



HILLTOPPER FACTS REFERENDUM AND GUIDE

The School District of Glenwood City Board of Education Approves Operational Referendum Question for November 3 Ballot. Proposed Four-Year Operational Referendum Designed to Support Students While Maintaining Low, Stable Tax Rate.

The Question Before Voters: On November 3, voters will decide whether to authorize the School District of Glenwood City to exceed its revenue limit by \$750,000 annually for four years. The District will continue providing information to residents before Election Day about the referendum, the District's finances, how the additional revenue would be used, and the projected property tax impact. The referendum asks voters whether the District should be authorized to exceed its state-imposed revenue limit by \$750,000 per year for four years, beginning with the 2026-27 school year and ending with the 2029-30 school year. Because the referendum is non-recurring, this additional authority would expire after four years unless voters approve another referendum in the future.

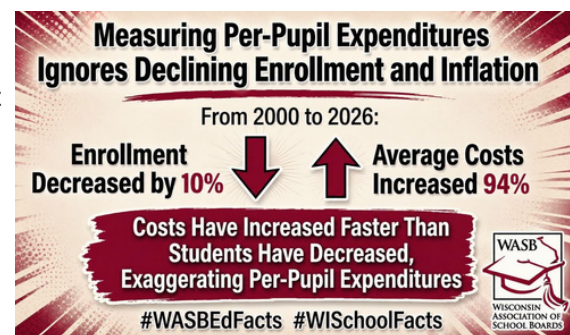
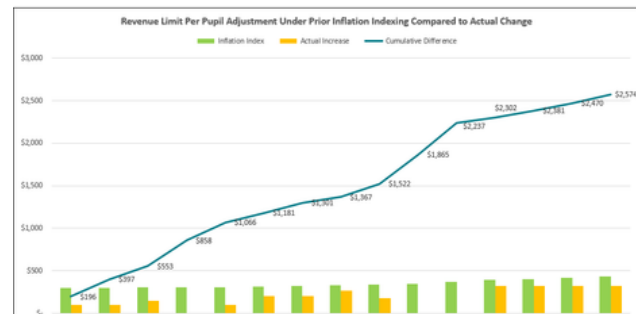
\$750,000 per year for four years, non-recurring, with a PROJECTED MINIMAL TO POTENTIALLY NO INCREASE in the overall school tax rate

An important part of the District's financial planning is that approval of the referendum is projected to have a minimal impact and potentially no increase on the District's overall property tax rate. The District's goal is to maintain a low and stable mill rate of approximately \$7.00 per \$1,000 of equalized property value while providing the resources necessary to maintain educational opportunities for students. While the referendum would provide the District with additional operating revenue, the amount of a referendum does not translate dollar-for-dollar into an increase in the property tax rate. The District's overall tax rate is also affected by factors including state aid, changes in equalized property values, debt obligations, and other components of the annual school levy. Based on current financial projections and assumptions, the District believes the additional revenue can be incorporated while keeping the overall school tax rate relatively stable.

Why Is the District Asking Now? This decision follows approximately a year of community conversations, financial analysis, long-range planning, and feedback gathered through the District's community survey. After reviewing this information, the Board determined that voters should have the opportunity to consider the question in November. If approved, the additional revenue would help the District maintain current staff positions, educational programming, student services, and opportunities while addressing increasing operational costs. The District's objective is to balance two important responsibilities: providing students with the opportunities, support, and resources they need to succeed while remaining responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Understanding Wisconsin's School Funding System: Like other Wisconsin public school districts, Glenwood City operates under a state revenue-limit system established more than 30 years ago. Revenue limits restrict the amount of funding school districts may receive through the combination of state general aid and local property taxes for operations. Many of the factors affecting a district's revenue limit and financial position are outside local control. For example, if state-authorized per-pupil revenue had kept pace with inflation since 2009, districts such as Glenwood City would have had approximately \$3,500 more per student in spending authority during the 2025-26 school year. For a district serving approximately 600 students, that represents roughly \$2.1 million annually. The District also faces financial pressures in areas such as special education, where state and federal funding does not fully cover the costs of required programs and services. Under Wisconsin's school funding system, an operational referendum is the mechanism available to voters to authorize a school district to exceed its state-established revenue limit.

Maximum Revenue Per Member



Projected Minimal to Potentially No Increase in the Overall School Tax Rate



YOU SPOKE. WE LISTENED.

Community Feedback Is Helping Shape the Operating Referendum



This past spring, the School District of Glenwood City asked our community to share its priorities, concerns, and expectations for the future of GCSD. Your feedback has helped guide our planning and the development of the November 3 operating referendum.

