



*Opportunities, for Every Child, Every Day.
"It's the Tiger Way!"*



Gillett School District

208 West Main Street P.O. Box 227 Gillett, WI 54124-0227

Gillett School District: A Revised Path Forward in the November 2026 Operational Referendum

Gillett School District: A Revised Path Forward

On August 24, 2026, the Gillett School Board unanimously voted to place a non-recurring Operational Referendum on the upcoming November 3 ballot. This measure asks our community to authorize an increase to the District's revenue limit to help us maintain quality staffing and critical educational opportunities for our students.

Across Wisconsin, public school districts are grappling with significant financial challenges. Statutory state revenue limits have not kept pace with historic inflation or the escalating real-world costs of health care, utilities, transportation, and educational supplies. Because state aid mechanisms have lagged behind actual expenses, local communities across the state are increasingly required to rely on local referendums simply to sustain baseline operations and keep school doors open. We want to be completely transparent with our residents about our budget reality, what steps we have already taken internally to stretch every dollar, how we listened to community feedback, and why your support is vital for the future of our schools.

What's Been Done to Date: Fiscal Responsibility

Before bringing a referendum proposal to taxpayers, the District took hard, proactive measures to reduce spending. Gillett staff are currently the lowest-compensated in our region across all categories—certified, non-certified, and administrative. Despite maintaining the lowest tax levy among neighboring districts, the Board made difficult structural cuts, saving over \$695,000 over the past two school years:

- **Staffing Restructure Saved \$260,000:** Eliminated a 4K teaching position (\$80,000); reduced a full-time custodian to part-time (\$50,000); replaced the Dean of Students with a behavioral interventionist (\$40,000); and eliminated two paraprofessional positions over two years (\$90,000).
- **Operations & Benefits Saved Over \$230,000:** Restructured staff health insurance plans (over \$90,000); discontinued non-required college credit course offerings (\$40,000); and transitioned the 3K program to a parent-funded model starting midyear 2026–2027 (\$100,000).
- **Grants & Budget Efficiencies Saved Over \$205,000:** Reorganized budget structures to maximize state special education reimbursement (\$65,000); reduced OT/PT support staff (\$100,000); and secured grant funding for a district van to cut daily bussing costs (\$40,000).
- **Resourcefulness & Partnerships:** Partnered with the Bonduel School District to share a Physical Therapist, collaborated with NWTC for free and low-cost technology resources, reduced administrative contracts, and streamlined bulk custodial purchasing.

A Revised Request Based on Community Feedback

We heard clear feedback from our community: taxpayers wanted us to look even harder at our long-term projections and take a more conservative approach.

Dr. Nathan Hanson, District Administrator
Shawn Limberg, Secondary Principal

Amy McKeefry, Elementary Principal
Wendy Simonis, Special Education Director



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In response, the Board adjusted its strategy. Instead of a five-year stepped increase, we moved to a three-year flat dollar proposal of \$1.9 million per year (\$1,900,000 in 2026–27, 2027–28, and 2028–29). This revised approach projects an initial tax levy adjustment for the 2026–2027 school year, followed by a projected decrease in the overall tax levy across the final two years of the referendum term.

Why This Matters: The Real-World Impact on Students

Gillett has reached a tipping point where additional revenue authority is essential. The District has been operating at a deficit and drawing down its fund balance to levels that threaten our financial stability—potentially requiring short-term borrowing just to cover basic day-to-day operations. Without additional operational authority, spending estimates project a \$1.4 million deficit in 2026–2027, a \$1.97 million deficit in 2027–2028, and a \$2.29 million deficit in 2028–2029.

Because administrative overhead and operational efficiencies have already been cut to the limit, unaddressed deficits directly translate into immediate losses inside the classroom. Without referendum support, the District will be forced to make significant reductions that directly impact students:

- **Increased Class Sizes:** Staffing cuts will require combining grade levels or enlarging class sizes, reducing the individual attention teachers can give to each child.
- **Eliminated Programs & Electives:** Because these courses are not required by the state, academic pathways, career and technical education (CTE) courses, electives, and extracurricular opportunities that keep students engaged and prepared for life after graduation will face severe cutbacks or outright cancellation.
- **Staff Retention Struggles:** Continued inability to offer competitive compensation will lead to continued high turnover, making it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain high-quality educators for our schools.

Moving Forward Together

Our local schools are a shared community investment and the heartbeat of Gillett. The Board remains deeply committed to balancing two essential obligations: delivering the high-quality education our children deserve and serving as responsible, accountable stewards of your tax dollars.

Please join us at one of the upcoming referendum information meetings – September 29 and October 15 at 6pm in the Secondary Commons – to get the facts and your questions answered.

The referendum and district finances will also be discussed as part of our Annual Meeting on October 28 at 5pm in the Secondary Commons. The regular October Board Meeting will follow.

We encourage all residents to review the facts, reach out with questions, and stay informed as we plan for the future of our district.

For more information please visit <https://gillett.referendumfacts.org/>

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