

# Community Survey

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ATHENS



All survey responses must be submitted online or postmarked by July 12th!

Dear Community Members and Parents:

The School District of Athens administration has spent the past several months **gathering information on our annual operation budget as well as the needs and wants for our school facilities**. A facility assessment that looked at the condition of both of our schools was completed in early 2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic paused any immediate effort to address the identified needs. The acquisition of Maple Grove Charter School this spring provides a new educational choice for our students, and allows the District to look critically at our existing school buildings and how we can improve operating efficiencies.

The District has also been reviewing the facility assessment findings to determine the best way to address the District's facility needs. A significant investment is needed to update building systems and improve educational adequacy at the elementary school. Updates are needed to the career and technical education classrooms (shop space), fitness center (weight room), and track at the middle/high school. In addition, there is a desire to add a wrestling/multi-purpose room and concessions area. Finally, a new roof and emergency generator are needed at Maple Grove Charter School. **If the public chooses to address these needs, the primary way to obtain funding is through a capital referendum.**

The District has also been looking carefully at our operating budget. District administration has identified an **estimated operating deficit of \$900,000 beginning in the 2022-23 school year and growing to \$1.67 million in the years that follow**. To balance the budget, **the school board will either need to make reductions to staff and programs or ask voters to provide needed funding through an operational referendum. If the district is unable to balance the budget they will be forced to look at ceasing to exist or consolidating with one or more neighboring school districts.**

As the planning process continues, **the school board is exploring the possibility of asking Athens' voters to support one or more referendum questions to address these challenges**. This survey will allow all residents to provide their input on the proposed plans. Please take a few minutes, to complete this important survey!

Sincerely,  
Athens School Board



## Complete this survey online or by paper!



- A ONLINE**  
Scan the QR code to the right with your phone camera or visit the website link [bit.ly/athensCommunitySurvey](https://bit.ly/athensCommunitySurvey) to complete the survey online.
- B PAPER SURVEY**  
Download and print the survey at [athens1.org](https://athens1.org).  
Once complete, drop off or mail to: School District of Athens, 601 West Limits Road, PO Box F, Athens, WI 54411.
- C SENT TO YOU**  
Call **715-257-7511** to have a survey mailed to you. Once complete, drop off or mail to:  
School District of Athens, 601 West Limits Road, PO Box F, Athens, WI 54411.



## ABOUT YOU

### 1 What is your age?

- 18-25     26-35     36-45     46-55     56-64     65 and older

### 2 Do you live in the School District of Athens?

- Yes     No     Unsure

### 3 In which municipality do you reside?

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Village of Athens | <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Bern     | <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Johnson   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Hamburg   | <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Halsey   | <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Rietbrock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Rib Falls | <input type="checkbox"/> Town of Goodrich | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |

### 4 Please select the options that describe you. Check all that apply.

- I work for the School District of Athens
- I have children that attend school in the School District of Athens
- I own a home in the School District of Athens
- I rent in the School District of Athens
- I own residential property within the School District of Athens, in addition to where I live
- I own commercial property in the School District of Athens
- I own agricultural land in the School District of Athens
- None of the above



## OPERATIONAL FUNDING CHALLENGE

The District is facing a **\$900,000 deficit beginning next school year that will grow to \$1.67 million in future years.**



### STATE FUNDING FORMULA

School districts get much of their funding from the State. State funding is calculated based on a set dollar amount per student. Unfortunately, **this formula that has not kept pace with inflation nor the cost of current curriculum and facility needs.** In addition, the State has implemented new mandates, many of which require additional staffing, but do not have funding attached. As a result, the District expenditures are surpassing revenues.



### LOW STUDENT TO STAFF RATIO

The majority of a school district's budget is spent on staff. To-date the District has made a commitment to a **low student-teacher ratio** as part of the personalized learning experience. The District is proud of the small class approach and the academic benefits it provides but acknowledges that it requires employing more teachers.



### MAPLE GROVE CHARTER SCHOOL

The District **purchased Maple Grove Charter School in the town of Hamburg** this past school year. This kindergarten through 5th grade school integrates agriculture and environmental themes into all subject areas. The school gives parents in the District another educational option for their children and allows the District to gain enrollment through the Wisconsin Open Enrollment Program from students who live in neighboring districts that are seeking an agriculture and environmental-based educational approach. Additional enrollment results in greater revenue for the District to support programs and services for all students.