What We Heard:

- Keep the referendum affordable.
- Residents expressed concern about property taxes, rising household costs, and the financial impact of any additional levy.
- Be clear about where the money will go.
- Community members want a straightforward explanation of why additional revenue is needed, how it will be used, and what it will cost taxpayers.
- Demonstrate fiscal responsibility.
- Respondents expect the District to carefully review expenses, prioritize essential needs, and responsibly manage taxpayer dollars.
- Focus on students and essential programs.
- Comments emphasized protecting core academics, career and technical education, special education, student supports, and opportunities that prepare students for life after graduation.
- Continue rebuilding trust through transparency.
- Residents want consistent communication, strong financial oversight, accountability, and opportunities for community input.

What Our Community Values: The survey also reinforced what makes Glenwood City special:

- Caring and committed staff who build strong relationships with students.
- A small-school environment where students are known, supported, and connected.
- Student programs and opportunities that help children discover their interests and prepare for their futures.
- A strong sense of community and pride in Glenwood City Schools.

Our Commitment: The operating referendum is intended to help GCSD maintain financial stability and protect essential educational opportunities while remaining mindful of the impact on local taxpayers.

As we move toward November 3, 2026, we will continue providing clear information about:

- Why additional operating revenue is being requested
- How referendum dollars would be used
- What the estimated tax impact would be
- What happens if the referendum passes or does not pass

GCSD OPERATING REFERENDUM.....Your Questions Answered

Q: WHY DOES GCSD NEED AN OPERATING REFERENDUM?

A: GCSD faces a structural funding challenge as expenses continue to rise faster than revenues. Three significant cost pressures are an aging transportation fleet, rising employee health insurance costs, and facility needs. Health insurance costs alone have increased by more than \$400,000 in just two budget cycles, while six aging buses have been sold over the past year and a half as the District works to provide safe, reliable student transportation. At the same time, the District has faced growing facility expenses to address aging infrastructure, safety needs, and code compliance. GCSD has used fund balance to help manage these rising costs and minimize the impact on taxpayers, but relying on savings to fund ongoing expenses is not sustainable.

Why Consider a Referendum?

Operational:

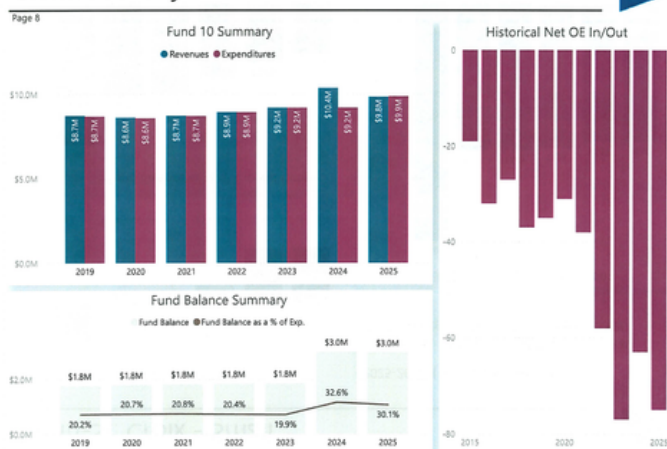
- Revenue limits have not kept pace with rising costs
 - Current Gap* ~\$2,470 per student (~\$1.7M in 2025-26)
- Increasing staffing and benefit expenses
- Maintain class sizes and strong programs
- Support student services and needs
- Manage major budget areas like technology, maintenance, and curriculum



Base Scenario – No Referendum

No Referendums or Overlevy/Defeasance				Base			
	Historical	Current Year	Budget Year	Forecast			
	2024 - 2025	2025 - 2026	2026 - 2027	2027 - 2028	2028 - 2029	2029 - 2030	2030 - 2031
Sept Membership (FTE)	684	670	644	624	611	598	588
Per Pupil Increase	\$325	\$325	\$325	\$325	\$325	\$325	\$325
Per-Pupil Categorical Aid \$	\$742	\$742	\$742	\$742	\$742	\$742	\$742
TIF Out Equalized Valuation Growth	9.12%	11.86%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%	3.00%
Fund 10 Total Salaries Increase	8.58%	3.66%	3.00%	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%	2.50%
Fund 10 Total Benefits Increase	4.31%	14.50%	14.48%	3.00%	3.04%	3.08%	3.12%
Fund 10 Revenues	\$9,835,347	\$10,088,415	\$10,200,685	\$10,247,280	\$10,256,887	\$10,159,793	\$10,211,789
Fund 10 Expenditures	\$9,863,436	\$10,418,571	\$10,737,425	\$11,072,690	\$11,385,907	\$11,845,274	\$12,422,243
Surplus (Deficit)	(\$28,089)	(\$330,157)	(\$536,741)	(\$825,410)	(\$1,129,020)	(\$1,685,482)	(\$2,210,454)
Fund Balance	\$2,970,328	\$2,640,172	\$2,103,431	\$1,278,022	\$149,001	(\$1,536,480)	(\$3,746,934)
Fund Balance as % of Expenditures	30.11%	25.34%	19.59%	11.54%	1.31%	-12.97%	-30.16%
Non-Recurring Referendum \$	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Referendum Debt Levy	\$654,313	\$1,020,788	\$653,163	\$655,225	\$656,238	\$655,488	\$653,613
Total School-Based Tax Levy	\$3,506,262	\$3,694,111	\$3,364,330	\$3,155,137	\$3,067,019	\$2,922,376	\$2,851,459
Mill Rate (per \$1,000 EQ Value)	\$7.43	\$7.00	\$6.19	\$5.64	\$5.32	\$4.92	\$4.66

