

THE FACTS ABOUT

OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT & THE REFERENDUM

This is **NOT A “PETITION TO LOWER TAXES”** - This referendum calls for an unvetted \$1.5 million cut to the unanimously approved School District budget derived through data manipulation and **MISINFORMATION.**

This is **NOT A REFERENDUM TO APPROVE AN INCREASE** to the annual School District Budget. The 2023-2024 School District budget has already undergone a 4-month development process and a 12-week approval process - the Town Council has already unanimously approved the budget.

The budget approved calls for **LEVEL FUNDING** - meaning a zero-dollar increase to the total budgeted year over year. In actuality, this is a **2% - 4% BUDGET CUT** when factoring in general inflation, required payroll increases, and an increase in insurance premiums. In addition, the '23-'24 school year will be the fourth consecutive level funded budget - meaning the School District budget has not increased since 2020.

Even before this referendum, and because of the level funded budget, the School District has already committed to a 5% - 7% reduction in staff, closing Curtis Corner Middle School, having already closed Wakefield Elementary School this past summer, and reducing overall programming - including mental health support for our students.

There is **NO BUDGET SURPLUS** or error in accounting anywhere in the approved budget - if the referendum is passed, it will definitively require the additional **TERMINATION OF 22 FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES.** This means significant cuts to music, English language arts, social studies, Pre-K, CTE, guidance, and **NO FALL SPORTS.**

VOTE JUNE 6TH

THE EFFECTS OF THE REFERENDUM RIGHT NOW

Based on State law, the School District is required to **NOTIFY STAFF OF TERMINATION IN WRITING BY JUNE 1ST**. This means 22 current full-time employees will be notified of their termination before anyone votes - teachers and staff across music, English language arts, social studies, guidance, Pre-K, and the athletics departments. These staffers can be called back if the referendum does not go through - but some may be lost to other jobs, and all will be put under unfair stress as their jobs hang in the balance.

This means that the school district's plan, which is available for review online, is not a worst-case scenario constructed to deter voters - it is a real plan that will already be in irrevocable progress when the referendum is voted on.

THE TRUE IMPACT OF AN UNPLANNED \$1.5 MILLION BUDGET CUT

- The termination of an additional 22 full-time employees - to be notified by June, 1st
- No High School or Middle School Fall Sports
- Cuts to the following departments:

Athletics - 5 FTE laid off

Music - 2.5 FTE laid off

High School English Language Arts - 1 FTE laid off

High School Social Studies - 1 FTE laid off

CTE Construction - 1 FTE laid off

Pre-K - 5 FTE laid off

Administration and Maintenance - 3 FTE laid off

Health and Needs Support - 2 FTEs laid off

High School Guidance - 1.5 employees laid off

Elementary Library - 1 employee laid off

- It is important to note that with these layoffs, the School District is required to pay unemployment, which is typically required for 50% - 60% of the laid-off resources

VOTE JUNE 6TH

FACTUAL INFORMATION TO HELP CITIZENS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

COST PER PUPIL

- The cost per pupil is **\$23,850**, NOT \$28,000, as stated by the author of the referendum - this is misinformation
- South Kingstown's \$23,850 cost per pupil is on par with other RI municipalities like Narragansett, Jamestown, Warwick, and others
- It is important to understand that municipalities like Barrington and East Greenwich do not include grant funding and/or donations in their cost per-pupil data, this allows for these municipalities to report a lower cost per pupil - whereas South Kingstown does include these contributions

LEVEL FUNDED BUDGET

- Level funding means a 0% increase to the annual budget year over year - This does not take into consideration general inflation, required payroll increases, and increases to insurance premiums
- This means a level funded budget is the equivalent of a 2% - 4% budget cut
- This will be the 4th level funded annual budget for the School District, equating to significant budget reduction year over year

YEAR-OVER-YEAR REDUCTIONS

- Since 2008 the School District has eliminated 190 FTE positions, from 590 FTEs to 400 FTEs - a 32% reduction in staff
- Since 2008, enrollment has dropped by 34%, meaning staff reductions are in line with the decline in enrollment
- Wakefield Elementary was closed last summer
- Curtis Corner Middle School will close this summer
- 4 Years of Level-Funding is the equivalent of an 8% - 16% budget reduction over that period of time

VOTE JUNE 6TH

FACTUAL INFORMATION TO HELP CITIZENS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

THE TAX CUT

- The author of the referendum states that the \$1.5 million cut in the School District can pass along a .22 cent per thousand reductions to the FY '23 municipal tax rate for all - but it is important to note that the Town has yet to vet and verify that that number is accurate
- A .22 cent per thousand reduction is speculative and may not be correct - Town Staff is currently taking the necessary time to evaluate
- It is essential to understand the facts of the impact on the School District of this unvetted \$1.5 million cut to decide if the cost is worth the return to the taxpayer

BUDGET SURPLUS

- There is no budget surplus
- Some supporters of the referendum have pointed to a line item on the active '22 - '23 school year budget referred to as 'Available Budget', claiming that this is surplus - this is not surplus - this line acknowledges a cash-on-hand balance that is earmarked to pay budget expenses through the end of the year
- Some supporters of the referendum have also pointed to the line item in the budget referring to a 'Fund Balance' - maintaining a fund balance of 2% is in line with federal and state guidelines and is town policy - it is used for unexpected one-time costs and catastrophic events i.e. a roof failure, a high special education costs due to an unexpected new enrollee, or a heating system failure
- Every city/town/school district has a Fund Balance account
- the School Department Fund Balance total is projected at \$1.1 million, below the recommended 2%

VOTE JUNE 6TH

FACTUAL INFORMATION TO HELP CITIZENS MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

WHY A LEVEL-FUNDED BUDGET AFTER CLOSING TWO SCHOOLS

Some supporters of the referendum question why the budget hasn't been cut more deeply to coincide with the closure of two schools - this is why:

- The students and many of the staff have been relocated to other schools
- Significant Federal and State funding for COVID-related initiatives and COVID-related inflation end this school year - but the programs required to continue to recover from COVID learning loss gaps continue, and inflation issues continue
- Even though staff has been reduced, the School District is still required to pay for unemployment benefits for those employees let go that do not find other jobs - on average, this is around 50% - 60% of the terminated staff

THE REFERENDUM BALLOT LANGUAGE FOR THE VOTE ON JUNE 6TH

Please note that the current language for the referendum vote is potentially confusing. It is currently proposed as follows:

Approve the Town Council's appropriation of
\$55,994,773 for the School Fund
VOTE TO KEEP OUR SCHOOLS FUNDED

OR

Approve the petition for reduction of
\$1,500,000 to \$54,494,773 for the School Fund
VOTE FOR AN UNVETTED BUDGET CUT

VOTE JUNE 6TH