

**WESTON SCHOOL
DISTRICT**

OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM

APRIL 7, 2026

BAIRD SCHOOL FINANCE

School Business Solutions



- Focused on meeting the unique demands of School Administrative Professionals across the State, Baird's School Business Solutions team provides creative, effective, and cost-efficient tools and services to help Wisconsin School Districts with their diverse and ongoing financial needs.
- 263 (62%) school districts use our Budget Forecast Model, Analytics, or Baird Video Library
- SBS team has over 50 combined years of experience in school business offices



Meet the Baird School Finance Team

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EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

Revenue Limits (1993)

- Intended to control property taxes, but over time it created more challenges for districts. Costs continue to rise, but revenue limits are not increasing at the same pace

Referendum Reliant

- Due to these funding limits, more districts are turning to voters for support—89 districts in Spring 2025 alone asked their communities to approve operational referenda

Modern Challenges

- Schools are striving to provide high-quality education while maintaining fiscal responsibility—sustaining teachers, programs, and student support services—even as they navigate ongoing funding constraints.



Wisconsin's 2025-27 K-12 Budget: Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back

Two Steps Forward:

+ \$325
Per-Pupil Revenue
Limit Increase

Granted for both the 2025-26
and 2026-27 school years



Special Education
Aid Reimbursement
Rises to
45%

Increases from 30.6% in
2024-25, providing \$504.7M
over the biennium



High-Cost
Special Ed Aid
Jumps to
90%

The reimbursement rate
for students with costs
over \$30,000 will reach
90% by 2026-27

Two Steps Back:



**\$0 Increase in
General School Aids**

This is the first time since
the 2009-11 budget with
no new general aid



**\$760
Million**

**Shift to Property
Taxpayers**

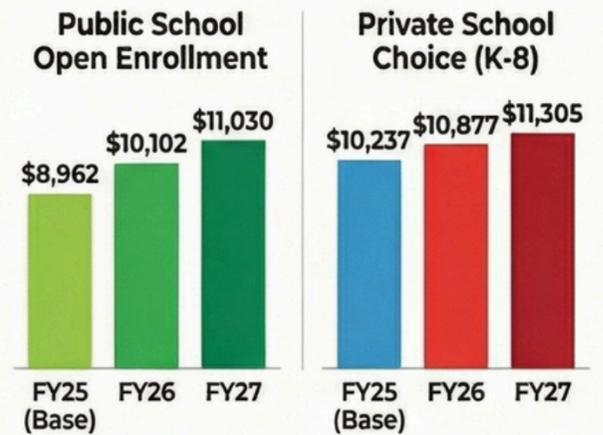
The entire revenue limit
increase must be funded
by local property taxes



**School Funding
Lags Inflation by
Over \$3,500
Per Pupil**

By 2027, revenue limits will
have trailed inflation for
18 consecutive years

Per-Pupil Payments Growth Comparison





SPECIAL EDUCATION

Legal Requirements

- Every public school district in Wisconsin is **legally responsible for providing special education services to every child who lives within district boundaries**- regardless of where that child attends school (FAPE)

State Reimbursement

- Schools are required to provide necessary services, but **the state only covers about 42% of these costs.**

Payment Responsibility.

- Schools fund the remaining two-thirds from their general fund budgets, leaving less money for teachers, classroom resources, and student programs

WISCONSIN PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

What Are They?

- State-funded scholarships allowing eligible students to attend private schools instead of public schools.

Funding

- Vouchers range from \$10K-\$15K per student and state revenue for our district is **reduced** by the amount of the voucher. This year alone, our district has lost approximately \$148,000 in funding. (Note that is equivalent to 2 staff members reduced at Weston)

