BENSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
2026 REFERENDUM GUIDE

VOTE ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 3







FALL 2026
OPERATING LEVY FOR LEARNING

Benson Public Schools

FUTURE FOCUSED

STRONG SCHOOLS = STRONG COMMUNITIES

STRONG SCHOOLS. STRONG COMMUNITY. STRONG FUTURES.

Early Learning and Strong Readers

Strong futures start early. Benson's Discovery Kids provides care starting at 6 weeks old through toddler, preschool and up to 6th grade. Our VPK program gives 4-year-olds their first full-day school experience with a licensed teacher. High-quality preschool helps children succeed in school and narrows the early achievement gap, with long-term studies finding up to $17 in social benefits for every dollar invested. Reliable child care also supports local businesses.

Every Student's Success Begins with Reading

Benson elementary teachers are trained in the science of reading, teaching phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension step by step. That matters when more than 54% of Minnesota third graders aren't meeting grade-level reading standards. Benson helps students become confident readers early and catches those who need extra help before they fall behind.

Preparing Braves for Tomorrow

Hands-on learning prepares students for college, the military, or a job through shop and trades classes, FFA and BPA, e-sports, and college-credit opportunities, with students able to earn up to 55 credits before graduation. The proposed operating levy would help maintain these programs.

Supporting Every Learner

No two students learn exactly the same way. The proposed operating levy would help maintain reading and math intervention, social-emotional and mental health support, specialized instruction, and manageable class sizes. Without additional operating revenue, the district could face higher class sizes and fewer student supports.

Great Teachers and Staff

Benson's teachers and staff show up for our students in good years and hard ones. The levy would help recruit and retain quality teachers, maintain strong classroom instruction, and support the dedicated staff who know our students by name.



Behind every successful Brave is a dedicated teacher making a difference.

- Elementary teachers with extensive literacy training
- Hands-on learning in shop, trades, FFA, BPA, and e-sports
- Care from 6 weeks old through toddler, preschool, and VPK with licensed teachers
- 55 college credits can be earned before graduation – at a school of just 360 students

Dear Benson Public Schools Community:

As the previous page shows, we have a lot to be proud of in Benson, but we also have our challenges. Like many schools across Minnesota, Benson Public Schools is facing ongoing money challenges. Costs keep going up, but the money schools get from the state hasn't grown enough to keep up.

Our Challenges

Over the past three years, Benson has cut more than $1 million from its budget, including $300,000 for this school year. The district does have some savings, but that amount is expected to shrink from $2.1 million to just $105,000 in a few years unless operating revenue increases (see pages 4-5 for details).

Because of these challenges, the School Board voted unanimously to place a single referendum question on the ballot for the November 3, 2026 election. This booklet explains our district's needs, along with the plan and cost for the referendum.

A Lesson Learned

A similar referendum request didn't pass last year. Looking back, we simply didn't communicate enough. This time, we're committed to a robust plan to educate all stakeholders with clear and timely communications. We are coming to you to explain the need, the plan, the real costs, and show and tell everyone about the exceptional opportunities Benson Public Schools has for every student's success.

Please take the time to review this brochure and vote on or before November 3.

Sincerely,

Benson Public School Board

Brian Samuelson, Chair
Melissa Wrobleski, Vice-Chair
Paul Carruth, Clerk
Jim Berens, Treasurer
Bill McGeary, Director
Angela Nissen, Director
Dave Hafvenstein, Director



Like households, school districts are affected by rising costs. When prices increase faster than revenue, the same budget covers less, which affects staffing, programs, and day-to-day operations. Families experiencing higher costs may also have greater needs, which can increase demand for school-based services such as meals and student support.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over the past three years, **Benson has cut more than $1 million from its budget, including $300,000 for this school year.**

2024-25 **$272,000**	4th Grade Teacher eliminated Business Dept. Teacher eliminated Business Office Position eliminated Instructional Assistant eliminated Maintenance Department eliminated Community Education/Activities Secretary eliminated
2025-26 **$889,000**	Administration - High School Principal position not replaced Teachers - One elementary and one secondary position eliminated Teacher reassignment Teacher contract days and overloads reduced High school instruction assistance and clerical support reduced Nursing reduced Social worker reduced College course costs reduced Student support software subscription eliminated Athletics & Activities stipends reduced Athletics broadcasting contract eliminated Capital expenses reduced Maintenance (services & contracts) reduced Funding/coding reassignments to reduce expenses in General Fund
2026-27 **$300,000**	Activities Director and Community Education Coordinator Positions combined. Director of Teaching & Learning Position eliminated Reduce Elementary PE Teacher Position to .6 Reduce SWWC School Psychologist Position to .5 Reduce School Resource Office to part-time Misc. reductions & cost-savings

