

School Referendum – Supporting Pinellas Students Since 2004

Every four years since 2004, Pinellas voters have authorized a local option one-half mill dedicated to teacher pay, the arts, technology and reading programs. When originally passed, Pinellas was only the 2nd district in the state to have a local tax and it produced a distinct advantage in hiring and the development of referendum program areas.

Now, most districts in the state have voter authorized local funding sources, including all our surrounding districts. This year, Pinellas voters are being asked to authorize one mill and add support staff supplemental pay to the approved uses. All other elements of the ballot language remain the same.

BALLOT TITLE: APPROVAL OF ONE MILL AD VALOREM TAX FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT OPERATING EXPENSES WITH INDEPENDENT OVERSIGHT

BALLOT QUESTION: Shall a Pinellas County School District ad valorem millage of one mill per year be levied beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2029, for necessary operating expenses including funds to recruit and retain quality teachers and support staff; preserve music, art and reading classes; and provide current technology, while sharing funds with public charter schools proportionate to student enrollment as required by law, with expenditure oversight by an independent citizens financial oversight committee?

If the voters say YES and the Referendum passes: Based on the 2023-24 tax roll, Pinellas teachers will receive an annual salary stipend of \$11, 081 and support personnel will receive \$2910. Funding for art, music, reading and technology will increase by almost 50%, from \$12.5 million to \$18.7 million.

If the voters say NO and the Referendum fails: This funding will stop in July of 2025, and teachers will lose their current supplement of \$6328, again based on the 2023-24 tax roll. Because Referendum money is the primary funding source for art, music, reading and technology programs, the district will have no choice but to make drastic cuts. All programs that exceed minimum state requirements will be in jeopardy.

Supporting Organizations

League of Women Voters	St. Petersburg Area Chamber of Commerce
Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association	CLEARPAC, Inc.
Pinellas County Council of PTAs	Pinellas/Tampa Bay Realtor Organization
Pinellas County Education Foundation	Pinellas County Economic Development Council
Arts for a Complete Education	AMPLIFY Clearwater
Pinellas Educational Support Professionals Association	
Service Employees International Union	
Concerned Organizations for Quality Education for Black Students (COQEBS)	

How the Referendum works

Local Funding – Local Control

Florida is 50th in per pupil spending from State sources. This Referendum produces money above and beyond State funding. All referendum money remains here in Pinellas County and by law; the Legislature cannot reduce the money our district gets from the state.

How is this money used?

The ballot language requires that Referendum funds only be used to recruit and retain quality teachers and staff, support reading programs and music and art classes, and provide current technology.

How do I know the money is used as advertised?

The ballot language also requires an Independent Financial Oversight Committee which meets every 90 days to review the spending (including charters). Their meetings are open to the public and their findings are regularly published. The Referendum money has always been spent exactly as promised and continues to be closely monitored.

Do our schools really need the money?

Our schools are not receiving the resources they need from the State. In the most recent Census report, Florida is \$5,636 (30%) below the national average in per pupil spending. The Referendum gives Pinellas schools an additional funding source controlled by our citizens.

How does Pinellas teacher pay compare to neighboring counties?

Last year, starting teacher pay was less than all our surrounding districts. The average Pinellas teacher made more than teachers in Pasco and Manatee, and \$300 more than teachers in Hillsborough, but \$10,876 less than those in Sarasota - even with the Referendum. Passage of the 2024 referendum will provide our teachers a supplement of \$11,018 a year. If the Referendum fails, our teachers will lose their current supplement of \$6,328 a year.

Why include support staff?

Our schools can't function without support staff, yet they are among the lowest paid employees. Pinellas school nurses (LPNs) make about \$30,000 and most classroom aides make under \$22,000. Passage of the referendum will provide support staff with \$2910 in supplemental pay.

How much is one mill?

Based on 2024 property values, the average single-family homeowner with a homestead exemption would pay \$223 a year, less than \$20 a month.

How do current school taxes compare to nearby counties?

When Pinellas voters enacted the referendum 20 years ago, there was only one other district in the state with a local option property tax. A half mill made Pinellas schools stand out. Now all our surrounding districts have both impact fees and local option sales taxes for capital projects. Pinellas has neither. And our surrounding districts also have a 1 mill local option property tax to fund operating expenses. (except Hillsborough, which will vote on a 1 mill tax in 2024)

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS
CURRENT DISCRETIONARY TAXES THAT SUPPORT SCHOOLS

County	Operating Millage	Sales Tax (Capital Projects)	Impact Fees (Capital Projects)
Hernando	1.0 mill	Yes, ½ cent	Yes
Hillsborough	1.0 mill failed in 2022; will be on ballot in 2024	Yes, two sales tax, ½ cent and ⅛ cent	Yes
Manatee	1.0 mill	Yes, ½ cent	Yes
Pasco	1.0 mill	Yes, ⅞ cent	Yes
Pinellas	0.5 mill	No	No
Sarasota	1.0 mill	Yes, ¼ cent	Yes



Is the money shared with charter schools?

State law requires this funding be shared with public charters based on student enrollment. Charter schools are required to use the funds for teachers and support staff, reading programs, art, music, and technology. They also must submit regular reports to the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee for review. No funds are ever shared with private or religious schools.

What happened to the lottery dollars?

The lottery no longer funds K-12 public schools. Pinellas received less than \$20,000 in the 2023/24 school year. That’s down from \$6.2 million in the 2005/06 school year.

I don’t have kids in the school system. Why should I care about the Referendum?

Good schools lower crime rates, reduce the need for social services, and support high property values. Our businesses need a well-educated workforce and skilled labor to thrive, and a pool of good workers encourages business expansion and relocation to our area. Great schools build great communities.

Learn more at pcsb.org/referendum

Video at https://youtu.be/bv2G2_5emSU?si=LLITiE52fkGey5CG