

KEEP KIDS LEARNING Advocate Toolkit

MILTON COMMUNITY
2024



School Referendum Work Group

Dear Milton *Keep Kids Learning* Advocate,

Welcome to partnering with Forward Janesville's 500+ member business partners and 100+ active volunteers to secure a brighter future for Rock County through its **Keep Kids Learning** initiative.

A thriving economy starts with a solid investment in education. Strong schools do more than educate—they prepare the future workforce, help recruit and retain employees, support local businesses, and contribute to a vibrant local economy. They also keep our neighborhoods safe, enhance property values, and ensure Rock County remains a desirable place to live and work. And well-resourced educational systems help prevent workforce shortages, rising business costs, and community decline.

Prioritizing education paves the way for business growth, community prosperity, and a stronger future for everyone. We can also avoid workforce shortages, increased business costs, and community decline with robust educational systems. This is crucial for the success of our Keep Kids Learning initiative, which ensures that our communities in Milton and Janesville stay informed and ready to support local school referendums on Nov. 5, 2024.

To drive this vision forward, Forward Janesville has identified four key actions essential to ensuring Rock County's competitiveness and future prosperity through education:

1. **Building Strategic Partnerships**
2. **Expanding Work-Based Learning**
3. **Championing Lifelong Learning**
4. **Securing Sustainable and Accountable Funding**

But we can't do this alone. That's where you come in. Whether you're a Forward Janesville member or not, we're asking everyone to rally behind the critical task of securing sustainable and accountable funding for education.

We've developed this Advocate Toolkit to equip you with the resources you need to take meaningful action and help build collective support for the referendum in your community:

- **Spread the Word: Share the importance of education with your network.**
- **Engage with Voters: Help everyone understand how to vote and the impact of their vote.**
- **Advocate for Funding: Support sustainable and accountable funding for our schools.**

Please use this toolkit and share it widely.

Thank you for joining our effort to Keep Milton Kids Learning!

What's in your advocate toolkit?

Welcome to Forward Janesville's **Keep Kids Learning Toolkit**, your comprehensive guide to supporting School District of Milton's upcoming referendum. Inside, you'll find everything you need, along with tips on how to use each resource.

04

Conversation Starters

Explain why referendums are becoming more common and why our local schools need community support to thrive.

05

SDM Referendum Fact Sheet

A quick reference from SDM to help you understand and advocate for sustained school funding.

06

Customizable Sample Scripts

Craft effective emails, lead conversations, and Letters to the Editor to support the referendum. Be sure to make them your own.

07

Around the Town Flyer

Download, print, and post this flyer in your business, home, or community spaces to raise awareness. **PRINTABLE FLYER**

08

Productive Online Conversations

Tips for leading online discussions and engaging in everyday conversations on social media. **SEE GOAL!**

09

Sample Social Media Posts

Copy, paste, or customize these posts to spread the word effectively across your business, personal profiles, or in community groups.

10

Ways to Activate Your Community

Organize your support of the referendum by submitting letters, attending meetings, forming and joining groups, and ordering lawn signs.

11-12

Additional Learning Resources and Info

Learn more about school referendums, watch learning videos, news stories, and find essential voting instructions.

Why are so many school districts, including ours, going to referendum?

It's a growing trend across Wisconsin and a statewide issue. By the end of 2024, two-thirds of the nine public school districts in Rock County will have gone to referendum, with one district having gone twice. Across the state, 241 referendum questions have been *presented in 2024*.

What happened to state funding for our schools?

The school funding model from the 1990s promised that the state would cover 66% of local education costs, but today, that contribution is down to about 53%, leaving Wisconsin's per-pupil spending to drop significantly—from 11th in the nation in 2002 to 25th in 2020.

What is the Milton referendum about?

Milton voters are being asked to approve a \$5 million recurring operational referendum on Nov. 5, 2024. Without it, the district will face significant budget deficits, leading to cuts.

Is this in addition to the current referendum?

No, this referendum will replace the expiring 2020 non-recurring referendum.

Why a recurring referendum?

A recurring referendum is necessary because state funding isn't meeting needs, risking irreversible learning gaps. Recurring ensures consistent resources for sustaining standards.

Can the funding come from other sources?

No, because the state caps per-student spending (the revenue limit) and per-student spending has not kept pace with inflation since 2009. The funding schools once relied on has yet to be available or expected to return.