Operating Levy for Learning at a Glance

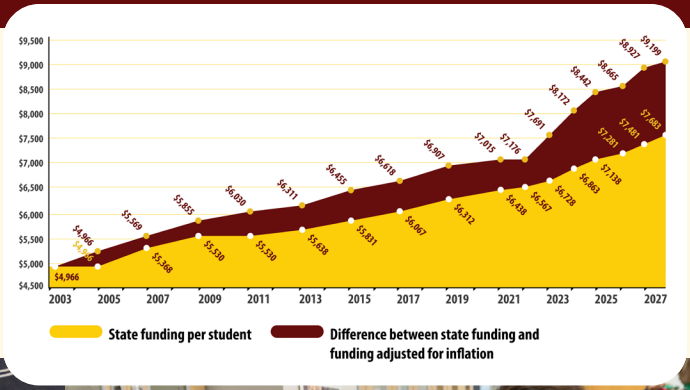
RECRUIT AND MAINTAIN EXCELLENT TEACHERS & STAFF

PRESERVE STUDENT CLASSES, PROGRAMS, AND SERVICES

PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE, MILITARY, CAREERS, AND LIFE

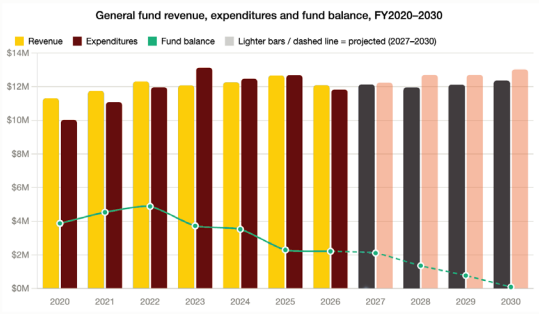
STATE REVENUE INCREASES DON'T KEEP PACE WITH INFLATION

- Had the allowance increased by the rate of inflation each year since 2003, the 2027 allowance per pupil would be $9,199.
- The difference between the FY27 formula allowance per pupil and the inflation adjusted formula allowance is $1,516 or 19.7%.









GENERAL FUND REVENUE, EXPENDITURES, AND FUND BALANCE

The district does have some savings, but that amount is expected to shrink from $2.1 million to just $105,000 in a few years unless operating revenue increases.

The proposed levy would help Benson:

SUPPORT EVERY LEARNER

MAINTAIN REASONABLE CLASS SIZES

SUSTAIN HIGH-QUALITY SCHOOLS DESPITE RISING OPERATING COSTS

The school board voted unanimously to ask voters to consider an operating levy that would give the district $700 more per student each year; about $522,000 more each year for the district. If approved, the new levy would raise a total $1,050,000 a year for 10 years, starting with taxes paid in 2027.

THE OPERATING LEVY FOR LEARNING WILL

Continue hands-on activities like FFA (Future Farmers of America) BPA (Business & Professionals of America)

Maintain current classes & programs

Provide student services & supports

Retain shop & trade classes

Recruit & retain quality teachers & staff







IF THE REFERENDUM IS APPROVED

- Protect the strong academics
- Preserve student programs
- Reduce the need for future cuts
- Maintain a healthy fund balance (savings account)
- Retain and recruit quality staff

If the referendum fails, Benson Public Schools will face a projected $800,000 in cuts (about 6.5% of the total budget) for the 2027-28 school year. The list below shows possible program and staff reductions under consideration, with estimated costs. A thorough staff and community engagement process will precede any formal school board action.

POTENTIAL BUDGET REDUCTIONS (In No Specific order or priority)

Reduction/Adjustment	*Description*	*Cost Savings*
Reduce superintendent hours by 25%	The superintendent's time leading Benson schools will be reduced 25%.	est. $50,000 salary/benefits
Reduce administrative support	Building and district secretarial staff	est. $16,600 salary/benefits
Implement a 4-day school week	Move from 5 to 4 instructional days for students. Reduced contracts for support staff and increased childcare costs for many parents/families.	est. $220,000-$320,000
Professional development reassigned to general fund	Eliminates professional development with no funding available. (Must be voted on by the BEA and Board.)	est. 2% of budget
Reduce a bus route	This will increase the time a student spends on the bus; pickup/drop-off times will be changed.	est. $27,500
Increase elementary class sizes (Grades K-5)	K-5 classroom sizes increase up to 30 students per classroom; two grade-level classrooms may be combined.	Eliminate 5 FTE positions; est. $325,000 total
Reduce course electives for students (Grades 6-12)	Reductions could include: ag, building/trades, welding, business, art, band, choir, physical education, health, and College in the Schools.	Eliminate 5 FTE positions; est. $325,000 total
Reduce athletics & activities	Reduce athletic & activity opportunities (BPA, FFA, Speech, Clubs, etc.)	Eliminate 2 athletics & 2 activities; est. $11,878 total
Reduce academic and behavioral support services	Para-educators/instructional assistants	Eliminate 2 FTE positions; est. $80,000 total
Reduce physical & mental health student support services	Social workers, counseling, cultural liaison, nursing, and cooperative services	Eliminate 2 FTE positions; est. $125,000 total





