

## Referendum Q and A:

Q1: When will we know exactly how the monies gained from a referendum will be projected to spend?

A1: A Proposed Revenue Spending Plan is submitted to the DLGF. This is monitored as you must spend the money how the district has outlined the spending. The Proposed Revenue Spending Plan outlines the following:

Safety and Security: \$67,920

Retaining and attracting teachers and staff:

\$2,083,800

Improvements to student transportation: \$88,487

Operations fund: \$101,650

Q2: Will some of the dollars be spent on any building remodels, repairs, improvements, or any building additions? If so, what is the scope of these projects?

A2: At this time, we are looking at monies to sustain salaries, benefits, busing and programs. We are also looking at staffing, safety and programming that will further excel our district, leading to more and better opportunities for our students in Griffith. We are not looking at adding building projects to the referendum.

Q3: What student opportunities will be supported with the referendum dollars?

A3: If the referendum passes, the district will be able to maintain the following: small class sizes that

allow for individualized instruction, after school tutoring opportunities, remediation during the school day, after school programs for elementary students, STEAM, Music, Art, PE, and Library for elementary students, extra curriculars and sports programs. The district would like to increase dual credit opportunities and explore additional course offerings such as PLTW, Aviation, Robotics, and additional music course offerings. School Safety is always our number one concern. The district would like to employ one additional resource officer to increase the overall safety of our district.

Q4: What is the current outstanding general obligation debt of the school referendum?

A4: Griffith Public Schools currently has GO debt outstanding totaling \$1,095,000. GPS GO capacity as of today is \$3,544,340.

Q5: What will the exact tax impact per \$100 assessed value be for residential properties?

A5: .3294 cents. Please reference the calculator on the GPS website beginning Jan 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

Q6: How will we know the referendum money is spent as the taxpayers are told?

A6: The referendum is an added fund to the annual budget which is approved by the School Board and Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF). It is reported to the School Board each month like all current budgeted funds.

Q7: Will any of the referendum money have to be shared with private schools in this town?

A7: At this time, the law does NOT require us to share referendum money with the non-public schools in the boundaries of Griffith.

Q8: What exactly can the community expect to happen in the schools if this referendum is not passed?

A8: Several cost cutting measures are outlined in the presentation, all of which are considerations. We will need to decrease staffing immediately upon a failed referendum. Cuts will be made prior to June 1 of this current school year. Expect cuts of up to at least 30 staff members district-wide. Classroom sizes will increase significantly at all grade levels. The community will be put on notice that all bussing will end in three years. Parents and community members should expect to see less programs, course offerings, and extra curriculars for every grade level. The administrative team will expect to see a significant decrease in moral with a high turnover rate in staffing after a failed referendum. All considerations will need to be approved by the school board of trustees.

Q9: What is the livable wage you are seeking?

A9: As the cost of living has continues to rise, salaries have not risen significantly at GPS for many years. For several years, our base teacher salary was \$38,500, while those around us were closer to and above \$45,000. As we are recommending the base teacher salary to be \$42,000, some around us have reached \$50,000 per year. We have struggled to compete with districts around us that have passed referendums. We also need to live within our means. It is not our intention to necessarily match salaries around us. It is our intention to be comparable while

making this an outstanding district to work for. When someone is paid a comparable wage and enjoys coming to work and feels supported, it makes it a difficult place to leave.

Q10: How will wages and salaries be funded after the referendum has ended?

A10: A referendum lasts 8 years. My recommendation to the board is to continuously review and identify cost saving measures, determine short- and long-term goals, and identify solutions if those goals are not met. Most districts continue to “renew” their referendum. It is always in the best interest to protect the tax dollars of our community. Having another demographic study conducted will help us determine short- and long-term growth in the district.

Q11: Should we expect another referendum to follow this one to continue to support salary and raises?

