



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Thank you for your interest in learning more about Nicolet's operational referendum on the April 6, 2021 ballot. Click on your desired question to go to that answer in the document. We encourage you to submit any questions that you don't see answered below to our [google form](#).

1. [WHAT IS ON THE BALLOT?](#)
2. [WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REFERENDUMS?](#)
3. [WHY ARE REFERENDA SO COMMONLY USED AS A SCHOOL FUNDING TOOL?](#)
4. [WHY IS THIS REFERENDUM BEING PROPOSED NOW?](#)
5. [HOW DOES THE REFERENDUM IMPACT STUDENTS?](#)
6. [WHAT WOULD BE MY TAX IMPACT IF THE REFERENDUM WAS SUCCESSFUL?](#)
7. [WHAT IS MILL RATE AND HOW WOULD THIS REFERENDUM AFFECT IT? WHAT HAPPENS IF THE REFERENDUM FAILS?](#)
8. [HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL?](#)
9. [WHAT HAS NICOLET DONE TO CUT COSTS AND GENERATE PRIVATE SOURCES OF REVENUE?](#)
10. [WHAT WAS THE FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY?](#)
11. [WHAT FINANCIAL IMPACT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON THE DISTRICT?](#)
12. [IF THE OPERATING REFERENDUM IS APPROVED THIS SPRING, WILL WE NEED TO GO TO REFERENDUM AGAIN? IF SO, WHEN?](#)
13. [HOW DO THE OTHER AREA DISTRICTS WORK TOGETHER / SEPARATELY FOR OPERATIONAL PURPOSES?](#)
14. [IS NOW THE BEST TIME FOR AN OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM, IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC?](#)
15. [HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE REFERENDUM?](#)
16. [WHEN AND WHERE DO I VOTE?](#)

## WHAT IS ON THE BALLOT?

The Board unanimously approved an operation funding question for the April 6, 2021 ballot. The ballot question will read:

*Shall the Nicolet Unified High School District, Milwaukee and Ozaukee Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$3,900,000 per year for six years, beginning with the 2022-2023 school year and ending with the 2027-2028 school year, for non-recurring purposes consisting of maintaining and supporting instructional programs, services and class sizes?*



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

## WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF REFERENDA?

There are two types of referenda school districts use to obtain additional funding: Operational and Capital.

1. An **operational referendum** is used to support daily operations and help maintain current programs and services. The Nicolet community supported operational referendums in 2011 and 2016. A replacement of the expiring 2016 referendum is on the ballot April 6, 2021.
2. A **capital referendum** allows a district to issue debt (take out a loan) to pay for major facility projects. Much like a home mortgage, major facility projects are often financed over a longer period of time (often 20 years). There is not a capital referendum question on the April ballot.

## WHY ARE REFERENDA SO COMMONLY USED AS A SCHOOL FUNDING TOOL?

Funding for public schools in Wisconsin is both complex and restrictive. The two main sources of funding for public schools (state aid and property taxes) are subject to a state-imposed revenue cap.

Revenue cap increases are determined by the state government and are determined through the state biennial budget process. Increases to the revenue cap have not kept pace with inflation (cost of living).

Although progress was made in recent years to close this widening gap through per pupil aid, the increase does not close the gap. In short, this means that as expenses have risen, revenues have not kept up with increasing expenditures.

An operational referendum requests permission from voters to exceed the cap on property taxes, allowing districts to help offset the budget gap.

According to the [Wisconsin Policy Forum](#), 280 of the 422 (66.4%) public school districts in the state have passed at least one referendum (operational or capital) since 2016.

## WHY IS THIS REFERENDUM BEING PROPOSED NOW?

The proposed operational referendum is a continuation of the tradition of funding Nicolet High School to ensure the district could continue to maintain and support educational programs, retain critical teaching staff, and maintain small class sizes.

The District passed a non-recurring, five year referendum in 2011 that expired in 2015-16. The District then passed a non-recurring, six year referendum in 2016 that will expire after the 2021-22 school year.

Without a replacement referendum in place for the 2022-23 school year, the District will face significant immediate financial hardship.

The proposed referendum (6 years, \$3.9 million per year) will replace the existing referendum starting in the 2022-23 school year and will allow Nicolet to maintain small class sizes, offer a wide range of courses for students, and maintain Nicolet's status as a premier Wisconsin high school.



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

## HOW DOES THE REFERENDUM IMPACT STUDENTS?

Nicolet is ranked “significantly exceeds expectations” on the state DPI report card, has consistently been named a “Best High School” by US News and World Report and is currently ranked within the top 5% of high schools nationally.

We are proud to offer unique programs and services that make Nicolet a top school, in part, due to the support from previous operational referenda.

If the referendum passes, Nicolet students would continue to experience small class sizes taught by highly-qualified teachers in a variety of challenging, diverse subjects, receiving unparalleled support and opportunities for growth.

## WHAT WOULD BE MY TAX IMPACT IF THE REFERENDUM IS APPROVED?

Property taxpayers would pay an additional \$17 for every \$100,000 of their property value for the next six years. This impact is demonstrated in the chart below. This is limited to six years and would not take effect until the December 2022 tax bill.

