

2023 Update on School Referenda in Indiana

A look at November 2023 election results and all-time results since 2008

Seven Indiana school corporations secured approval at the November 2023 election to raise nearly \$630 million through property taxes over the next eight years, with a passage rate of 58% of referenda on the ballots.

This surpasses the 2021 and 2022 general elections when 50% of school referenda prevailed.

Out of the 12 school referenda pitched to voters in November 2023, seven were approved – six operating and one safety. Voters defeated three operating referenda, one safety referendum, and one capital referendum.

58% of School Referenda Passed

School Referenda Results, November 2023

Type	Win	Lose	Total	Pass
Operating	6	3	9	67%
Capital	0	1	1	0%
Safety	1	1	2	50%
All	7	5	12	58%

Notably, the 67% pass rate for school operating referenda indicates a positive trend, with taxpayers endorsing two-thirds of operating referenda in consecutive elections for the first time in three years.

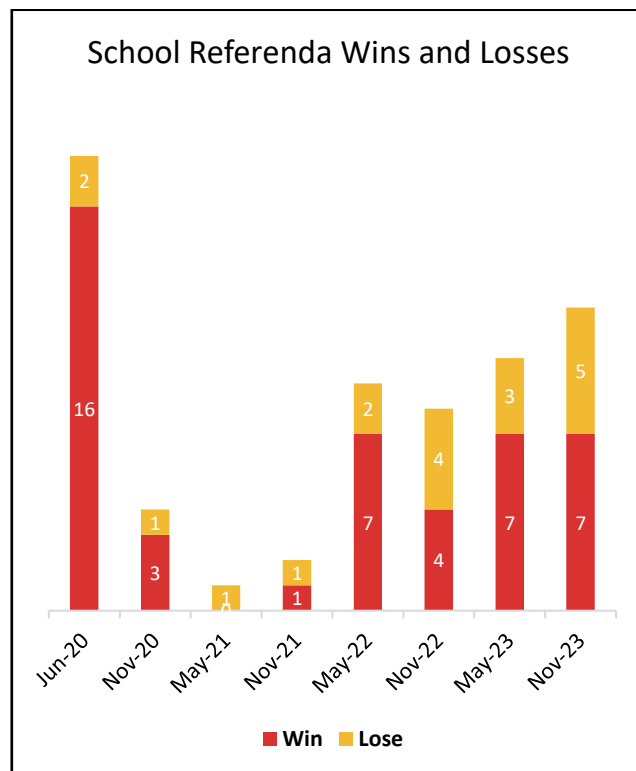
However, challenges persist for capital referenda, as evidenced by the defeat of the lone capital referendum at stake. Only two out of six capital referenda have passed over the past seven election cycles.

Additionally, first-time school corporations continue to face setbacks, having now gone 0 for 7 in referenda attempts over the past three elections.

Some regions fared better than others at the ballot box on November 7.

Hamilton County has now won 21 consecutive school funding referenda, after the success of all three of its school referenda on the ballots.

Conversely, all four Lake County referenda encountered defeat, with Lake County school corporations having now lost six of their past seven referenda requests.



Overall, referendum proposals passed in Carmel, Fishers, Sheridan, Bloomington, West Lafayette, Fort Wayne, and Northeast Dubois and were defeated in Hammond, Whiting, Lake Station, and Bluffton-Harrison.

The 12 measures proposed by 11 communities covered teacher pay, transportation, mental health services, pre-kindergarten, weapons detection systems, and beyond.

Hamilton Southeastern Schools

With approval from 70% of voters, the Hamilton Southeastern Schools will reimpose the existing tax levy, now at a reduced rate of \$0.1995 per \$100 of assessed value, supporting 126 full-time teaching positions, competitive compensation packages for

1,400 teachers, and funding for 14 additional school resource officers.



Sheridan Community Schools

In the Sheridan Community Schools, which includes a portion of Boone County, 81% of voters reaffirmed the referendum tax rate of 25¢ per \$100 of assessed valuation to maintain funding for employee compensation, student programs, and operational expenses.

At approximately \$1.2 million per year, referendum revenue constitutes about 7% of the school corporation's annual budget.