A11: A referendum lasts 8 years. My recommendation to the board is to continuously review and identify cost saving measures, determine short- and long-term goals, and identify solutions if those goals are not met. Most districts continue to “renew” their referendum. It is always in the best interest to protect the tax dollars of our community. Having another demographic study conducted will help us determine short- and long-term growth in the district. The expectation is that you increase student enrollment each year. This creates “new money” to fund, and support raises. Voters can also pay close attention to who they are voting for at the state level and their stance on funding public education.

Q12: What is the referendum going to be used for?

A12: See A3

Q13: Where has the money been spent over the last 7 years?

A13: The PowerPoint presentation presented by Matt Ruess outlines exactly how money has been spent over the course of several years. This presentation can be located on our GPS website under the "Referendum" tab. We have received a second full scope financial analysis by Baker Tilly. This presentation is also posted under the referendum tab on our district website.

Q14: How did the school pay out previous Superintendent's and a Principal?

A14: Personnel questions will not be answered in this forum.

Q15: What is the School Board going to do to not continue making bad investments (hiring and firing those under contract, maybe better track record before expanding or extending contracts)?

A15: Leaders should be held accountable. Identifying great leadership is important to the overall success of GPS. Each administrator is held to a high standard, goals are reviewed at least twice per year, and annual evaluations determine overall work performance of an administrator. Before an extension of any contract, performance evaluations will be thoroughly reviewed and presented to the School Board of Trustees.

Q16: How was the GEER award spent, specifically?

A16: We received \$0.00 for GEER grant. We applied but did not receive the award. Please see GEER notice sent directly from the DOE below:

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Leah Domezich, Superintendent, Executive Officer, or Point of Contact  
Griffith Public Schools (4700)

Josh Garrison, Indiana Commission for Higher Education

**FROM:** Katie Jenner, Senior Education Advisor to Governor Eric J. Holcomb  
Ron Sandlin, Indiana State Board of Education

Nathan Williamson, Indiana Department of Education

**SUBJECT:** GEER Notice - Griffith Public Schools (4700)

**DATE:** August 19, 2020

Thank you for applying for GEER funds. Ultimately the statewide need exceeded the funding available for this program and we were not able to fund your proposal. We continue to pursue additional funding sources to meet the pressing need for student devices and internet connectivity in response to school closures due to COVID-19 and will hold onto your application in case another opportunity emerges.

**Nathan Williamson**

*Director of Title Grants and Support*

**Indiana Department of Education**

(317) 232-6671 | [nwilliamson@doe.in.gov](mailto:nwilliamson@doe.in.gov)

[www.doe.in.gov](http://www.doe.in.gov) Feedback: [How are we doing?](#)

Q17: How was federal stimulus money spent, specifically? How was/is **ESSERS** being spent, specifically? The correct name for the funds is ESSERS II and III.

A17: Cares Act: \$356,591.19 (\$352,173.19 GPS & \$4,418.00 Non-Pubs), ESSER II: \$1,555,604.45, ESSER III: \$ 3,493,666.62

Cares Act: GPS - \$24,045.38 in teacher stipends. \$151,849.00 two school buses to assist with adhering to social distancing guidelines. \$165,169.55 Cleaning products and supplies, thermometers, safety precautions and measurers.

ESSERS II: We are currently pay 34 teacher salary and benefits.

ESSERS III: We are not currently paying out of the grant. This money is being slated for remediation and tutoring. Amendments are still being made to both grants at this time.

Q18: Why do you live by the sword of a report from 2013?

A18: The demographic study was intended to share information with the community. Once a new demographic study is completed, it will again be shared with the community. Projections are made. Actuals have been shared in the financial presentation. This presentation can be located on the GPS website under the "Referendum" tab.

Q19: Do board members think another retired person will buy your home if you move for some reason?

A19: Board members have never shared with me or expressed to me that they have an interest in selling their home so I cannot speak to this question.

Q20: What is the current outstanding general obligation debt?

A20: General Obligation Debt of the district including Principal and Interest is \$1,358,352 at the start of 2022. Total Outstanding Debt (including Principal and Interest) of the School Corporation is \$26,478,872 as of January 2022.