Glenwood City



Q: HAS GCSD ALREADY REDUCED SPENDING?

A: Yes. Before asking taxpayers for additional operating revenue, GCSD reduced spending by nearly \$1 million beginning in 2023 through measures such as:

- Cut or reassigned staff positions.
- Delayed facility maintenance projects.
- Shifted from purchasing buses to leasing buses.
- Used fund balance to cover financial shortfalls.
- Strengthened financial oversight and accountability.
- Partnered with Baird Public Finance for long-term financial planning.

Even after these measures, the District's earlier financial analysis projected a funding gap of approximately \$2.5 million over four years, averaging approximately \$613,000 per year.

Q: WHY CAN'T THE DISTRICT JUST CUT MORE?

A: Additional reductions are possible - but they would increasingly affect the educational services provided to students.

- Reducing staff and increasing class sizes.
- Reducing course offerings.
- Reducing athletics and extracurricular opportunities.
- Delaying classroom materials and curriculum updates.
- Reducing building maintenance.
- Reducing services such as counseling and nursing.
- Delaying technology updates.

The question is no longer simply whether GCSD can spend less but what programs, services and opportunities the community is willing to reduce.

Glenwood City

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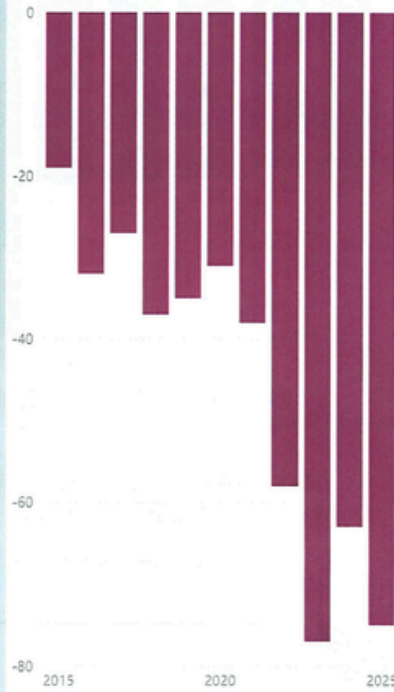
BAIRD

Fund 10 Summary

Revenues Expenditures



Historical Net OE In/Out



**GRAPHICS
EXPANDED
FOR
CLARITY**

Fund Balance Summary

Fund Balance Fund Balance as a % of Exp.



Base Scenario – No Referendum

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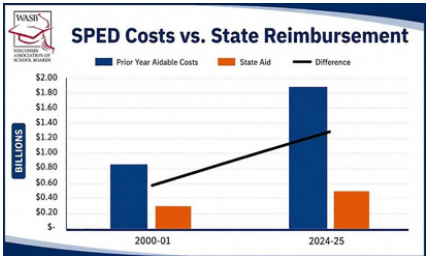
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Q: HOW DOES DECLINING ENROLLMENT AFFECT GCSD?

A: Enrollment affects the amount of revenue available to operate Wisconsin public schools. GCSD’s enrollment projections show 599 students in 3K-12 for 2026-27, compared with 610 students in 2024-25. However, enrollment declines do not produce equivalent reductions in operating costs. The District must still heat, maintain and insure its buildings, operate transportation routes, provide required student services, maintain appropriate staffing and offer educational programming across all grade levels. Revenue can decline faster than costs can reasonably be reduced.

Q: HOW DOES SPECIAL EDUCATION AFFECT THE DISTRICT BUDGET?

A: Special education services are required but state and federal funding does not cover the full cost of providing them. The District’s community survey identified that GCSD transferred approximately \$974,379 from its general operating budget to cover special education costs not supported by dedicated special education funding. Those are general operating dollars that therefore cannot be used for other District priorities.



Q: WHY AREN'T WE SIMPLY SPENDING LESS ON CURRICULUM, FACILITIES OR OTHER ITEMS?