PROPERTY TAX IMPACT CHART		
PROPERTY VALUE	AVERAGE ANNUAL IMPACT	AVERAGE MONTHLY IMPACT
\$100,000	\$17.00	\$1.42
\$250,000	\$42.50	\$3.54
\$500,000	\$85.00	\$7.08

*All financial data is based on assumptions made at the January 2021 Board Workshop.*

## WHAT IS MILL RATE AND HOW WOULD THIS REFERENDUM AFFECT IT?

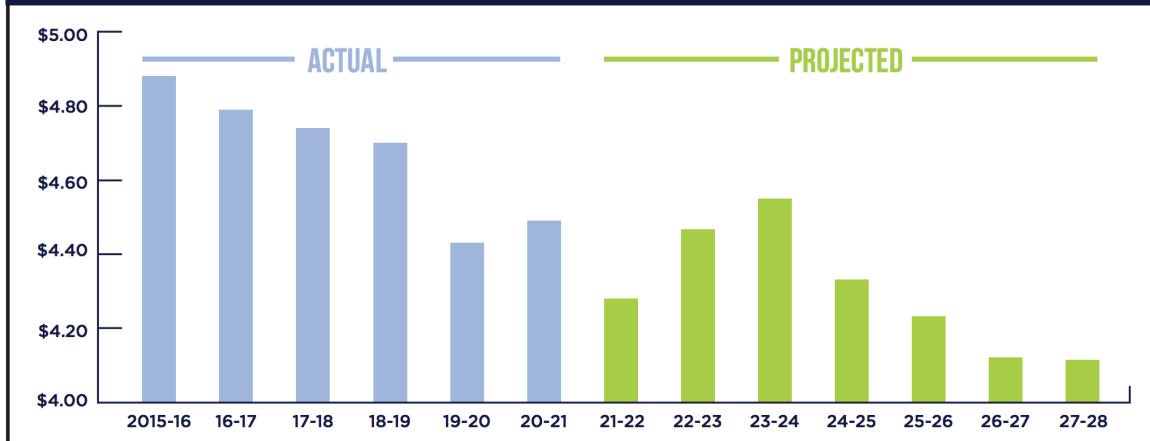
School district property taxes include levies for general operations, debt service, capital expansion and community services. Property values are equalized to reflect market value rather than local assessed value. The equalized levy rate is the total property tax levy divided by the current year equalized property value with tax incremental financing (TIF) values excluded. Levy rates are shown in "mills" or property tax dollars levied per \$1,000 of equalized property value.

Based on current assumptions for debt structure, enrollment and forecasted revenues, the District projects that the mill rate will decline in future years. Please see the graph on the top of the next page.



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

## MILL RATE ACTUAL & PROJECTED



*Mill Rate: Property tax dollars levied per \$1,000 of equalized (fair market) value.*

*All mill rate projections assume a 1.0% increase in property valuation across communities.*

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THE REFERENDUM FAILS?

Without a replacement referendum, Nicolet is facing an average budget shortfall of approximately \$3.9 million per year (or approximately 17.9% of the forecasted 2022-23 general operations budget) over the next six years. To achieve a balanced budget in 2022-23, Nicolet would need to implement an immediate reduction of \$3.4 million in expenses. Future years would require additional budget modifications.

The District would close the budget gap by making potential cuts such as:

- Elimination of some co-curricular and extracurricular programming for students
- Reducing the number of teachers and support staff, resulting in increased class sizes
- Reducing the variety and frequency of courses taught at Nicolet
- Reduced funding for instructional technology

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL?

Consistently ranked a “Best High School” by U.S. News and World Report, Nicolet High School is ranked within the top 5% of schools nationally. Nicolet is driven by its mission to accelerate the achievement of every student, in every classroom, every day.

Nicolet is known for its diverse and challenging academic courses, commitment to equity and student support, exceptional extracurriculars, highly qualified staff and, of course, the many achievements of its students.

To learn more about Nicolet High School:

- Read our [district fact sheet](#)
- Check out our [past newsletters](#)



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

- View our [annual report](#)
- Find us on social media
  - [Facebook](#)
  - [Twitter](#)
  - [Instagram](#)

## WHAT HAS NICOLET DONE TO CUT COSTS AND GENERATE PRIVATE SOURCES OF REVENUE?

While we are limited in our ability to generate funds due to state law, we have been creative in our efforts to offset costs.

Nicolet has sought and implemented cost savings in our current operational budget. The District has invested those savings in a number of ways, including prepaying future debt costs to provide flexibility with future budgets. Looking ahead to future years, we've made adjustments to our operational budget to hold cost increases to a minimum. However, the future cost of inflation still exceeds the current funding, as well as any savings we were able to carry forward to future budgets, which is why Nicolet is still seeking support through an operational referendum.

Financial support from the Nicolet High School Foundation has been substantial. The Foundation's fundraising has helped offset the cost of classroom learning materials, classroom technology and funded valuable classroom and school-wide presenters on a wide range of educational and societal topics.

