

Riverdale School District sets Tax Levy at Annual Meeting

The Riverdale School District held its Annual Meeting on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, delivering community members a comprehensive look at the district's current financial standing, upcoming capital projects, and projected budget for the 2026–2027 school year. During this meeting and the special board meeting following the Annual Meeting, the Riverdale School District set the tax levy and approved the 2026-2027 school year budget.

Following a profitable 2025–2026 fiscal year that closed with a positive net of \$145,182.95, district leaders presented a projected year-end deficit of \$326,759.00 for the 2026–2027 term. The 25-26 fiscal year surplus resulted from delays in the maintenance shed project. The surplus was added to the general fund, and the entire project is included in the 26-27 budget. Despite this forecasted deficit, Riverdale maintains a solid General Fund ending balance projected to shift from \$3,638,311.42 down to an estimated \$3,311,552.42.

Revenue updates reveal a dynamic shift in state, federal, and local funding streams. State aid increased by \$122,816 from the previous year due to referendum spending and increased special education reimbursement, which is at 38% this year compared to 32% last year. The state budget called for 42% this year and 46% next year. Open enrollment revenue increased by more than \$6,000 to \$483,046, plus a \$60,000 allocation for literacy coaching from the DPI and an estimated \$33,000 mental health grant. The district was also awarded \$31,271 in Rural School Grant funds. These gains were partially offset by a \$13,356 drop in per-pupil aid due to a slight decline in membership, and a \$14,266 reduction in equalization aid due to the second year in a row of no increase to the state aid pot. The key point is that equalization aid does not provide the district more revenue to spend, but it does provide taxpayer relief because an increase would reduce the amount the district would have to levy in taxes. Federal program funds continue to decline, with an overall net loss of \$15,824, including cuts to Title programs.

On the expenditure side, projected salary and benefit expenses rose by \$363,408. The district saw a \$23,654 decrease in special education expenses and a \$20,000 decrease in the special education transfer. The school choice voucher payment program increased by \$16,614.80, which is now up to \$205,655. These are district taxpayer funds going to educating Riverdale resident students in private voucher or online programs not associated with the Riverdale school district. District operational expenses highlight that fuel costs nearly doubled from last year's spending, reaching a budgeted \$105,000. Technology software and hardware initiatives account for \$593,840, while phone

infrastructure upgrades cost \$32,000. Property and general liability insurance policies decreased slightly overall, while workers' compensation costs increased by \$11,136.

A couple of maintenance projects remain deferred for several years, with all projects to be reviewed at a committee meeting later in the year. The district outlined facility and maintenance improvements for the upcoming year. Projects include \$182,695.27 to complete the maintenance shed, \$54,654 for backstop and baseball field fencing (from Fund 80), and \$70,000 for parking lot recoating and striping, roofing repairs, and snow removal.

The Food Service Fund has a declining balance, with an estimated deficit of \$52,299. This is due to the sharp increase in food costs, full-time staff benefits, fewer students eating lunch, and the threshold change for free and reduced-price meal certification. The Community Service Fund will continue financing Junior High Athletics and the Chieftain Care Program. Regarding district debt, half of current debt service payments will fall off in 2030.

Immediately after the Annual Meeting, the Riverdale School Board approved the \$4,571,986 tax levy and the 2026-2027 school year budget at a special board meeting. The district's equalized property value continues to climb, increasing by \$78,184,961 to \$682,494,446. The school district's mill rate decreased by 68 cents to \$6.85 per \$1,000 of property value. With the decrease in mill rate and the increase in equalized value, the taxpayer portion of the funding will be distributed over a larger financial base.

Wisconsin state public school funding continues to lag behind basic expenses and inflation. The funding formula froze schools in 1993 at a per-student rate still in place today. Schools that were financially responsible then continue to lag behind higher-spending districts. Riverdale's per-student amount this year is \$12,048, which is in the bottom tier of the CESA. Riverdale is ranked 27 out of 31 schools in CESA 3. For comparison, the top two receiving districts in CESA 3 are Potosi, which receives \$16,886 per student, and Highland, which receives \$16,165 per student. Pecos, Iowa, Grant, and Barneveld receive over \$14,000 per student. Until 2009, school districts received a per-student increase based on inflation. For the past four years, Wisconsin districts have received a \$325 per student increase. This is a move in the right direction but still lags behind the annual inflationary increase of \$425.

You can find the district's budget presentation on the Riverdale website under District Administrator Welcome. Continue to check back on that page for updates on the budget and the upcoming tax bill season. As always, please reach out to the District Office if you have specific budget questions.

concerning the Riverdale School District. District residents' support for the 2025 passage of the operational referendum has been instrumental in providing Riverdale students with a top-notch education.

The school year is off to a great start! Please continue to visit the Riverdale Schools Facebook page to see the great things happening at Riverdale every day.