Q21: How much money was spent on Ready and on what?

A21: \$1135.40 on a slide repair. The invoice date is 12/01/2020.

\$1305.00 on a sewer/plumbing repair. The invoice date is 04/17/2019.

\$4002.00 on clear security window film paid from Safety and Security grant. Invoice date is 06/11/2019.

\$5984.50 on HVAC repairs. Invoice dates include: 10/10/2019, 12/01/2019, 02/01/2020.

\$1122.13 on roof repairs. Invoice dates include: 05/09/2019, 06/20/2019.

\$1057.12 on equipment repairs. Invoice dates: 02/01/2021 and 03/01/2021.

\$386.50 on security swipe cards and service fee. Invoice date: 04/11/2019

\$1282.32 on Univent repairs/motors. Invoice date: 06/20/2019

\$5746.59 on Univent repairs (classrooms). Invoice dates: 04/17/2019, 09/12/2019, 10/10/2019.

\$1016.22 on filters. Invoice dates: 04/17/2019 and 03/19/2020.

\$1500.00 to clean and annual gym floor maintenance cleaning/finishing. Invoice date: 06/01/2020.

\$1962 on roof repairs. Invoice date: 12/30/2019

\$569.40 on Ice Melt for building usage. Invoice dates: 02/14/2019, 03/14/2019, 04/11/2019, 04/17/2019, 01/01/2020.

\$137.73 for plumbing repair and supplies.  
Invoice dates: 05/09/2019, 11/14/2019,  
12/01/2019, 04/01/2020.

Q22: Why doesn't the district just sell Ready  
Elementary?

A22: This is a great question. The law forces us to offer our  
building to a Charter School for \$1. This would adversely  
impact our schools and community.

\$675.00 on Fire Extinguisher Services. Invoice dates: 05/14/2019, 04/24/2020, 09/10/2020.

\$192.85 Paint and patch nurse's office. Invoice date: 12/05/2019.

\$364.77. Carpet Cleaning. Date: 07/11/2019

\$113.60. Equipment repairs, mowers. Invoice dates: 04/11/2019, 06/01/2020

\$23,545.92 on Johnson Controls fire protection service agreement, replace duct detector/beam. \$11,203 was our portion of this bill.

They YMCA picked up the other half at \$11,203.32. Invoice dates: 04/2021-06/2021.

\$9295.93 on Mechanical Concepts Incorporated (HVAC repairs). Invoice dates: 03/01/2020 and 10/01/2020.

\$1508.80 on replacement of overload equipment. Invoice date: 09/01/2020.

Q23: Do we have data that shows what grade level we are losing students?

A23: We have had the challenge of students moving in and moving out throughout the school year, and in some cases, we see students move in and out multiple times over the course of a single school year. We have not identified at what specific grade level students are moving out. The trend is lower enrolment each year

for several years. That said, we have seen an increase at our elementary schools this year, specifically Kindergarten. It is our hope that young families with children are moving into the community. Several people have described Griffith as landlocked. Others have expressed the need for a larger home with expanding their families.

Q24: Without spending money on another climate study, is there another way to gather data? Could we contact realtors?

A24: We do need to invest in another demographic study to assist us with making accurate projections of student growth, population, and the potential for expansion.

Q25: Why have talks of the referendum been tabled at school board meetings for so many months, and now beginning to be swiftly added to May ballot instead of November 2022?

A25: If you go back a few years, you will likely recall when a reduction in staff was done. Shortly after that, Ready was repurposed. Currently, we have no other option but to ask our taxpayers for a referendum. The referendum will need to go on the ballot in May because a large reduction in force will need to take place immediately should the referendum fail. November will be too late as cuts will have to be made prior to November.

Q26: Why, specifically does Griffith need a referendum?

A26: GPS needs a referendum to sustain current teacher salaries which will keep classroom sizes low, add additional staffing positions, additional school safety needs, and provide additional programming opportunities for students.

