

School board votes to put referendum on ballot

The Brown County School Board voted unanimously to place a referendum question on the May 7, primary ballot at its meeting last week.

The ballot question is asking voters to approve 10 cents per \$100 of assessed property value go to Brown County Schools. The amount is two cents more than the referendum approved by voters in 2016 which ended in December of 2023.

The board voted that nine of the 10 cents collected would go toward “teacher and staff salaries, benefits and programs.” The remaining one cent is designated to go toward adult education services at the Career Resource Center (CRC) which is the same amount it received in the past. If the referendum passes in May, those funds would become available to the school corporation after the spring 2025 property tax payments and continue through 2032. The exact

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Guest columnist

amount each property owner would pay under the initiative differs according to the property’s assessed value each year and whether it is personal or business property. A calculator will soon be available on the school’s website that calculates the exact cost each property owner would pay if the proposed rate passes in May.

After a referendum initiative that asked for 12 cents failed in the November 2022 election by 333 votes, the school corporation reduced staff and programming for calendar years 2023 and 2024 in anticipation of a loss of approximately \$1.2 million per year. Those cuts remain in place until another referendum is passed.

“Over the past 15 months, we confirmed that the residents of Brown County love and appreciate our teachers and want to ensure that our children have the highest quality teachers and staff that will prepare them to be college-and-careerready on the Monday after high school graduation,” according to Emily Tracy, the district’s superintendent.

Last fall, to learn more about whether residents would support a referendum with a smaller price tag, the board mailed a survey to every household in the county asking for public input. The survey had a high response rate and found residents overwhelmingly support a



To be eligible to put a referendum question on the ballot for May of 2024, Brown County Schools must show that it cannot “carry out its public educational duty” without additional funding and submit 500 certified voter and/or property owner signatures to the Clerk’s Office. The corporation surpassed the number of signatures needed and certified more than 650 signatures, again showing strong support from the community to move forward.

“Between now and May 7, we will be providing the facts and figures that show the successes of the prior referendum and why these dollars are needed to keep and retain the best of the best teachers and staff for Brown County kids into the future,” Tracy added.

“Brown County kids are worth it because that’s truly at the heart of our mission.

“People ask me every day: “How can I help you pass a new referendum?” Tracy said. “My answer is to join us over the next three months to get the word out about how world-class opportunities and small school relationships have a lifelong impact on Brown County kids far into adulthood.”

Tracy suggests residents share stories with friends and neighbors about how a favorite Brown County teacher, bus driver, cafeteria worker or paraprofessional changed a child’s life for the better and how we have the chance in May to pay it forward to the next generation of students.

Planning meetings are being held every Monday at 4 p.m. at the Barn Burner on South Jefferson Street and those who are interested in helping pass the referendum are invited to come.

Amy Oliver Huffman 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.

referendum of 10 cents. The board took action only after a close review of the results of that survey, informal comments from the public and staff along with months of budget forecasting by its financial advisors.

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