What contribution is being asked of me?

The referendum would cost \$42 per \$100,000 of property value. For example, if you own a \$250,000 home, the cost would be \$105 per year, or \$8.75 per month, starting in the 2026/27 school year.

If it's recurring, does that mean I will pay this every year?

Yes, but the tax impact is expected to decline in subsequent years because the mill rate (property tax you pay per \$1,000 of assessed value, not appraised) is expected to decrease.

Still need help? Local officials can explain further how the mill rate determines your property tax.

What will happen if the recurring referendum doesn't pass in Milton?

The consequences and impact on students and staff will be severe without a replacement.

- Programs vital for student development and success may be cut or eliminated.
- Larger class sizes will lead to diminished educational outcomes and a weaker workforce.
- The diverse programs that make Milton schools unique and competitive will be lost.
- Quality educators will seek opportunities elsewhere, where resources and job security are stable.

HOW WILL THIS REFERENDUM IMPACT OUR COMMUNITY?



MAINTAIN MILTON'S EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Strong schools make strong communities. This referendum would allow us to *maintain* the high-quality programming and opportunities that our District is known for.

WHAT MAKES MILTON SPECIAL?

#1

Top Rated School District in Rock County (Niche-2024)



WI District Report Card has improved every year since 2020



Highest AP and ACT Scores in Rock County



#MiltonPride | "Proud To Be A Red Hawk" Survey Question
88% of District Families Agree, 4% Disagree
77% of Community Members Agree, 10% Disagree



Highest WI Forward Achievement in Rock County - 3 Straight Years



The projected mill rate for 2024-25 is \$6.70, a decrease of 27.6% since 2019-20



NOTE ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 5



<https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024>

Business Leader Outreach Script

[BUSINESS NAME] supports Forward Janesville's Keep Kids Learning initiative.

As a business leader in Milton, I recognize that the strength of our schools directly impacts the vitality of our local economy. Supporting schools is not just about education—it's about ensuring a pipeline of well-prepared future employees, attracting and retaining talent, and fostering a thriving business environment.

Strong schools mean a more robust workforce, higher property values, and a safer community.

That's why we're standing hand-in-hand with Forward Janesville and the School District of Milton's Recurring Operational Referendum, and we invite you to join us in supporting this critical investment in our community's future. Thank you!

Learn more: <https://www.forwardjanesville.com/keepkidslearning> and follow #KeepKidsLearningFJ on social media

Community Member, Booster Club, Parent Group Script

[I, FAMILY NAME, OR ORGANIZATION'S NAME] support/s Milton schools.

As parents and neighbors, we know how much our schools mean to our kids and this community. They create opportunities for all of us to enjoy, take pride in, and establish what's important for future generations. Schools create a pipeline of well-prepared youth and provide them with opportunities to learn and grow.

Most importantly, they foster the same mentality of 'caring for each other' Milton is known for.

If we don't replace the expiring referendum with the proposed recurring referendum, all of that is at risk—by creating fewer opportunities for our kids and larger class sizes, and programs our kids and community love could be cut back or even disappear. We risk losing some of our best Milton teachers to other school districts where resources are more secure and referendums are supported.

By saying 'YES' to the upcoming referendum, we're ensuring our schools stay strong, our kids get the education they deserve, and our community continues to thrive. Let's continue to invest in Milton's future together. When the time comes, please vote 'YES' and encourage your friends and neighbors to do the same. Thank you!

Learn more: <https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024> and follow #KeepKidsLearningFJ on social media

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MILTON COMMUNITY MEMBERS WILL SEE A \$5 MILLION REFERENDUM ON THE NOVEMBER 5 BALLOT



State funding of public schools has not kept up with inflation since 2009.



Despite prior budget reductions, we can't sustain our current programs without a replacement referendum. A more stable, recurring solution is needed.



A \$5 million recurring referendum starting in 2026-27, can help *bridge that gap* and create a predictable and sustainable funding plan.



The board's proposal will add a net increase of \$2.5 million to the expiring referendum authority going forward, minimizing the overall tax impact. (\$2.5M + \$2.5M = \$5M)



The projected initial mill rate impact in 2026-27 is \$42 per \$100,000 of property value, with a decrease expected over time.