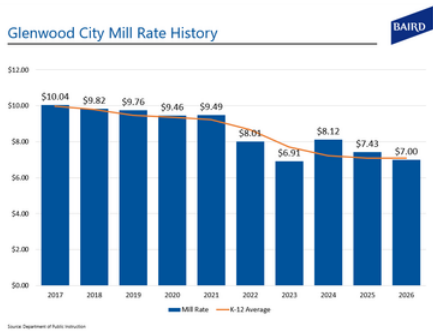
A: GCSD has already delayed expenditures in several areas to balance previous budgets, including facility maintenance and classroom materials. Delaying those expenditures may reduce costs temporarily but it does not eliminate the need. Eventually, curriculum and instructional materials must be updated, technology must be replaced, buses must be maintained or replaced, and buildings must be repaired. Deferring a cost is not the same as eliminating a cost.

Q: WHAT DOES IT COST TO OPERATE GCSD?

A: GCSD’s Fund 10 operating expenditures were approximately \$9.9 million in 2025, according to Baird’s financial analysis. Baird’s model projects expenditures continuing to increase while revenues remain comparatively flat. The largest costs of operating a school district are connected to the people and services necessary to educate students every day - including teachers, support staff, transportation, utilities, insurance, student services, instructional programming and facility operations. The referendum is intended to help close the growing gap between the revenue GCSD receives and the cost of maintaining current operations.

Q: IS GCSD’S TAX RATE ALREADY HIGH?

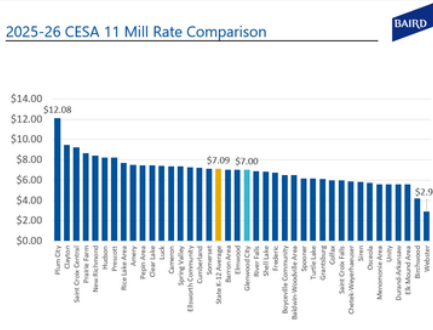
A: GCSD has worked intentionally to maintain a competitive school tax rate. The Board has prioritized keeping the school mill rate near \$7.00 per \$1,000 of property value while maintaining educational programming. Baird’s 2025-26 comparison shows GCSD at approximately \$7.00, compared with a statewide average of \$7.03 for all districts and \$7.09 for K-12 districts. The District’s goal is to balance the needs of students with its responsibility to taxpayers.

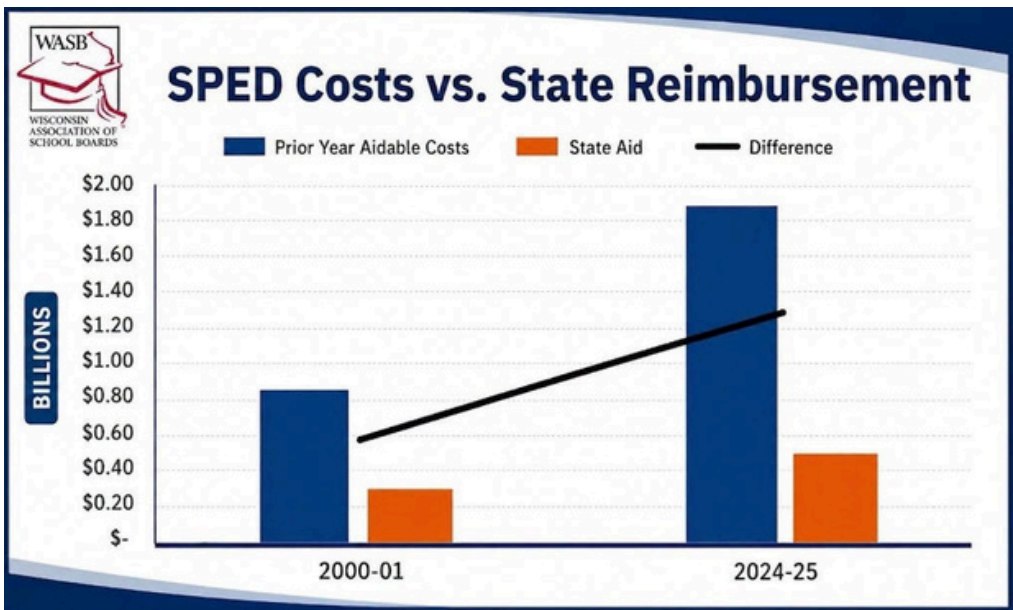


Q: HAS GCSD EVER ASKED FOR AN OPERATING REFERENDUM?

A: No. GCSD has previously asked voters to approve borrowing for capital projects, but the District has not previously asked taxpayers to approve a recurring or non-recurring operating referendum.

Baird’s referendum history shows six previous referendum questions since 1990 - all related to issuing debt for capital purposes rather than operating revenue. This is GCSD’s first request for additional operating revenue.

