



## BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Arlene Silveira, President    Lucy Mathiak, Vice President    Beth Moss, Clerk    Johnny Winston, Jr., Treasurer    Maya Cole, Member    Ed Hughes, Member    Marjorie Passman, Member

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The Board of Education voted unanimously to go to referendum to support Madison's public schools. We are committed to this referendum because we believe it will provide resources desperately needed in our schools. We are also very aware of the economic environment and worked hard to develop a plan that will minimize the referendum's impact on property taxes.

If passed, the referendum will permanently increase the property tax support base for our schools by a total of \$13 million over three years. For owners of a \$250,000 home, that is likely to translate to an additional \$91.50 in property taxes by the third year. The plan also includes financial strategies that make the most of our resources and reduce the amounts we are asking from taxpayers.

As board members, we would rather be spending our time working on strategies for increased student achievement than explaining the need for a referendum. But we do not have that choice now.

The problem is that we, like all school districts in Wisconsin, are squeezed from both sides by the school funding system enshrined in state law. State law requires a district to offer a pay package for professional staff with an increase of at least 3.8% per year in order to avoid arbitration for economic reasons, a process that has not been kind to school districts. This is the Qualified Economic Offer or QEO.

At the same time, state law limits the amount by which a district's overall spending can increase without a referendum to an amount that is significantly less than the increase that the QEO requires. This produces the annual budget gap.

If you think this law doesn't make much sense, you'd be right. It was enacted in 1993 in an effort to control school budgets. Fat has been cut from Wisconsin school budgets; Madison alone has cut over \$60 million. Further reductions will compel cuts in core programs at a time when quality K-12 education is vital to our state's economy and our graduates' ability to compete in a global marketplace.

Next year we face an \$8 million budget gap even though our expenditures will rise less than the rate of inflation. The referendum asks for \$5 million in additional spending authority for the year. We will redeploy funds and find efficiencies to make up the \$3 million difference between the referendum amount and the budget gap. We are also seeking an additional \$4 million in spending authority for each of the following two years to address those years' budget gaps.

We recognize the need to control costs. The Board is committed to seeking out efficiencies that will least affect the quality of the education we provide.

Passage of the referendum will not enable us to add new programs or restore programs that were cut over the past five years. A successful referendum will provide us three years to focus on ways to improve our schools without the constant specter of compulsory budget slashing.

Beginning in early 2009, we'll undertake a long-range planning process with our new superintendent, Dan Nerad. This process will include strong community input. This will follow with an assessment and review of district staffing and programs, and an examination of whether our resources are best allocated to critical areas of need.

As Board members, we are committed to working together, with each other and with the community. We would like the chance to see how much we can accomplish, and we expect to be held accountable for our results.

At its heart, the referendum asks for necessary funding to uphold our community standard of education - a goal that is essential to vital neighborhoods and property values, an educated workforce and, most important, a strong start for the children and youth who hold our future in their hands.

Arlene Silveira, Lucy Mathiak, Johnny Winston Jr., Beth Moss, Maya Cole, Ed Hughes, Marj Passman