IF THE REFERENDUM IS NOT APPROVED

- Fund balance (savings account) shrinks dramatically from $2.1 million to just $105,000 in a few years.
- Could lead to: higher class sizes, fewer student supports, and the potential reduction of student educational programs and staff.

THE COST

The school board voted unanimously to ask voters to consider an operating levy that would give the district $700 more per student each year; about $522,000 more each year for the district. If approved, the new levy would raise a total $1,050,000 a year for 10 years, starting with taxes paid in 2027.

This referendum asks voters to revoke the current $710.70/student operating referendum and replace it with a $1,410.70 operating referendum.

ESTIMATED TAX IMPACT ON THREE BENSON HOMES



$15.00
PER MONTH

Home Value	Revoked Levy Authority	
	Annual	Monthly
$150,000	$156	$13
$175,000*	$182	$15
$200,000	$208	$17

*$175,000 is the median home value in Benson Public Schools

Calculate Your Personal Tax Impact

Scan this QR code to visit the tax calculator and determine the specific tax impact for your home and agricultural property.

TAX RELIEF OPTIONS FOR RESIDENTS

Homestead Credit Refund

Available for all homestead property*, both residential and agricultural - house, garage and one acre (HGA only). Refund is sliding scale, based on total property taxes and income (maximum refund is $3,310 for homeowners and $2,640 for renters).

Special Property Tax Refund

Available for all homestead property*, both residential and agricultural (HGA only) with a gross tax increase of at least 12% and $100 over prior year. Refund is 60% of tax increase that exceeds greater of 12% or $100 (max $1,000).



AGRICULTURAL PROPERTY

Taxed only on the value of the House, Garage and One Acre (HGA), remaining value exempt.



Proposed Levy Authority		NET CHANGE	
Annual	Monthly	Annual	Monthly
$310	$26	$154	$13
$361	$30	$179	$15
$413	$34	$205	$17

When Would New Revenue be Available?



Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral

Allows people 65 years of age or older with household income of $96,000 or less to defer a portion of property taxes on their home. Deferred property taxes plus accrued interest must be paid when home is sold or homeowner(s) dies.

Survey Says...

In February, a district budget survey showed most community members (81%) understood the money situation, and 7 in 10 expected big cuts. Student learning mattered most, with 92.5% ranking it first or second. Classroom teachers were the top staff priority, and many valued hands-on learning opportunities like trades and FFA.

EARLY VOTING BY DIRECT BALLOT BEGAN OCTOBER 16
MAKE A PLAN TO VOTE ON OR BEFORE NOVEMBER 3

There are three locations:

Swift County Courthouse, 304 14th St. North, Benson, MN 56215
Pope County Courthouse, 130 East Minnesota Ave, Glenwood, MN 56334
Chippewa County Courthouse, 629 N. 11th Street, Montevideo, MN 56265

Business hours: Mon-Fri 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. | **Additional hours:**

- Saturday, October 24 at 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- Tuesday, October 27 at 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.
- Saturday, October 31 at 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- Sunday, November 1 at 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- Monday, November 2 at 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.



ELECTION DAY VOTING

ELECTION DAY IS TUESDAY, NOV. 3

Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.



Another Ballot Question: Constitutional Amendment

Minnesota voters will also see a Constitutional Amendment on the November 3 ballot. It proposes increasing the Permanent School Fund's annual distribution to schools to up to 4.5% of its three-year average value, effective FY 2028.

