

Understanding the 2025 Property Tax Increase in the Riverdale School District

By Jeff Campbell, Riverdale School District

As taxpayers within the Riverdale School District receive their 2025 property tax statements, many families and businesses have understandably expressed concern about the increase in school taxes. Statewide, this is the most significant property tax increase in three decades, with an average increase of 7.8%. I'd like to take this opportunity to explain the reasons behind these changes and how state funding decisions and rising property values have impacted our local tax levy.

Rising Equalized Property Values

One of the primary drivers of the increase in your property tax bill is the rise in equalized property values across our district. Equalized value is the measure used by the State of Wisconsin to ensure fair and equitable property taxation among municipalities. When equalized values increase, the same school levy is spread across a larger base—but to maintain necessary revenue to meet our budget obligations, districts often need to adjust their levies accordingly. In many parts of the state this year, equalized property valuations climbed substantially, increasing the overall tax burden for property owners. In 2025, equalized property values in Riverdale and surrounding areas increased significantly compared to prior years.

No Increase in State General Aid

While the Riverdale School District continues to work efficiently and maintain high educational standards, we are not immune to broader fiscal trends affecting school funding across the state. The 2025–27 Wisconsin state budget allowed for modest increases in state revenue limits (\$325 per pupil) but did not include an increase in general school aid. In the 2025 fiscal year, the State of Wisconsin did not increase the amount of general school aid provided to districts. That means Riverdale School District received roughly the same state funding as in previous years despite rising operational costs—including inflationary pressures on materials, supplies, utilities, and transportation.

Historically, general aid has helped offset the impact of revenue limit increases on local property taxpayers, but this year that support did not materialize. As a result, local districts like ours are required to make up the difference through local property taxes.

Increased Costs from Private School Voucher Programs

Another factor affecting property tax levies statewide, including here in Riverdale, is the increase in payments required for private school voucher programs. State legislation expanded voucher eligibility and increased the amounts districts must pay to support families choosing private schooling options. These payments are funded through the district's tax levy, which directly affects property tax calculations. Statewide, the per-pupil voucher amount increased significantly for the 2025–26 school year. This increase did not come with additional state funding to cover

the cost; instead, it shifted the responsibility to local districts like Riverdale. As a result, a larger share of property tax revenue is now allocated to voucher program payments.

Riverdale has seen a steady increase in the last couple of years. This year was a substantial increase. The amount of public taxpayers' money going to students living in the Riverdale district but attending private schools was \$94,025 in 23-24, \$97,121 in 24-25, and increased by \$90,919 this year to \$188,040. This number is not known until October 15 of each year, which makes it very difficult to plan budgets. There is a movement to include this number on next year's tax bill, so local taxpayers understand the amount going to students attending Riverdale and the amount funding private school students under the Wisconsin School Choice program.

Spring Referendum Passage

Last spring, voters in our community approved a referendum that will allow the district to maintain and improve essential educational programs, services, and infrastructure. I am deeply grateful to the community for their support.

The referendum funds are necessary to preserve things like:

- Update classroom technology and materials
- Safe and efficient building maintenance
- Continue learning opportunities for students
- Competitive teacher salaries to recruit and retain excellent staff

However, the referendum's positive impact also requires an adjustment to the tax levy to implement the approved plan. The district carefully planned this allocation, and we will continue to monitor expenditures to ensure funds are used responsibly and effectively.

Looking Ahead

The Riverdale School District remains committed to fiscal responsibility and continues to seek cost savings, operational efficiencies, and alternative revenue sources. If you have questions about your tax bill, the referendum, or how school funding works in Wisconsin, please contact the District Office. We welcome the opportunity to continue this conversation.

Thank you for your continued support of Riverdale schools and our students.