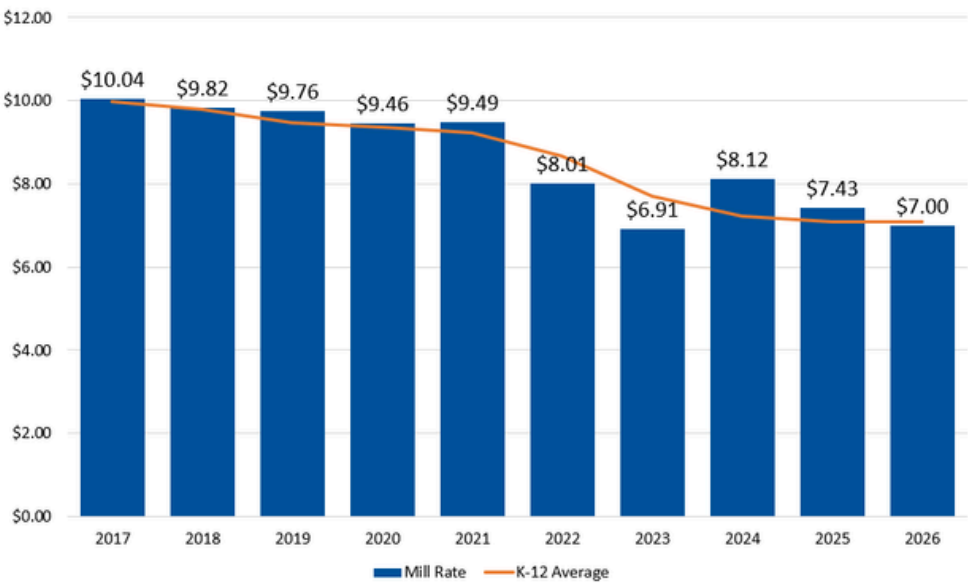




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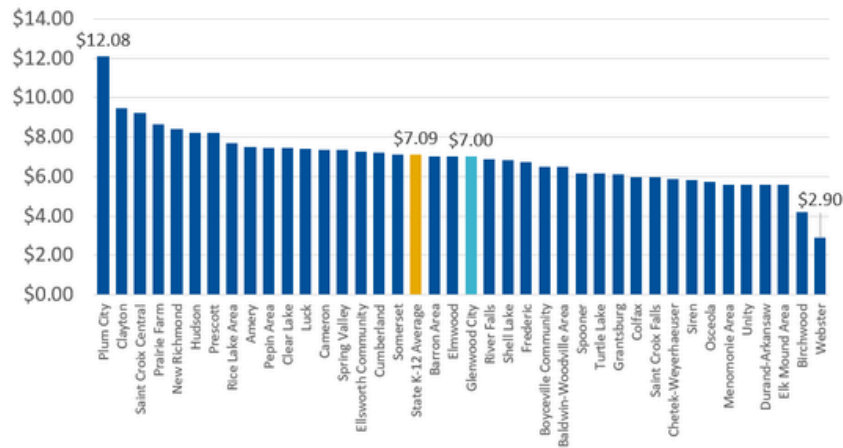
Glenwood City Mill Rate History

BAIRD



2025-26 CESA 11 Mill Rate Comparison

BAIRD



Q: WHY IS THIS REFERENDUM ONLY FOUR YEARS?

A: The proposed referendum is non-recurring and limited to four years. A four-year term provides the District with greater financial stability and planning time while still requiring GCSD to return to the community before the authority can continue. A shorter three-year referendum would require renewal discussions to begin almost immediately. The additional authority does not automatically continue after four years.

Q: WHAT WILL REFERENDUM FUNDING BE USED FOR?

A: The operating referendum is intended to provide financial stability so GCSD can:

- Maintain educational programs and student services.
- Maintain appropriate staffing.
- Address rising operating and employee benefit costs.
- Continue responsible maintenance of District facilities.
- Reduce reliance on fund balance.
- Continue responsible debt management.
- Preserve financial flexibility for the future.



The District’s long-term strategy is to stabilize operations first, rather than make major facility investments without having adequate resources to operate and maintain them.

Q: WHAT ACCOUNTABILITY WILL BE IN PLACE?

A: GCSD has strengthened its financial systems and oversight and will continue monitoring expenditures and making budget adjustments as necessary.

- Redesigned financial policies and procedures.
- Hired new accounting personnel.
- Added independent financial oversight.
- Partnered with Baird Public Finance for financial forecasting and planning.
- Committed to continued Board oversight and public financial reporting.

Referendum approval does not eliminate the need for responsible budgeting. The District will continue evaluating expenditures, controlling costs and making financial decisions with both students and taxpayers in mind.

Q: WHAT HAPPENS IF THE REFERENDUM DOES NOT PASS?

WHAT HAPPENS IF IT PASSES / WHAT HAPPENS IF IT DOES NOT PASS?