Or visit <https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024>


 VOTE ON OR BEFORE
NOVEMBER 5

Online Conversations

Tips for Engaging on Social Media

Here's how you can make sure your online interactions are helpful and constructive:

1. Stick to Reliable Info and Credible Sources

Share content from trusted sources, accounts, and reputable news sites. Avoid sharing anything from sources you're unsure about—that way, we keep the message strong, credible, and clear.

- *SDM Referendum webpage*
- *Forward Janesville's Keep Kids Learning webpage*

2. Keep It Friendly

A friendly and constructive tone is best. If things start getting heated or confrontational, stepping back is okay. Staying respectful keeps the referendum's focus on track with the right people.

3. Use the Facts

Make sure your points are based on solid facts. You've got great resources in this toolkit (pages 11 and 12) to back you up, so use them to keep your messages accurate and supported.

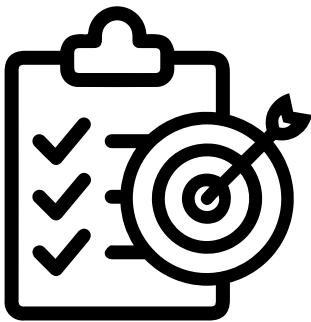
4. Don't Feed the Trolls

If you come across negative or inflammatory comments, it's best not to engage. Responding can often make things worse and distract from what matters. Instead, put your energy into positive discussions.

5. Encourage Good Conversations

Start meaningful conversations by asking questions, sharing your own experiences, and respectfully inviting others to share their thoughts.

GOAL: Lead 15-20 social media interactions before Nov. 5.



- **Search, like, follow, and engage** with Forward Janesville and the School District of Milton's social media communities.
 - SDM: *Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube*
 - FJ: *Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn*
- **Share messages** from those pages and tag (@) accounts.
- **Encourage others to join** the cause by posting on your accounts with the sample messaging provided (page 9).

#MiltonPride #KeepKidsLearning
#WeAreMilton #KeepKidsLearning FJ

Sample Social Media Messaging

Business Owner, Brand, Local Leader Use



Facebook/LinkedIn

As a business leader in Milton, we see firsthand how strong schools fuel a thriving community. This isn't just about education—it's about securing our future. The proposed referendum will ensure we have well-prepared employees, attract top talent, and keep our local economy strong. Let's come together to support @ForwardJanesville's Keep Kids Learning initiative and invest in the success of our schools, businesses, and families. Please share this with your network, and let's make a difference! #MiltonPride #WeAreMilton #KeepKidsLearning #KeepKidsLearningFJ

<https://www.forwardjanesville.com/keepkidslearning>



Twitter/X

Strong schools power our community's future! Support the Milton referendum to ensure well-prepared employees, attract top talent, and boost our local economy. Join us in keeping our schools and businesses strong. #KeepKidsLearning #Milton

<https://www.forwardjanesville.com/keepkidslearning>



Instagram (use personal photos/video/#s to accompany this post)

Our @milton_school_district schools matter. By backing the proposed referendum, we ensure our kids are ready for tomorrow's challenges, our businesses thrive, and our community stays vibrant. Let's stand together! #KeepKidsLearning #KeepKidsLearningFJ #WeAreMilton #SupportSchools

Community Member, Booster Club, Parent Group Use

Facebook/LinkedIn

Our kids' future is on the line. If Milton's upcoming recurring referendum doesn't pass, the consequences for our students will be severe—fewer educational opportunities, larger class sizes, and programs could disappear. We might even lose some of our best teachers to other districts. Vote 'YES' on the recurring referendum to keep our schools strong and our community thriving. Please share this and encourage your friends and neighbors to do the same! #MiltonPride #MiltonSchools #KeepKidsLearning #KeepKidsLearningFJ <https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024>

Twitter/X

Our kids need us. If the recurring referendum fails, they'll face fewer opportunities, larger classes, and the loss of great teachers. Let's vote 'YES' and spread the word! #KeepKidsLearning #MiltonStrong #WeAreMilton

<https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024>

Instagram (use personal photos/video/#s to accompany this post)

The future of our kids' education is at risk. If the recurring referendum doesn't pass, they could lose essential programs and even see their best teachers leave. We can't let that happen. Let's vote 'YES' to keep @milton_school_district strong and give our children the education and experiences they deserve.

❤️ #KeepKidsLearning #MiltonPride #MiltonSchools #KeepKidsLearningFJ

1. Submit a Letter to the Editor

Writing a letter to the editor is a powerful way to express your support publicly. You can use the sample script provided on page 6 of the Toolkit to help you start writing one.