West Lafayette Community School Corporation

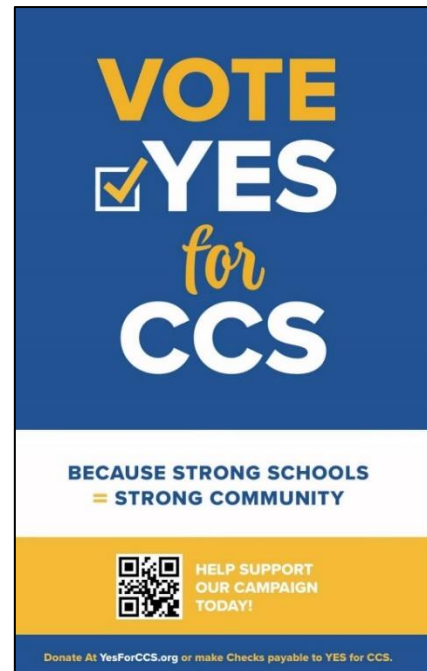
The Building on Excellence plan passed resoundingly, as 80.5% voted in favor of re-imposing the current 37¢ operating referendum tax that brings in about \$4.5 million annually for employee compensation and \$2.5 million annually for custodial, maintenance, and transportation-related contracted services. The community has been paying the referendum tax since 2011. Referendum revenue accounts for about 18% of the district's budget, the equivalent of 70 staff positions.

"We are very grateful for the continued support of our community for our students and schools," said West Lafayette School Board President Rachel Witt. "We understand that not everyone voted yes and pledge to continue to be good and transparent

financial stewards with focus upon our students as we move forward with our plans for the levy."

Carmel Clay Schools

An eight-year extension of the existing 19¢ tax levy gained the approval of 68% of voters in the Carmel Clay Schools. The referendum generates \$24 million per year and funds around 1 in 5 teachers.



Fort Wayne Community Schools

The state's largest school corporation by enrollment became the second, after Carmel four years ago, to pass a referendum dedicated to enhancing safety and security.

With the agreement of 53% of voters, the SAFER FWCS referendum will introduce a 10¢ tax increase, generating \$12 million annually for physical security, well-being supports, and around 90 staff positions.

About \$2 million (29%) will be designated for Open Gate weapons detection systems for middle and high schools, exterior door lockout systems, intrusion alarms, radios, upgraded cameras, and security vehicles.

Another \$1.8 million (25%) will fund the employment of 18 mental health therapists at the middle and high schools, complementing the

existing therapy services offered in the elementary schools.

An estimated \$1.7 million (24%) will go toward hiring 56 student advocate personnel (two at each high school and one at each middle school and elementary school), fostering positive relationships with students and enhancing their overall well-being.



Additionally, around \$690,000 (10%) will be allocated to employ 12 additional school resource officers. FWCS currently has an SRO in most middle schools and security officers who work on a rotating, part-time basis in the high schools. The district has set a goal of having certified school resource officers in all middle and high schools.

The final piece is \$500,000 (7%) to fund the expansion of the Peacemakers program to all high schools, empowering students to become proficient in conflict resolution. The investment extends beyond the walls of the schools through the development of future city leaders equipped with skills to build a more peaceful and just society.

The ballot indicated an average 12.74% increase in homeowners' school property tax bills to pay for the comprehensive approach to school safety and positive school culture.

The SAFER FWCS initiative stands for Student Advocates, Advanced Security, Family Friendly, Education Centered, and Responsible.

Monroe County Community School Corporation

The Family-Centered & Community-Focused spending plan secured a narrow victory with 50.5% of the vote, making MCCSC the first school corporation to pass four operating referenda.

The 8.5¢ tax will support the school corporation's goal of advancing equitable access to public education, particularly for low-income families, by eliminating miscellaneous out-of-pocket expenses for early childhood education, elementary school supplies, dual credit tuition and fees, career certification exams, Advanced Placement exams, instructional technology devices, and assorted consumables.

Of note, around \$6 million of the \$8.5 million generated in the first year will be allocated to early childhood programming.

Northeast Dubois County School Corporation

The Northeast Dubois County School Corporation, the lone school corporation from southern Indiana with a referendum at stake, triumphed in its request to extend the existing 18¢ operating referendum tax through 2031.

The measure to support general educational excellence through quality academics, small class sizes, and extracurricular opportunities won with 61% of the vote.



School Referenda, November 7, 2023

School Corporation	Type	Tax Rate	Outcome	Margin
Bluffton-Harrison, MSD	Safety	\$0.075	Fail	- 15.6
Carmel Clay	Operating	\$0.19	Pass	+ 35.6
Fort Wayne Community Schools	Safety	\$0.10	Pass	+ 6.6
Hamilton Southeastern Schools	Operating	\$0.1995	Pass	+ 40.2
Hammond, School City of	Operating	\$0.44	Fail	- 42.6
Hammond, School City of	Capital	\$0.4357	Fail	- 52.6
Lake Station Community Schools	Operating	\$0.54	Fail	- 1.4
Monroe County Community School Corp.	Operating	\$0.085	Pass	+ 1.0
Northeast Dubois Community School Corp.	Operating	\$0.18	Pass	+ 21.2
Sheridan Community Schools	Operating	\$0.25	Pass	+ 61.8
West Lafayette Community School Corp.	Operating	\$0.37	Pass	+ 61.0
Whiting, School City of	Operating	\$0.17	Fail	- 20.4

M.S.D. of Bluffton-Harrison

The safety and security referendum held by the M.S.D. of Bluffton-Harrison fell short, with 289 votes (42.2%) in favor and 396 (57.8%) against. It was the Wells County school corporation's first referendum attempt.

