

## School board member outlines referendum

Over the next few weeks, Brown County Schools will be answering questions residents may have about the referendum ballot question in May. If you have a question you'd like us to answer, please email me as a school board member at [amoliver@browncountyschools.com](mailto:amoliver@browncountyschools.com).



**Amy Huffman Oliver** Guest columnist

What is a referendum? A referendum is a public question that is put on a ballot asking voters to approve an additional property tax levy. The funds are collected with your property tax bill and set aside to fund a specific school purpose. Schools can ask for funding for a variety of needs: capital projects, school safety, technology improvements, or other operating needs such as staff salary and benefits.

Do we have a referendum in place now?

No. In 2016, Brown County Schools approved a referendum for eight pennies per \$100 of assessed property value. It called for seven pennies to go towards staff salary and benefits and one penny to the Career Resource Center. Brown County Schools asked for a renewal of that funding with an extra four pennies in November of 2022 and it failed by 338 votes. That referendum ended in December of 2023 so there is no referendum in place for calendar year 2024.

What is Brown County Schools asking for in this referendum?

On May 7, 2024, Brown County Schools is asking voters to approve a referendum levy for ten pennies per \$100 of assessed value. It would be effective for eight years, from 2025 through 2032. The schools are requesting nine pennies for staff salary and benefits and one penny for the Career Resource Center.

What are the specifics of the referendum plan?

Brown County Schools estimate that the referendum would collect approximately \$1,879,000 per year. That amount can change based upon the assessed value of property in the county each year, but this is the number we are using as an estimate.

The proposal would provide a \$5,000 raise for each certified teacher and a 5% increase for each staff member to help bring salaries in line with surrounding districts along with additional funds to sustain current and future increases to base salaries. It would also allow hiring additional teachers in the areas of:

- ■ Special Education;
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- Career and Technical Education (Expansion of Eagle Manufacturing and potential
- ■ Construction);
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- Civic Arts (Theater and Art); and
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- Work-Based Learning The referendum would also provide \$188,000 annually to the Career Resource Center to support adult educational programming, staff salaries, and other operational costs not covered by grants and student fees.

Why does Brown County School need referendum funding to pay its teachers?

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in their decision-making as they need to provide for their own families. That salary gap continues

Teacher pay is the number one cost of any school system.

Offering competitive pay and benefits is not a luxury, but a necessity to attract and keep talented teachers. Brown County kids deserve the “best-of-the-best” teachers. Brown County Schools needs to be able to pay our teachers and staff competitively with the surrounding school systems and we cannot do that with the funds provided by the state.

Most of the funding requested (nine of the proposed ten pennies) through the proposed referendum would go to teacher and staff salaries and benefits, just like the prior referendum. We are asking for only a two-penny increase to cover inflation between 2016 and 2032.

As a concrete example of the inequities in teacher salaries between school districts, a new teacher with a bachelor’s degree and zero years of experience will be paid annually between \$750 more in Edinburgh Schools and \$15,500 more in Monroe County Schools than in Brown County Schools to perform the same job.

Other nearby school districts offer new teachers a salary \$3-7,000 more than we can currently offer.

When teachers are choosing whether to start or continue a career in teaching in Brown County, this salary gap makes a difference

throughout a teacher’s career and when our experienced teachers reluctantly left the district for higher pay over the past two years, they are being offered as much as \$10-20,000 more per year in a neighboring district for the same job duties.

With the referendum funds we graciously received from property taxpayers from 2016 and 2023, Brown County Schools was able to increase teacher pay and benefits with a special emphasis on teachers who had been with the district through leaner times. Without the approval of referendum funding in 2024, we will continue to lose our valued teachers and the programming they can provide because they cannot afford to live and work in our county.

How do other schools offer more in salaries than Brown County Schools?

Edinburgh, Bartholomew County, and Beech Grove Schools all have referenda in place that supplement state funding and property taxes.

Monroe County passed two separate referenda in 2022 and 2023.