

## School trustee answers referendum questions

On May 7, 2024, voters will be asked to vote on a property tax referendum to support Brown County Schools.

Just like Brown County families, schools have faced higher prices since our last referendum in 2016. We need to pay for essentials for our school buildings – from the big things, like heating and electricity, to the little things, like copier paper and toilet paper.

The cost to provide highquality education and a safe learning environment for our students has increased since

### Amy Huffman Oliver

Guest columnist

the last referendum approval in 2016, including the cost to pay competitive salaries and benefits for our teachers and staff.

This week, we are continuing our series of questions and answers about the referendum. Please reach out to me or any other member of the school board with specific questions.

My email is [amoliver@browncountyschools.com](mailto:amoliver@browncountyschools.com). What is the proposed spending plan for the referendum?

Our current estimate of the amount of funding this referendum would provide for our schools is \$1,879,051 per year. The amount the schools will receive will vary each year and is not guaranteed due to several factors including changes in property assessment values and law changes by the General Assembly.

Specific uses for referendum dollars:

- ■ Teacher and staff salaries, benefits and programming \$1,691,146 – each year
- ■ Career Resource Center Adult Education Support \$187,905 – each year



- ■ Specifically, Brown County Schools will be able to do the following with referendum funds:
  - ■ Offer competitive wages and benefits for prospective teachers and staff to hire and keep the best of the best for Brown County students (this includes certified teachers, support staff, and transportation staff);
  - ■ Ensure innovative programming and support smaller class sizes;
  - ■ Reinstate Career and Technical Education courses, such as construction, trades, manufacturing, etc. and hire a full-time Work Based Learning Coordinator
  - ■ Reinstate full-time theater and drama teacher at Brown County High School and expand art, band and/or choir staff; and
  - ■ Increase special education and mental health support across the entire district.

**REFERENDUM from page A4 to A5**

Why isn't the funding we receive from the state enough to meet our needs?

There is a complex formula that the state uses to determine how much the state allocates to our school system based on student enrollment numbers. That funding was never intended to cover all the costs a school may have. Starting in 2009, the legislature strictly limited how schools could use those funds.

State dollars can only go toward expenses directly related to teaching staff and students.

State dollars cannot fund wages for custodians, front desk and administrative staff, principals, school lunch staff, health assistants, substitute teachers, and bus drivers who keep our schools running smoothly and safely every day.

State dollars cannot be used for operational expenses such as general building maintenance, utilities, or internet access.

A portion of the referendum funding would go towards increasing the wages of our school support staff who do the important work of transporting, feeding, and nurturing our children every day.

How does Brown County's property tax rate compare to other counties?

Brown Countians already pay a significantly smaller portion of their property taxes to schools than in neighboring school

systems. Residents in Edinburgh, Martinsville, Seymour, Bartholomew County, and Monroe County school districts all pay higher property taxes.

Another factor that reduces our school funding is that around 30% of Brown County's 61,458 acres of land are tax-exempt as confirmed last week from the Brown County Assessor's Office. That means the government owners of thousands of acres of Brown County property in the state park and national forest pay no taxes to support our schools.

Even if the referendum passes, Brown County Schools will continue to receive much less money than our neighboring school systems. Our school system does an exceptional job of preparing our students for the Monday morning after graduation with fewer dollars than our nearest school systems, but we need more help from our residents through the passing of a referendum so that young families will be attracted and stay Brown County because of the high-quality of our schools.

*Amy Huffman Oliver is a member of the board of trustees for the Brown County Schools. She plans to write updates for the community on the school system.*