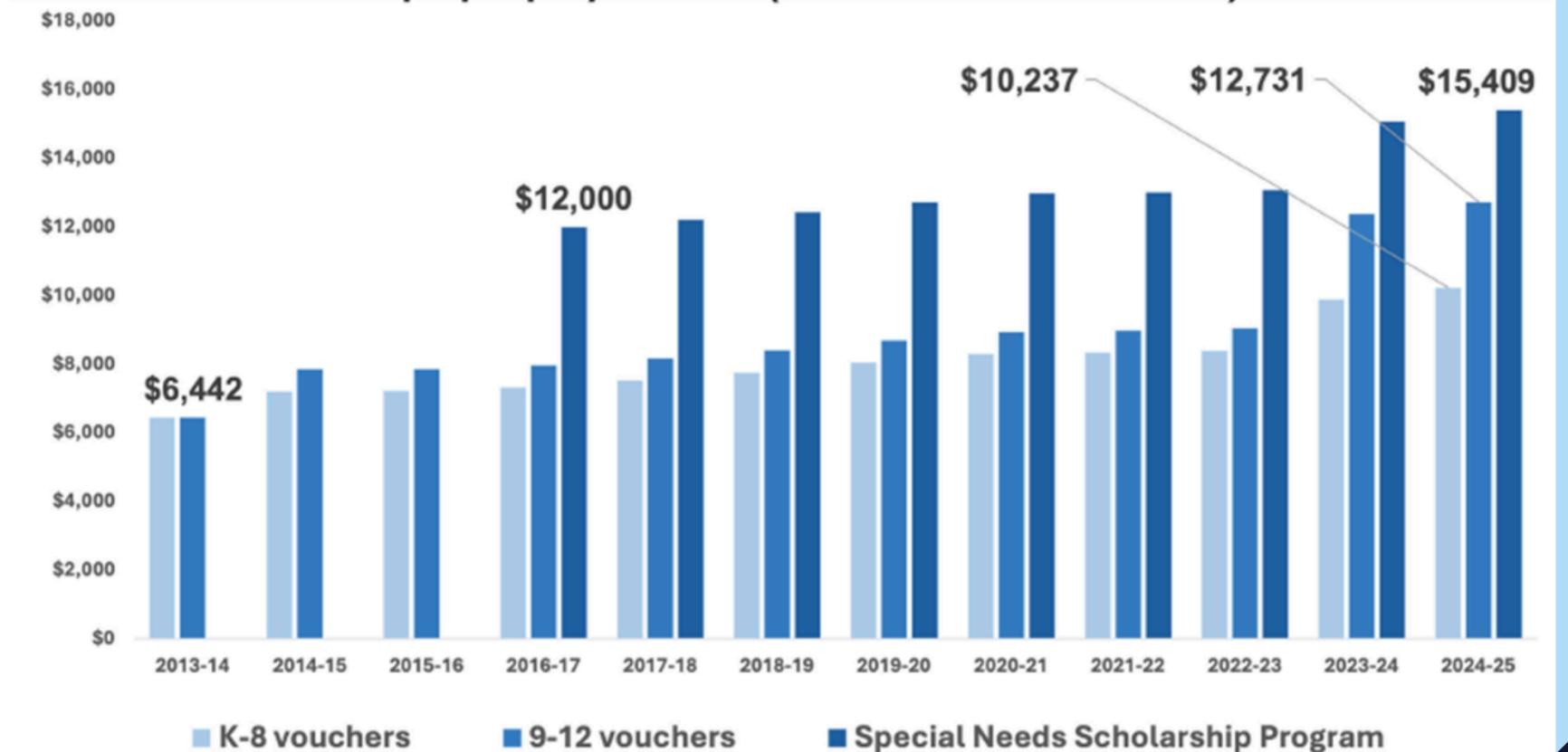
Impact on Public Schools

- Loss of state funding
- Districts may raise local property taxes to cover lost revenue
- Budget constraints can reduce resources and services for public school students

WISCONSIN PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

- Furthering the Need for Operational Referendums
- Vouchers Increasing Faster Than State Funding
- Local Private Schools Affecting Attendance
- Wisconsin Ranks 3rd in the Nation on share of state education dollars on private K-12
- In 2026-2027, Wisconsin Voucher Program Enrollment Caps will be lifted, furthering even more private school funding

Figure 1: Wisconsin voucher programs: Per-pupil payments (2013-14 to 2024-25)



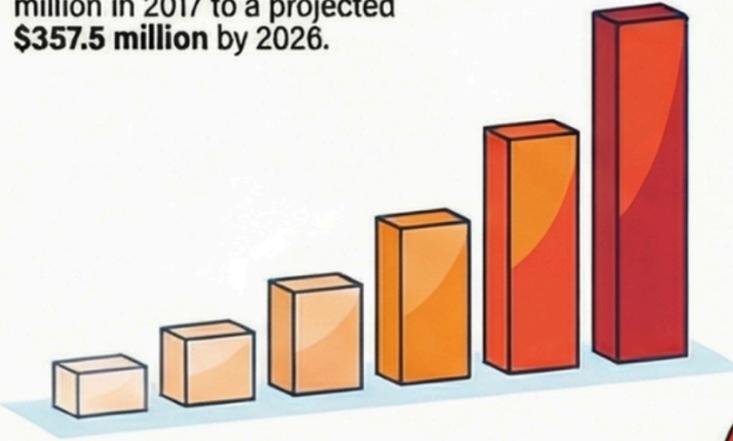
Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. [Fiscal impacts – Private School Choice Programs, Special Needs Scholarship Program](#)

Wisconsin's Parallel School System: The Growing Cost of Private School Vouchers

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH & SCALE

1,303% Increase in Voucher Costs

Total voucher-related aid deductions grew from \$25.5 million in 2017 to a projected \$357.5 million by 2026.