This referendum will help ensure Glenwood City Schools can continue to provide a high-quality education while keeping our tax impact minimal. Here's what the future could look like:

IF APPROVED
The referendum passes.

Maintain current programs and services
Students continue to benefit from the opportunities they have today.

Maintain appropriate staffing
We can continue to attract and retain dedicated staff and support reasonable class sizes.

Address rising insurance and operating costs
Helps manage increasing costs that are beyond the District's control.

Maintain facilities responsibly
Allows us to keep up with repairs and deferred maintenance needs.

Four-year financial stability
Provides temporary, non-recurring funding for four years to keep our District on solid financial ground.

IF NOT APPROVED
The referendum does not pass.

Additional reductions likely
More program cuts would be necessary to balance the budget.

Staffing/class-size changes possible
Reductions in staff could lead to larger class sizes and fewer course offerings.

Greater reliance on fund balance
Using reserves is not sustainable and could impact our long-term financial health.

More maintenance may be deferred
Facilities needs could go unmet, leading to higher costs in the future.

Larger future reductions as reserves decline
Without additional revenue, deeper cuts may be required in the future.

Our goal is to maintain a high-quality education, support student success, and be responsible stewards of your tax dollars.

YOUR VOTE ON NOVEMBER 3 WILL HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF GLENWOOD CITY SCHOOLS.

Operating Referendum Facts & Guide - District Improvements and Stewardship

Before asking our community for additional operating support, GCSD has worked to strengthen programs, improve financial practices, maximize existing facilities, expand opportunities for students, and plan responsibly for the future.

ACADEMICS

- Expanded high school course offerings.
- Increased dual-credit and transcribed course offerings by 85% - from 7 to 11 courses.
- Implemented stronger curriculum alignment, common assessments, PLCs, and evidence-based instructional practices.
- Added subject support opportunities for low-achieving students using the MTSS model.
- Added subject acceleration opportunities for high-achieving students.

STUDENT SUPPORT

- Enhanced school health services with a full-time registered nurse.
- Expanded paraeducator support and restructured intervention/Title I services toward an MLSS model.
- Implemented Character Strong across grades 4K-12 and expanded mental-health supports.

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

- Hired a full-time Tech Ed teacher and introduced six new Tech Ed courses.
- Invested \$125,000 in industry-grade equipment, including a CNC machine, laser engraver, and plasma cutter.
- Expanded hands-on college and career readiness opportunities for students.

PROGRAMMING

- Redesigned the K-12 schedules to increase elementary specials and appropriate lunch times.
- Added life skills opportunities and common grade-level planning time for teachers.
- Implemented Heggerty phonological awareness in K-2 and strengthened K-5 standards alignment.

FACILITIES & LEARNING SPACES

- Redesigned the Learning Commons into a modern collaborative space.
- Added a new elementary playground.
- Created the GCE/MS Gymnasium with new flooring, bleachers, and video projection.
- Created the Hilltopper Wellness Center.
- Improved art, special education, health, wrestling, and weight-room spaces.
- Repurposed approximately 13,000 square feet of former storage areas for more effective learning spaces.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

- Implemented financial and accounting audit recommendations.
- Strengthened budgeting, payroll, grant, and fund-accounting practices.
- Partnered with Baird for long-range financial forecasting and tax-equity planning.
- Created 5- and 10-year facility planning and capital budgeting processes.