## WHAT WAS THE FEEDBACK FROM THE COMMUNITY SURVEY?

In November of 2020, Nicolet conducted a community-wide survey, receiving feedback from more than 2,590 residents, to determine which level of operational support to pursue.

Four options were presented in the survey:

- Option 1: If voters do not support any referendum, the District would need to cut an average of \$3.9 million from the operating budget, beginning in the 2022-23 school year.
- Option 2: If voters support a referendum providing \$3.7 million per year, the District would need to reduce its budget by \$1.2 million over six years from current programs and services to balance the budget, beginning in the 2022-23 school year. *Option 2 would increase yearly taxes over current levels by approximately \$13 on each \$100,000 of home value for six years*
- **Option 3: If voters support a referendum providing \$3.9 million per year, the District could maintain current programs and services. *Option 3 would increase yearly taxes over current levels by approximately \$17 on each \$100,000 of home values for six years.***
- Option 4: If voters support a referendum providing \$4.1 million per year, the District could maintain current programs and services and contribute \$200,000 annually to fund maintenance projects on our campus. *Option 4 would increase yearly taxes over current levels by approximately \$22 on each \$100,000 of home value for six years.*



## NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

While there was strong support for Option 4 among parents and staff residents, Option 3 garnered the most support. According to survey respondents, 63% support Nicolet at or above the funding level requested on the April 6 ballot. For more information on the survey results, please [click here](#).

### **WHAT FINANCIAL IMPACT HAS COVID-19 HAD ON THE DISTRICT?**

While many Districts have seen sharp declines in enrollment as a result of COVID-19, Nicolet's enrollment has been consistent and is in line with what Nicolet expected before COVID-19.

The District has added costs related to technology, cleaning, supplies/equipment, and custodial staffing. However, the District has utilized both funds from the federal government via the CARES Act and existing resources to help mitigate the additional costs.

### **IF THE OPERATING REFERENDUM IS APPROVED THIS SPRING, WILL WE NEED TO GO TO REFERENDUM AGAIN? IF SO, WHEN?**

Like the 2011 and the 2016 referendums, the operational referendum on the ballot on April 6, 2021 is a non-recurring referendum, which means that the referendum expires. If passed, the 2021 referendum would begin during the 2022-2023 school year and expire at the end of the 2027-2028 school year.

Based on the November 2020 community survey, the District will continue to study capital improvements to determine the best next steps to address its facility needs. Addressing the significant needs that have been identified will likely require a future facility-related capital referendum at some point in the future.

### **HOW DO THE OTHER AREA DISTRICTS WORK TOGETHER / SEPARATELY FOR OPERATIONAL PURPOSES?**

Nicolet operates as an independent and comprehensive high school district for grades 9-12. Community input guided Glendale, Fox Point, Bayside and River Hills' decisions to operate kindergarten through eighth grade as local schools, while Nicolet serves as the high school for the area communities. The four area school districts work separately on operations, but interact and collaborate to find efficiencies in shared services and to align curriculum as much as possible.

### **IS NOW THE BEST TIME FOR AN OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM, IN THE MIDST OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC?**

Nicolet is extremely grateful for the support provided by our communities (River Hills, Fox Point, Bayside, Glendale) as we work together through a challenging school year. Administration realizes that it is hard to ask the community to continue its financial commitment to Nicolet during the COVID-19 pandemic, but this referendum is an investment in future students, and their opportunities, at Nicolet.

The timing of this new referendum (6 years, \$3.9 million per year) is being proposed to replace the existing referendum starting in the 2022-23 school year and will allow Nicolet to maintain small class sizes, offer a wide range of courses/options for students, and maintain our status as a premier Wisconsin high school.



# NICOLET HIGH SCHOOL OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM 2021

Without a replacement referendum in place for the 2022-23 school year, the District will face significant financial hardship beginning with the 2022-23 school year, which would immediately result in larger class sizes, discontinuation of programming, layoffs, and more.

## HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE REFERENDUM?

Visit the operational referendum page on the [Nicolet website](#). There will also be four virtual information sessions open to the community at the following times:

- February 24 from 8:00 - 9:00 a.m. or 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
  - [Click here](#) to join the Zoom meeting on February 24 at 8:00 a.m.
  - [Click here](#) to join the Zoom meeting on February 24 at 6:00 p.m.
- March 3 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. or 6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
  - [Click here](#) to join the Zoom meeting on March 3 at 8:00 a.m.
  - [Click here](#) to join the Zoom meeting on March 3 at 6:00 p.m.

## WHEN AND WHERE DO I VOTE?

**Election Day is April 6, 2021 between 7 a.m. – 8 p.m.**

**Request an absentee ballot** if you are already registered to vote. You must request the ballot no later than April 1, 2021 @ 5:00 p.m. and return it to the municipal clerk no later than 8 p.m. on Election Day. You must provide a photo ID with your absentee ballot request.

Visit <https://myvote.wi.gov> register to vote, find your polling location, request an absentee ballot (available March 16!) and more.