A \$629 Million System

In 2024-25, Wisconsin's four voucher programs serve over **\$8,000 students** at a combined estimated cost of **\$629 million**.



New Voucher Students Weren't in Public Schools

The vast majority of statewide voucher users switch from private tuition to taxpayer-funded vouchers.

THE FINANCIAL IMPACT

How Vouchers Impact Public School Funding

State aid is redirected from public school districts to pay for private school vouchers.

The Funding Cycle



1. State pays a private school for each voucher student.
2. The state then deducts that amount from the student's home public school district's aid.
3. The public school district is permitted to raise property taxes to replace the lost funds.

Voucher Funding Increases Outpace Public School Aid

Private School Voucher
~\$428

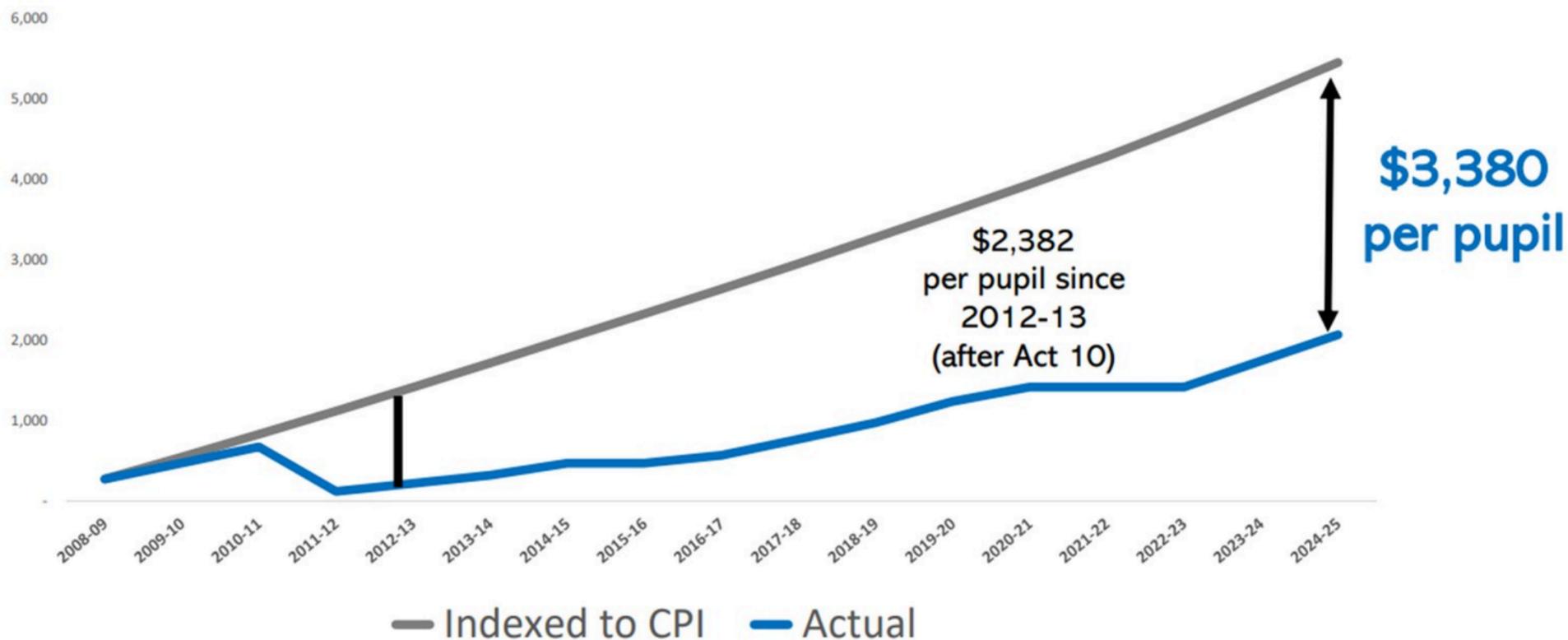
Projected Per-Pupil Increase (2025-27)

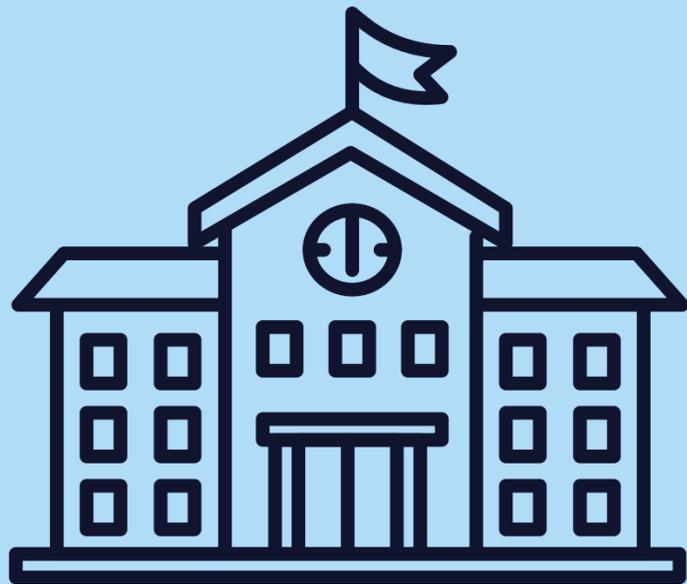
Public School Aid
~\$108

Projected Per-Pupil Increase (2025-27)

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General school district revenues per pupil lag inflation by more than \$3,300 since 2009





SHARED RESPONSIBILITY?