The proposed 7.5¢ tax would have generated \$445,000 annually for two additional school resource officers (57%); mental health supports (24%); physical safety and security improvements (14%), such as security cameras, a visitor management system, and vape sensors; and professional development and training (5%) focused on proactive safety strategies.

A key aspect involved using the mental health portion of the referendum to replace a Lilly Foundation grant that funds a licensed mental health therapist under contract with Park Center (Parkview Health). Furthermore, passage of the referendum would have allowed BHMSD to place an SRO at each school site. Currently, the district contracts with the Bluffton Police Department for one shared SRO among the three school buildings. The referendum would have cost the average homeowner an additional \$3.45 per month.

"I know that determining school safety, specifically for Bluffton-Harrison, is an important topic, and I

appreciate those who took part, whether they voted in favor or not in favor," said Dr. Brad Yates, superintendent. "Moving forward, BHMSD will continue to provide the safest school environment possible with the resources we have available."

School City of Hammond

Two referendums presented to voters in the School City of Hammond were defeated decisively.

The Renew Our Hammond Schools-Invest in Our Community Program would have sustained the existing 44¢ referendum tax in place since 2018, generating about \$15 million annually for transportation (33%), academic programs (20%), compensation for teachers and staff (20%), and student counseling and safety initiatives (10%). Just over \$800,000 of the revenue would have been shared with 10 different charter schools.

Unfortunately, 71% voted against the renewal. The Yes 4 Hammond Schools group warned that denial of the operating referendum might lead to potential state control of the school corporation.

The capital referendum, which would have funded an \$84.2 million bond issue primarily to modernize and expand Morton High School, originally constructed 56 years ago, encountered even greater resistance, with 76% of voters in opposition.

Lake Station Community Schools

By a razor thin margin, the Lake Station Community Schools fell short by a mere 14 votes in its bid to sustain the 54¢ referendum tax passed in 2017. The district cautioned that without renewal, student transportation might have to be eliminated, given that the circuit breaker results in the loss of 100% of its operations fund levy. The vote tally stood at 517 yes (49.3%) and 531 no (50.7%).

The referendum has also been paying for elementary school counseling, elementary art programs, elementary reading coaches, sixth-grade athletics, Project Lead The Way programming at every grade level, approximately 20 teachers, and safety enhancements.

School City of Whiting

Whiting voters defeated the district’s inaugural referendum request, a 17¢ tax rate to generate \$1.1 million annually. The funds were intended for additional intervention staff and instructional coaches; teaching positions in math, science, and fine arts; improved academic, extracurricular, and athletic programs; higher salary and wages for teachers and staff; expanded counseling and mental health services; technology and STEM programs; school resource officers; and safety initiatives. The vote results showed 259 in favor (39.8%) and 391 against (60.2%).

School Referenda Election Results Since November 2008

Voters have approved nearly two-thirds (64%) of the 274 school operating, capital, and safety referenda posed to them since November 2008. In that span, a total of 175 school referenda have passed – 122 operating referenda, 51 capital referenda, and two safety referenda.

Voters have backed 69% of school operating referenda requests but only 54% of school capital referenda requests, while two out of four school safety referenda have prevailed.

64% of All School Referenda Have Passed

School Referenda Results, Nov. 2008-Nov. 2023				
Type	Win	Lose	Total	Pass
Operating	122	54	176	69%
Capital	51	43	94	54%
Safety	2	2	4	50%
All	175	99	274	64%

Referenda have been attempted by 48% of Indiana school corporations, while 30% of Indiana school corporations have passed a referendum.

School referenda have substantially higher pass rates at the primary election than the general election. Across all three types of referenda, the pass rate is 15 percentile points higher at the primary election.

In all, 71% of referenda requests at the primary election have succeeded vs. 56% of referenda requests at the general election.

Primary Pass Rates Are Higher

School Referenda Results, Nov. 2008-Nov. 2023			
Type	Primary Pass	General Pass	Total Pass
Operating	78%	57%	69%
Capital	60%	51%	54%
Safety	0%	66%	50%
All	71%	56%	64%

For operating referenda, the pass rate is 21 percentile points higher at the primary election, with 78% passing at the primary vs. 57% in the general. For capital referenda, the pass rate is 9 percentile points higher, with 60% passing at the primary vs. 51% at the general.

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