ACTION: For the Milton Courier, submit your letter [here](#). For the Janesville Gazette, submit your letter [here](#). Include your contact information and follow any guidelines and word count.

2. Attend and Speak at Local Meetings

Showing up at local school board meetings and speaking out in favor of the referendum can make a big impact.

- *School District of Milton meetings*
 - *Oct. 9: 6:00 p.m. at Milton City Hall, 710 S. Janesville Street*
 - *Be sure to check SDM's referendum webpage for the most updated meetings list!*



ACTION: Use the sample scripts (page 6) to prepare and personalize your remarks. Advanced practice and inviting friends or neighbors to show collective support are helpful!

3. Get Organized in Your Community

Forming a group or activating one you are part of, like a booster club, sports team, or school parent group, is a great way to rally support and coordinate efforts in Milton. Present this toolkit and bring flyers to your next meeting!

Note: Avoid placing flyers in mailboxes, as it is legal to do so without proper postage. Per Sect. 508.3.1.3 of the Domestic Mail Manual (DMM).

Vote Yes for Kids, Inc. is a community group supporting the Milton School District referendum to protect funding for key sports, music, and extracurricular programs. The group can be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/voteyesforkidsmilton.

ACTION: Read *Vote Yes! Referendum Secrets* from the organization #SocialSchool4EDU.

4. Request a Presentation

Sometimes, a direct presentation is the best way to inform your community. You can present the toolkit on your own, or Forward Janesville's Keep Kids Learning Advocate can help!

ACTION: If you'd like to arrange a presentation or invite a guest speaker to participate, contact Claire Gray at claire@forwardjanesville.com.

5. How to Order Lawn Signs

Show a yard sign at home or in your business.

ACTION: Signs are available with the Vote Yes for Kids in Milton group. Contact dave2009email@gmail.com for more information.



Additional Resources

Information Provides Understanding

To better understand why so many Wisconsin school districts have to hold referendums, read/watch this March 2024 feature by *PBS Wisconsin's Here & Now*.

Watch *Wisconsin School Funding: Animated Video Explainer* and learn what is expected to happen to state revenue caps and policy limits in 2025 and the actual cost of students' needs today.

Tune in to hear about Forward Janesville's Keep Kids Learning campaign on *WCL0's "Your Talk Show" with Tim Bremel*—featuring Forward Janesville President and CEO Shar Hermanson and Board member Dave Holterman, recorded on Oct. 1, 2024.

School District of Milton Referendum Website and FAQ

<https://bit.ly/SDMReferendum2024>



SDM Referendum 2024 Overview Video What You Need To Know For November 5

<https://youtu.be/ygRuDr82D5c?feature=shared>



Additional Resources

Milton Voting Information

Make sure your vote counts in this important election. Every vote is vital to the future of our schools and our community! Here's how you can make sure your voice is heard:

- Check out the *Milton Absentee Voting Page* for instructions for absentee voting in Milton.
- Milton's referendum question will be on the front of the ballot and reads:

Shall the School District of Milton, Rock and Jefferson Counties, Wisconsin be authorized to exceed the revenue limit specified in Section 121.91, Wisconsin Statutes, by \$5,000,000 beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, for recurring purposes consisting of ongoing educational programming and staffing?

Statewide Voting Information

Visit *MyVote Wisconsin* for additional information about voting, including where to find your polling place, how to register to vote, check your voter status, and deadlines for the Nov. 5, 2024 election.

Keep Kids Learning | Forward Janesville

Learn more at Forward Janesville's *Keep Kids Learning* webpage.

Toolkit Sources

- PBS Wisconsin. "Why Are Many Wisconsin School Districts Holding Referendums?" PBS Wisconsin, Accessed September 2024. <https://pbswisconsin.org/news-item/why-are-many-wisconsin-school-districts-holding-referendums/>.
- School District of Milton. "2024 Referendum Information." School District of Milton, Accessed September 2024. <https://sites.google.com/milton.k12.wi.us/sdmreferendum2024?usp=sharing>.
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. "State/Federal Aid and Grant Programs Overview." Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Accessed September 2024. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/aid/overview>.
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. "Wisconsin School Finance System." Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Accessed September 2024. <https://dpi.wi.gov/sfs/outreach/finance-system>.