Q27: What other benefits are offered to teachers, staff, admin besides salary (health insurance, car, other benefits)?

A27: All full-time employees are offered health

insurance. Administrative benefit packages are on the GPS website as is the union contracts. Our paraprofessionals are currently part-time, not receiving benefits. We would like to see some paraprofessionals able to work full time and receive benefits with a referendum. Not one employee in our district has a car paid for by the district, including the Superintendent. Our Director of Safety and Security receives a transportation stipend as outlined in his contract.

Q28: How much is needed to have our teachers up to par with neighboring districts?

A28: We recently brought our base teacher pay up from \$38,500 to \$40,000. All Indiana schools needed to bring their salary up to at

least \$40,000 by next year. Some neighboring districts are raising their base pay up to \$50,000 per year. These same districts have passed at least one referendum already. Even with a referendum, we may not pay at the highest end of the salary. It is our hope to be comparable and provide a positive culture and climate to work in as a smaller district does provide that family feel that some teachers are looking for.

Q29: How will a referendum benefit GPS students?

A29: By passing a referendum, we will be able to maintain small classroom sizes, add additional support-staff positions, add programs and opportunities, implement additional safety, and expand current offerings.

Q30: Who will oversee the use of monies from the referendum?

A30: The DLGF, superintendent, CFO, and school board are tasked with overseeing the monies from a referendum. The state board of accounts also oversees ALL school expenditures.

Q31: Does township change effect the number of monies already received by GPS?

A31: This is something that we are currently researching, and I hope to have that number soon.

Q32: What happens if the referendum does not pass?

A32: Hard decisions will need to be made immediately. We will need to look at a significant reduction in force leading to increased classroom sizes, less teachers, and less supportive staff. Being that the Operations Fund is the fund that is depleting, we may need to look at eliminating transportation in the next 3 years. This is not to say that this is exactly what will happen, but we will need to find immediate ways to significantly reduce operational costs and salaries district wide.

Q33: What other solutions have been looked at besides a referendum?

A33: We had a significant reduction in staff in 2019. We repurposed a building in 2020. When we did the staff reduction, we decreased the number of supportive staff, teachers, SROs, administrators, guidance counselors, transportation employees, and secretaries. With the ESSERS monies, we have brought many of those positions back as we wanted to demonstrate to the community what we could do if we were funded adequately. The reduction in staff forced classroom sizes upwards of 40 in a classroom last year in some grade levels. The previous reduction in staff also cost us many great employees who left to work in higher paying districts.

Q34: What happened to the plans that the previous superintendent had?

A34: Several plans, ideas, etc. were discussed during that time. I, (Leah Dumezich) plan to take the best of a wide variety of methodologies, teaching strategies, and methods to best support the students of Griffith. A “one size fits all” approach does not meet the needs of ALL learners. Will I recommend “all” project-based learning? No. Will I recommend ONLY a traditional approach to teaching? No. I recommend that we create a learning environment that best meets the needs of our students. This may change each hour for some teachers. Students should have movement throughout their school day. Does this mean that we should ONLY have flex seating? No. This means that students who require more movement and sensory opportunities will have the ability to get what they need. I will NOT support a “teach to the test”

mentality. Our children are more than the results of a standardized test that does NOT give the whole picture of a child's abilities. In fact, standardized testing gives teachers very little data to help drive instruction, and it negatively impacts educators. We need to allow our teachers the autonomy to be creative, flexible, and innovative. If you treat educators like professionals and build positive relationships built on trust and respect, I believe that the same level of trust and respect will develop in classrooms throughout the district. Do we need technology? Yes, this is the world we live in. Do students need paper/pencil opportunities? Absolutely!! Do students need to have project-based and hands on opportunities in the classroom? Absolutely!

Q35: How many meetings will take place before the school board approves to move forward with the referendum?

A35: I will make the recommendation for the board to approve the language of the resolution in December. I will make the recommendation for the board to put a referendum on the ballot at the January meeting.