

Your guide to the November TRF school referendum

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Two weeks ago, Thief River Falls Public Schools held a community forum to give residents a chance to learn more about the upcoming referendum from myself and members of the school board. We had a great discussion, and I am encouraged by the engagement and enthusiasm shown by our community for our students' education.

Here, I'd like to answer some of the most common questions I received, in the hope that they are helpful to others in our community. It is our district's goal to ensure everyone has the resources to make a well-informed vote on Election Day.

Why is the Thief River Falls School District

holding a referendum?

Today, our District faces several challenges that threaten to disrupt our ability to maintain our high standards for student education. Over the past 15 years, the formula that Minnesota uses to determine funding has not kept up with inflation. This has not only made long-term investments in education difficult, it has challenged our district's ability to support our existing programming and services. Over the past six years, our district has cut its spending by nearly \$2.7 million in response to this challenge. Still, we face a \$3.3 million deficit by the 2026-2027 school year. While budget cuts are an efficient way to balance the budget, they often require our district to let go of staff members or cut student services to protect basic programming.

How would the district's plan protect student programming?

Our district is asking voters to consider three ballot questions that would authorize new levies to help stabilize the district's budget, maintain our small class sizes, and help recruit and retain quality staff.

Question One seeks to authorize a new operating levy of \$750 per pupil. This funding would be used to temporarily prevent budget cuts, retain quality staff, and invest in school security, mental health services, and career and technical education programming. Question Two would authorize a capital projects levy of \$800,000 for a seven-year term to complete funding for the district's 1:1 technology plan, and help alleviate pressure on our district's general fund. Question Three would

support the same goals as Question One with an additional operating levy of \$407 per pupil. This would add an additional two to three years of financial stability to our district's budget.

Would the proposed levies be permanent?

No. If approved, the levies proposed by questions One and Three would remain in place for a 10-year period, while the capital projects levy would expire after seven years.

What does the district's 1:1 technology plan include and how would the referendum impact it?

For roughly a decade, our school district has provided a device to every student to enhance learning, prepare them for a modern workplace, and allow them to collaborate in real-time with their peers and teachers

beyond the classroom. Question Two of the referendum would complete funding for our 1:1 technology plan, ensuring that all students continue to have access to reliable technology.

How will the referendum affect my taxes?

If any of the referendum questions are approved, the investment(s) will be supported by a property tax increase on properties owned within our district. If approved, a \$150,000 home would see an estimated property tax increase of \$15.06 for Question One, \$4.66 for Question Two, and \$8.18 per month for Question Three, for a total of \$27.90 per month starting in 2024. An easy-to-use tax calculator can be found at PlanForOurProwlers.org to calculate your exact tax impact.

How can I vote?

Residents will have the opportunity to make their voices heard on or before Tuesday, Nov. 7. Residents can vote early via absentee ballot or in person at the Pennington County Auditor's office, or in person on Election Day. To learn more about voting, visit PlanForOurProwlers.org/vote.

For answers to more frequently asked questions, I strongly encourage everyone to visit PlanForOurProwlers.org/FAQ.

Thank you for your engagement throughout this process. It is inspiring to see our community members care so deeply about the future of our district. I am always available to answer more questions via email at chris.mills@myprowler.org.