## STEPS TO ADDRESS OPERATING BUDGET

The District has already taken the following actions in an attempt to reduce operating costs:

- Restructuring of personnel for maximum efficiency including:
  - Certified staff
  - Support staff
  - Encore staff
  - Coaches
- Taking inventory of all existing resources
- Exploring resource and service sharing
- Deferring District athletic initiatives
- Applying for grants



## OPTIONS TO BALANCE THE OPERATING BUDGET

The following options have been identified to balance the budget:



### **OPTION 1: Make Reductions to Staff, Programs, and Services**

The District could do one or more of the following to balance the budget:

- Reduce staff (*Increase the number of students to staff/bigger class size*)
- Reduce District department and program budgets
- Reduce building budgets
- Reduce or eliminate academic programs
- Reduce or eliminate co-curricular programs (*Athletics, fine arts, clubs*)

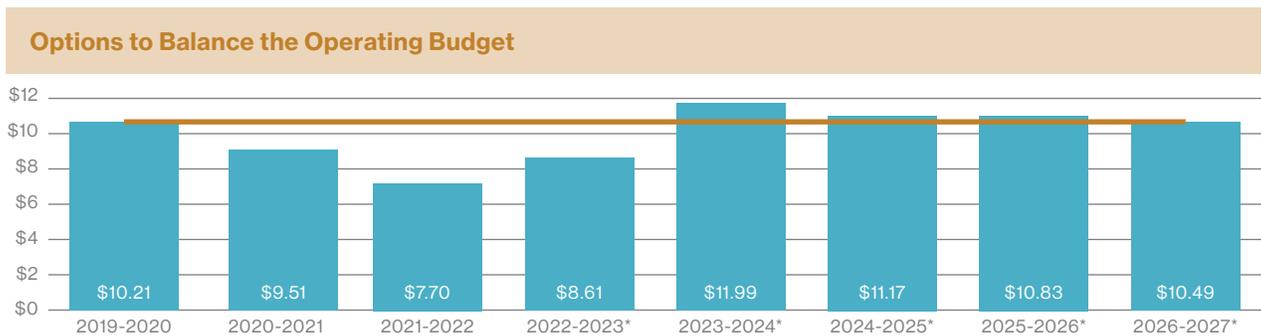
There are concerns that these reductions **will impact our District's ability to provide the best learning experiences for our students**. Reducing programs and opportunities also **decreases the likelihood that people will choose the District** when deciding where to move or send their child to school.



### **OPTION 2: Hold an Operational Referendum**

The **District can ask voters to support an operating referendum**. This would allow the District to levy funds to support the day-to-day operations of the District. The District would ask for the needed \$900,000 in 2022-23 and then \$1.67 million in the following years. This would result in a tax increase of \$0.91 per \$1,000 of equalized property value over the **2021-22 school tax mill rate of \$7.70 for the 2022-23 year and a maximum tax increase of \$4.29 per \$1,000 of equalized property value over the 2021-22 school tax mill rate of \$7.70 for years 2023-24 and beyond**.

It is important to note that the District experienced an increase in property valuation in 2022 when it acquired the Maple Grove Charter School in the town of Hamburg. As a result, the school tax mill rate declined. The maximum impact over the District's \$10.21 mill rate would be \$1.78.



### **OPTION 3: Cease Operations or Consolidate with One or More School Districts**

The District could shut down, forcing the State to assign students to other school districts or consolidate (join) another neighboring district. It is important to note that when a property is assigned to a new school district, the school tax mill rate of that new district is assessed on the property.



## OPTIONS TO BALANCE THE OPERATING BUDGET

The school board would like to know how you would like the budget deficit addressed.

**5** How should the school board address the budget deficit? Check all that apply.

- Reduce staff *(This will likely increase class size and/or eliminate courses)*
- Reduce District department and program budgets
- Reduce building budgets
- Reduce or eliminate programs academic programs
- Reduce or eliminate co-curricular programs *(Athletics, fine arts, clubs)*
- Ask voters to support an operational referendum *(This will increase the school tax mill rate an average of \$4.29 per \$1,000 equalized property value over the 2021-2022 level.)*
- Cease operations or consolidate with one or more school districts
- Other (please explain): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6** How likely are you to support an operating referendum to address the District's operating deficit as described above? *Representing an average tax increase of \$429 for every \$100,000 of property over the 2021-22 level.*

- Extremely likely
- Likely
- Unlikely
- Extremely unlikely
- Unsure

**Feedback + Comments**

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## FACILITY PLANNING BACKGROUND

Performance Services completed a Facilities Assessment of both schools in April of 2020 and updated it in May of 2022. The review evaluated each school's condition and identified infrastructure and building system needs as well as educational and site deficiencies that need to be remedied. The assessment determined that **a significant investment to address aging infrastructure and building systems is needed at the elementary school**. The study also identified that updates at the middle/high school were needed to the **career and technical education (shop) space, fitness/weight room, and track**. Finally, the middle/high school **lacks a concessions area and wrestling/multi-purpose space** that could be utilized by both the school and community.