- Outdated funding leads to heavier tax burden on communities (\$760 Million Shift to Taxpayers in the 2025-2027 Biennial Budget)
- Because smaller/rural districts have less tax base or few voters, the reliance on referendums can also create inequities between districts.
- Rather than providing adequate baseline funding, the state leaves districts regularly turning to the ballot seeking operational referendums just to cover day-to-day costs.

STATE CHANGES

“Year of the Kid”

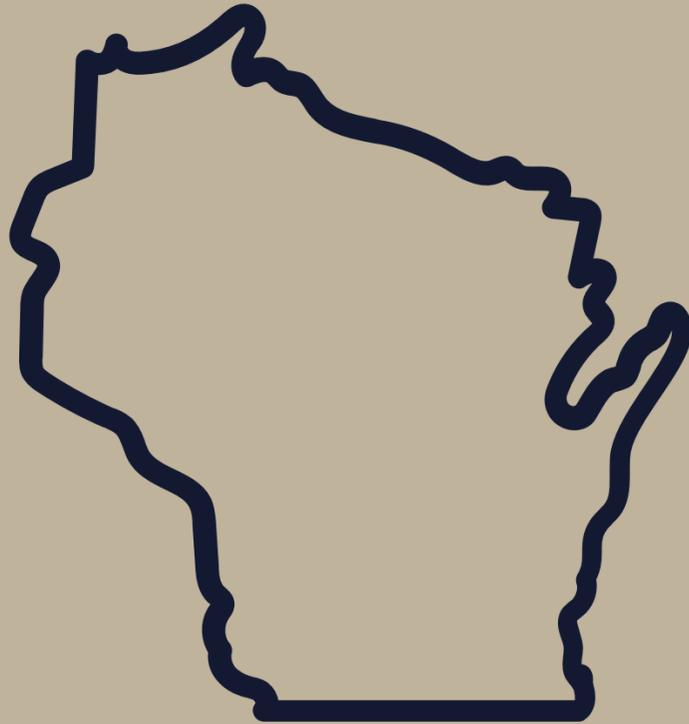
- The 2025–27 biennial budget proposed by Gov. Evers includes more than \$3.1 billion in general and categorical aid for K–12 public schools

Broad Goals

- Per Pupil Revenue Limits
- General Equalization Aid
- Special Education Reimbursement

Taxpayer Ask

- Even with the State Biennial Budget Adjustments, schools are still forced to turn to Operational Referendums.



HOW SCHOOLS IMPACT A LOCAL ECONOMY

1. Jobs & Local Spending

Schools are often major employers in small towns, and staff wages plus school purchasing help support local businesses.

2. Property Values

Strong schools help keep property values stable. When a school closes, home values typically drop.

3. Attracting/Retaining Families

Families choose communities for their schools. Without one, population decline usually speeds up as families move away.

4. Workforce Development

Schools prepare students for local jobs. Losing a school weakens the future workforce for area businesses.

5. Community Identity & Activity

Schools bring people together through events and activities, supporting local commerce. Without them, the community loses a central gathering place.

SCENARIO #1

OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM PASSES

- Weston is committed to re-evaluating and enhancing our programs and services to support student learning and well-being in the most cost-effective way.
- We will continue strengthening our fund balance, ensuring greater financial stability for the future.
- We will regularly review and adjust staffing to best meet the evolving needs of our students.
- Because of the timing of tax revenue, we may need to take out a State Trust Fund Loan to cover the gap between the 2025–26 and 2026–27 fiscal years.

SCENARIO #2

OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM FAILS

- Weston will pursue a third referendum question in the November 2026 election.
- Due to budget constraints, the district will make staffing changes that impact student programs and services.
- Weston will need to seek a State Trust Fund Loan to support basic day-to-day operations due to fund balance being nearly depleted.

SCENARIO #3

OPERATIONAL REFERENDUM FAILS FOR A THIRD TIME

- The district may be forced to consider dissolution or consolidation with another school district.
- It's important to note that district debt does not disappear in this process. If Weston were to consolidate with another district, existing debt would carry over, which could result in even higher taxes for residents of the newly combined district.

