

Pinellas County School Referendum Renewal on November 2020 Ballot for all Pinellas Voters



In 2004, Pinellas voters approved a property tax to directly enhance Pinellas County schools. Voters have renewed it every four years since. In 2019, it cost the average single family homeowner in Pinellas \$85.85 for the year or \$7.15 a month, producing approximately \$44.5 million. If the voters of Pinellas County do not renew the tax, that funding will disappear from our classrooms next year.

BALLOT TITLE: APPROVAL OF THE CONTINUATION OF ONE-HALF MILL AD VALOREM TAX FOR SCHOOL OPERATING EXPENSES

BALLOT QUESTION: Shall the Pinellas County School District ad valorem millage of one-half mill per year be continued beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2025, for necessary operating expenses including funds to recruit and retain quality teachers; preserve reading programs and music and art classes; and provide current textbooks and technology, sharing funds with charter schools proportionate to student enrollment as required by law, with expenditure oversight by an independent citizens financial oversight committee?

***A YES vote will renew the tax for four years.
A NO vote will stop the additional funding to our schools.***

The ballot language **REQUIRES** the money to be spent:

- ***Recruiting and retaining quality teachers.*** This year, teachers receive an additional \$5,231 in salary to help us keep great teachers. Referendum funds also provide teachers with extra training, making them more effective.
- ***Preserving reading programs.*** Small group instruction, new culturally relevant texts and reading intervention help students succeed.
- ***Preserving music and art classes.*** The Referendum supports robust arts education programs and supplies our students with needed materials.
- ***Providing current textbooks and technology.*** Up to date materials and technology is vital to future careers and integrated into all aspects of student learning.

What happens if the Referendum fails?

The Referendum produced approximately \$44.5 million for Pinellas classrooms in 2019/20. If the Referendum is not renewed, the district will have a huge hole in its budget and will have no choice but to make drastic cuts. Of course Referendum supported teacher pay, remedial reading, art & music, and textbooks & technology would suffer, but all programs that exceed minimum state requirements will be in jeopardy. Summer Bridge, band, athletics, vocational training, ROTC, advanced placement and drop-out prevention could be cut.

What does this cost?

This is a tax based on property values. In 2019, the average single family homeowner in Pinellas paid \$85.85 for the year or \$7.15 a month; the average condo owner paid \$77.61 or less than \$6.50 a month.

Is this a new tax?

This is not a new tax. Pinellas voters approved the 1/2 mill in 2004 and have renewed it every four years.



How do I know the money is used as advertised?

The ballot language requires that Referendum funds only be used to recruit and retain quality teachers, preserve reading programs and music and art classes, and provide current textbooks and technology. The ballot language also requires an Independent Financial Oversight Committee made up of local citizens 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?

In the most recent Census report, Florida ranks 46th in the country in per pupil expenditures and is \$3,266 below the national average. Our schools are not receiving the resources they need from the State. The Referendum gives Pinellas County an additional funding source controlled by our citizens.

Could the State take this money?

No. All the money collected remains here in Pinellas County and by law; the Legislature cannot reduce the amount of money the district normally gets from the state. This Referendum produces money above and beyond what the States provides.

What happened to the lottery dollars?

Pinellas discretionary lottery dollars totaled just \$342,315 in the 2019/20 school year. That's down from \$6.2 million in the 05/06 school year, a reduction of almost 95% in fifteen years.

How does Pinellas teacher pay compare to neighboring counties?

Last year the average Pinellas teacher made more than teachers in Pasco and Manatee, but less than those in Hillsborough and Sarasota - even with the Referendum. If the Referendum supplement ended our teachers would lose more than \$5,200 a year.

Is the money shared with charter schools?

A new state law requires renewal funding be shared with district approved charters based on student enrollment. For perspective, if this law were in effect for the 19/20 school year, approximately \$3 million of the \$44.5 million raised would have been shared with charter schools. The ballot language requires all charters use the funds for teachers, reading programs, art, music, textbooks and technology and that regular reports be submitted to the Independent Citizens Oversight Committee for review. No funds would be shared with private or religious schools.

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