SAFETY & TECHNOLOGY

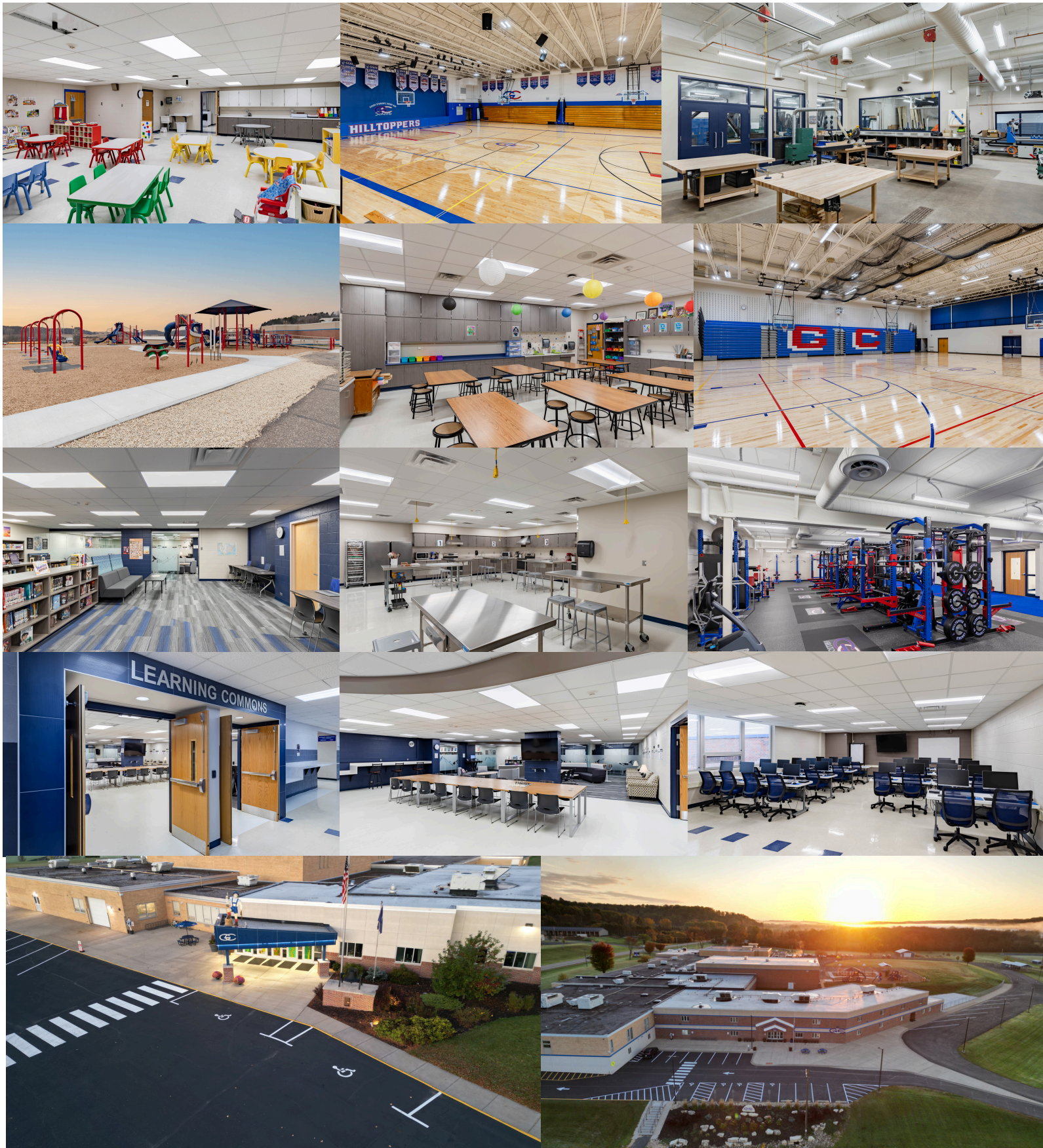
- Implemented multi-factor authentication, device management, asset inventory.
- Developed a cybersecurity incident response plan and completed a nationwide cybersecurity assessment.
- Improved network infrastructure, backups, Wi-Fi, access controls, and building safety systems.
- Updated fire plans in collaboration with Glenwood City Fire & Rescue.