For Benson Public Schools, approval would provide approximately:

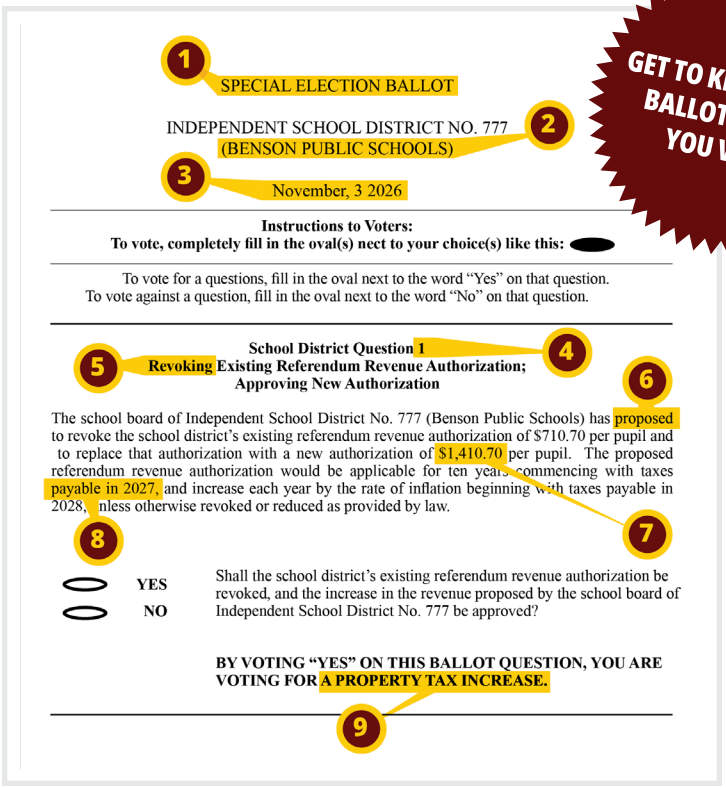
- **$20,600/year in additional annual funding**
- Approximately 0.1668% of the district's budget
- ZERO tax increase to residents



While appreciated, this amendment has a very minimal impact on Benson's financial challenges and does not replace the need for the operating levy.

Learn more about the Constitutional Amendment:
mnpsfamendment.org

GET TO KNOW YOUR BALLOT BEFORE YOU VOTE.



SPECIAL ELECTION BALLOT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 777
(BENSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS)

November, 3 2026

Instructions to Voters:
To vote, completely fill in the oval(s) nect to your choice(s) like this: ⬬

To vote for a questions, fill in the oval next to the word "Yes" on that question.
To vote against a question, fill in the oval next to the word "No" on that question.

School District Question 1
Revoking Existing Referendum Revenue Authorization;
Approving New Authorization

The school board of Independent School District No. 777 (Benson Public Schools) has proposed to revoke the school district's existing referendum revenue authorization of $710.70 per pupil and to replace that authorization with a new authorization of $1,410.70 per pupil. The proposed referendum revenue authorization would be applicable for ten years commencing with taxes payable in 2027, and increase each year by the rate of inflation beginning with taxes payable in 2028, unless otherwise revoked or reduced as provided by law.

⬭ YES
⬭ NO

Shall the school district's existing referendum revenue authorization be revoked, and the increase in the revenue proposed by the school board of Independent School District No. 777 be approved?

BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.

1. Legally, the referendum question is a Special Election because the school board voted to ask voters the question.

2. Serving more than 750 students, K-12, plus early learners and lifelong learners.

3. Please vote on or before Nov. 3. Early voting is NOW OPEN!

4. A second education-related question - the statewide Permanent School Fund amendment - is also on the November 3 ballot. If approved, it increases what every Minnesota school district receives from the existing fund without raising income or property taxes. If approved, Benson Public Schools could receive ~$20,000 per year beginning July 1, 2027 (IMPORTANT NOTE: leaving the question blank counts as a "no" vote).

5. Did you know Benson Public Schools has not passed a voter-approved levy since 2013. The graph on page 5 shows how the separation between inflation and actual funding was about $500 in 2013 and now it's $1,500.

6. The school board voted "unanimously" to ask voters to consider this referendum.

7. Benson Public Schools currently has lower school property taxes than neighboring school districts.

8. This revenue would be available to the school district for the 2027-28 school year.

9. For the median Benson home (valued at $175,000), taxes are estimated to increase $15/month.

Benson Public Schools
1400 Montana Avenue
Benson, MN 56215

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VOTE NOVEMBER 3

Virtual Meeting

Mon., Oct. 26, 6:00 p.m.
Visit bensonlevy4learning2026.com after October 23 for a link

Connect With Us

Web: bensonlevy4learning2026.com
Call: (320) 842-2040
Email: suptoffice@benson.k12.mn.us
Facebook: www.facebook.com/BensonPublicSchools777

Prepared and paid for by Benson Public Schools - ISD #777, 1400 Montana Avenue, Benson, MN 56215.