**If the public chooses to address these needs, the primary way to obtain funding is through a capital referendum.**

### ATHENS ELEMENTARY

**Challenge: The facility assessment identified approximately \$16.9 million in updates needed at the elementary school including:**

- Replacement of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system
- Update restroom to meet Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements
- Replacement of roof which is beyond service life
- Replacement of finishes due to age and wear including floors, ceilings, lights, and cabinetry
- Addition of bathrooms for 4-year-old kindergarten and kindergarten
- Update playground equipment to meet current ADA and safety requirements
- Additional classroom and dedicated gym space

Even with these improvements, **there will still be many educational inadequacies** as the classrooms are undersized and lack the flexibility for hands-on, project-based learning and small group activities. Unfortunately, interior remodeling options are extremely limited due to the school's floorplan and the location of load bearing walls. In addition, it is not possible to expand the school as the site is small and landlocked. Given the **operational funding challenges** the District is experiencing (explained on page 3), the District needs to **consider how to most efficiently staff and operate its buildings** to ensure the greatest available funding for programs and services for students.

### **Solution: Build an Elementary Wing onto the Middle/High School**

Based on the size of the investment needed at the elementary school and the need to improve operational efficiencies, the District believes **building an elementary wing on the middle/high school and consolidating operations to one building is the most fiscally responsible solution** there will be one less building to heat, clean, and operate. In addition, staff and resources can be more easily shared.

**The cost of a new elementary wing is estimated at \$20.1 million.**

### **What will happen to the existing elementary school?**

If the elementary school is moved to a newly built wing at the middle/high school, the existing elementary school would be vacant. This opens up the possibility of the site to be sold and used for youth and community programming including, childcare, youth sports, and programming for senior citizens. If the building was used for this purpose, the District could explore a gym usage agreement for the District's athletic programs.

**7 Based on the above information, do you agree with the District's plan to build an elementary wing onto the middle/high school?**

Yes

No

Unsure



**UPDATES AT MAPLE GROVE CHARTER SCHOOL**

The assessment determined that Maple Grove Charter School does not need any significant investments at this time. However, the school lacks a generator to provide back-up electricity if needed. The roof is also in need of replacement. **A capital referendum could include the purchase and installation of a generator and replacement of the roof at an estimated cost of \$365,000.**

**8** Based on the above information, would you support a capital referendum that included the purchase and installation of a generator and replacement of the roof at Maple Grove Charter School?

Yes
  No
  Unsure

**UPDATES AT THE MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL**

The District has identified five additional projects totaling \$5.35 million to better serve students and the Athens community. The capital referendum could be expanded to include one or more of the following projects:

**9** What priority would you put on each of these projects? Please check your response in the appropriate box.

**Heating, Ventilation, and Cooling System Upgrades and Equipment Replacement**  High  
 Due to the age of the heating, ventilation, and cooling system, there is a need to make upgrades to the system and replace equipment that is failing. This will not only improve air quality, but also increase energy efficiency.  Medium  
*Estimated Cost: \$1.1 million*  Low

**Consumer Science Classroom/Lab Renovation**  High  
 There is a growing demand for careers in the hospitality field. Therefore, there is a need to update the consumer science classroom into a culinary lab space to better align with course offerings that are preparing students for the workforce.  Medium  
*Estimated Cost: \$250,000*  Low

**Multi-Purpose Large Group/Gym/Wrestling Addition**  High  
 There is a need for large group multi-purpose space in the District. This space will be designed to meet the needs of the wrestling program as well as flexible gym space for other athletic and community programs.  Medium  
*Estimated Cost: \$1.7 million*  Low

**Update and Expand the Fitness Center/Weight Room**  High  
 The current fitness and weight room is too small to meet the needs of our physical education classes and the athletic teams. An expanded space would also allow for better community access.  Medium  
*Estimated Cost: \$1.2 million*  Low

**Rebuild the Track**  High  
 The track's current condition does not allow the District to host track meets.  Medium  
 The track needs to be rebuilt, including addressing water run-off.  Low  
*Estimated Cost: \$1.1 million*

**Feedback + Comments**

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## REFERENDUM SUPPORT

**The District needs to address the operating funding deficit to continue to exist in its current state.** The chart below shows the estimated tax mill rates for a recurring operating referendum with a \$900,000 increase in **2022-23 school year and a \$1.67 million in the years that follow** (■) and four proposed capital referendum amounts (■).



The following table shows the tax impact for each capital referendum amount.

Tax increase over 2021-22 taxes per \$100,000 of property value	\$18 M Capital Referendum	\$21 M Capital Referendum	\$24 M Capital Referendum	\$27 M Capital Referendum
	\$417	\$487	\$557	\$627

**10** How much of a tax increase would you support through an operating and capital referendum, to meet the District's operating and facility needs? *Tax impacts were calculated by Robert W. Baird & Co. Assumptions: Issuing 21-year bonds with interest rates of 4.75%-5.00%. Impacts include all principal and interest payments.*

- I would support the operating referendum and a \$27 million capital referendum
- I would support the operating referendum and a \$24 million capital referendum
- I would support the operating referendum and a \$21 million capital referendum
- I would support the operating referendum and a \$18 million capital referendum
- I would support a smaller referendum
- I would support the operating referendum only
- I would not support any referendum
- I'm not sure/need more information

Feedback + Comments

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**Once complete, drop off or mail to: School District of Athens, 601 West Limits Road, PO Box F, Athens, WI 54411.**