COMMUNITY & FAMILY CONNECTIONS

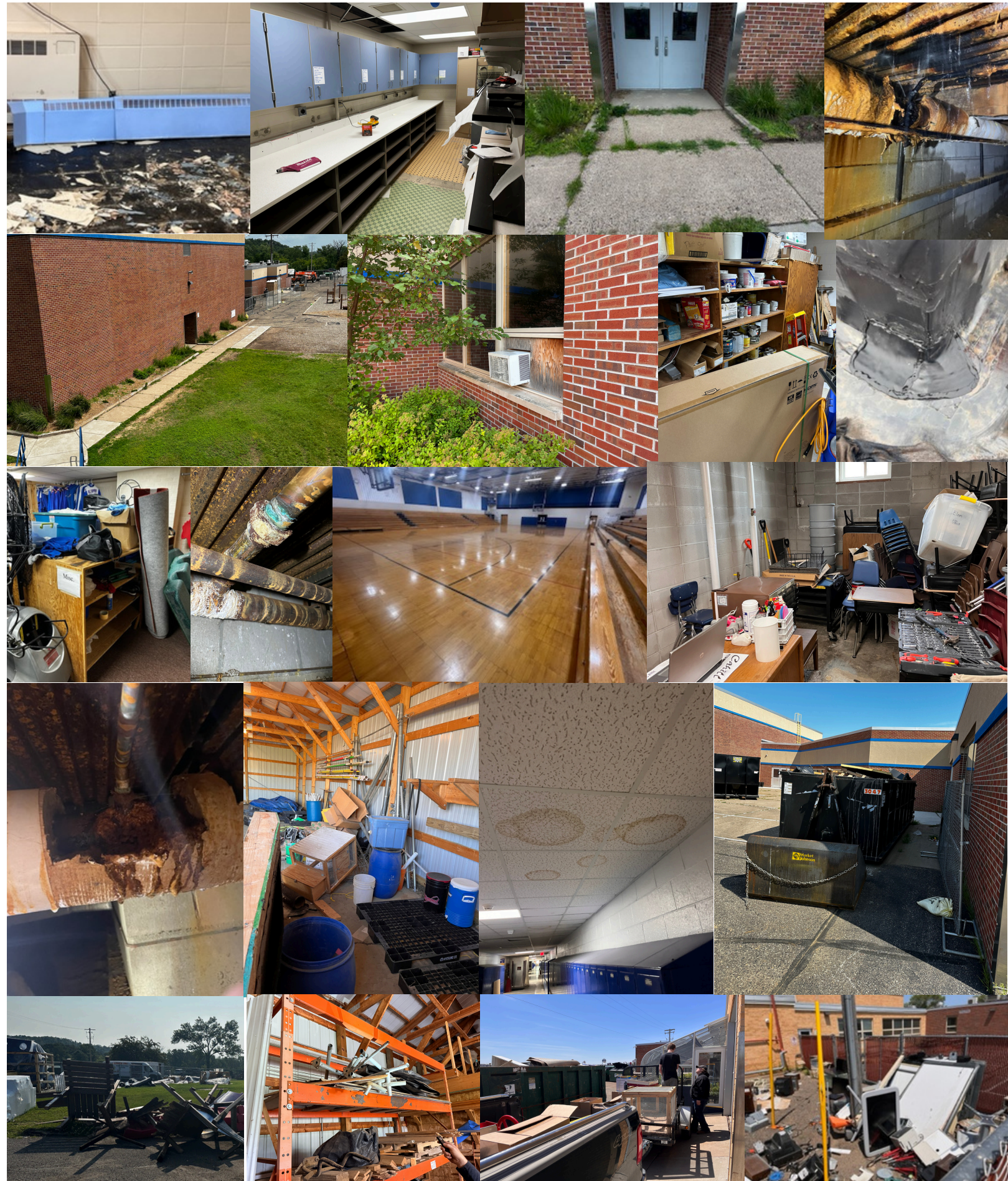
- Expanded Birth-to-3 child care services and school/community mental-health opportunities.
- Established the GAP Fund to reduce financial barriers for students and families.
- Implemented online enrollment, free summer meals, and free admission for residents age 65+ to sporting events.
- Expanded partnerships, grants, donations, and community-based opportunities supporting students and programs.

The referendum is not about standing still. It is about sustaining the programs, people, services, and opportunities our community has worked to strengthen.

What Responsible Stewardship Has Made Possible Since July 2023



Our Facilities in 2023: Before the Improvements





Celebrating EXCELLENCE. BUILDING FUTURES. TOGETHER!

RANKED #118
IN WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOLS
★ OUT OF 467 ★

BEST HIGH SCHOOLS
USNews
RANKED #3,284
NATIONALLY

#118
IN WISCONSIN HIGH SCHOOLS
OUT OF 467 SCHOOLS

#3,284
IN NATIONAL RANKINGS
OUT OF 17,945 SCHOOLS
U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT



YOU INVEST.

WE'LL PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND IMPROVE.



Upcoming Presentation Schedule

As part of the District's ongoing effort to provide clear and accurate information regarding the upcoming operating referendum, Superintendent Patrick Olson will be attending a number of local municipal and District meetings throughout September and October. These meetings will provide opportunities to share information about the referendum, explain the District's financial needs and projected tax impact, answer questions, and engage directly with community members. The schedule below includes confirmed presentations, meetings for which an invitation has been submitted, and upcoming GCSD Board meetings where referendum information and planning will continue to be discussed. Additional meeting dates may be added as they are confirmed.

- September 9: Town of Emerald @ 6:30pm
- September 14: Town of Springfield @ 6:30pm
- September 14: Village of Downing @ 7:30pm
- September 15: Town of Forest @ 7:00pm
- September 21: City of Glenwood City @ 7:00pm
- September 28: GCSD Budget Hearing/Annual Meeting/Regular Meeting @ 6:00pm
- October 7: GCSD Operating Referendum Presentation @ 5:30pm in GCSD Board Room
- October 12: Town of Glenwood @ 7:00pm
- October 13: Town of New Haven @ 7:00pm
- October 14: GCSD Board Work Session @ 5:30pm
- October 28: GCSD Regular Meeting @ 5:30pm



THE BOTTOM LINE

GCSD has reduced spending. We have used available reserves. We have strengthened financial oversight. But costs continue to rise faster than revenues. A four-year, non-recurring operating referendum provides GCSD with temporary financial stability while preserving educational opportunities, responsibly managing District finances and giving the Board and community time to plan for the future.

Four Years. Non-Recurring. Locally Accountable.

HILLTOPPER HIGHLIGHTS

School District of Glenwood City
850 Maple Street
Glenwood City, WI 54013



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PERMIT NO. #19