentive for voters to approve referendums.”

While these figures are troubling enough, the pro referendum propaganda has other misleading claims and misperceptions. For example, recent mailers only show a taxpayer’s price tag per year to minimize the actual cost. Even if the referendum were to only come in at \$124.9 million, the average homeowner in Wauwatosa would end up paying \$9,400 over the course of 20 years. For those whose homes are valued at \$500,000, the cost would come to \$18,800.

Finally, it’s often been cited in pro referendum literature that 73% of respondents in a recent survey support exploring a facilities referendum and that a majority support a referendum of at least \$125 million. However, there were only 3,432 survey respondents in a population base of 46,396. About 10 percent of the respondents were outside the school district and 12% of the respondents were district employees.

Focus on Tosa Education believes that the current referendum does not take into account the significant concerns outlined here. While we believe that Wauwatosa schools are in need of improvement, we do not believe the solutions being offered in the referendum are the answer. We ask residents to vote no and, as the [School District has offered](#), to re-engage the community to refine a plan.