

Institute for Reforming Government: Releases school referenda transparency tool for taxpayers

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New resource helps Wisconsin voters understand local school referenda

Delafield, Wis. - The Institute for Reforming Government (IRG) released an online school referendum transparency tool on Tuesday to help taxpayers better understand school spending ahead of spring 2026 school district referenda decisions.

The tool is available on IRG's website [here](#).

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The tool allows taxpayers to review:

- Additional spending requested by the referendum
- Growth in district staff from 2020 to 2025
- Total temporary federal ESSER III dollars that were allocated to ongoing expenses

The tool [uses](#) publicly available state and NCES data.

Taxpayers now have clear, consolidated information in one place, helping inform them about local school referenda.

WHY IT MATTERS

According to IRG's [latest analysis](#),

- Since 2020, Wisconsin public school enrollment has **declined by 49,078 students**.
- During that same period, districts **added 2,366 staff positions**.
- Because fewer students are in classrooms, taxpayers are funding **8,878 additional adult employees statewide compared to 2020**.
- **Nearly \$614 million** in temporary federal COVID relief funds were allocated to ongoing costs over two years. With those Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds now expired, some districts are asking voters to approve additional funding to sustain those temporary spending levels.

THE QUOTE

“Funding schools sufficiently is important, but taxpayers deserve clear information about district spending and staffing trends when considering new referenda,” said Quinton Klapon, Senior Research Director at the Institute for Reforming Government. “IRG’s tool provides simple, helpful information for anyone seeking to understand this April’s proposals.”

WHAT’S NEXT

Community members can review their district’s data using the transparency tool on IRG’s website.

[View this release online](#)