The Waterloo School District is one of 92 this year to exceed the revenue cap to pay for operational expenses, including teacher salaries and building costs.

Like many other school districts in Wisconsin, after a biennial budget with no increase in per-pupil spending, the school district is turning to taxpayers for funding in what has become an ongoing trend statewide. Forty-two school districts will ask referendum questions this November.

The number of operational referenda sets a new record for Wisconsin this year; only in 2001 did the state come close with 84 such elections, according to figures from the Department of Public Instruction’s website.

Districts seeking operational funding this fall also include Fort Atkinson, Waunakee, Sun Prairie and Whitewater.

Other area districts have sought operating referendums in the past. Just this April, Marshall passed nearly $2 million in referendum questions.

The Deerfield Community School District has passed just over $7 million in referendums since 2008, all of which to handle increasing operation costs and sustaining programming.

In 2017, Cambridge School District passed a $1.6 million recurring referendum. But, the district went back to the community in 2020 for another recurring referendum, this time for $150,000.

McFarland School District has passed $1.3 million in referendums since 2016. In 2020, the Monona Grove community agreed to pay an additional $3.7 million each year until the 2024-2025 school year so the district could continue its level of staffing and programming.

If the Lake Mills Area School District wasn’t pursuing a capital referendum this fall to potentially add a new school, Superintendent Tonya Olson has said the district would likely be pursuing an operational referendum to mitigate rising costs.

In 2017, Cambridge, Deerfield, DeForest, Lodi, Marshall, McFarland, Middleton, Monona Grove, Mount Horeb, Stoughton, Oregon, Sun Prairie, Verona, Waterloo, Waunakee and Wisconsin Heights, the letter explains the impact of reduced state funding on districts.

“The number of operational referendum questions on upcoming ballots reflects a significant shift in the state’s commitment to funding schools. Over the years, more of the responsibility for funding schools has moved from the state to local property taxpayers, via referendums,” the letter reads.

Members of the Lake Mills Area School District met with community members at a local book store to discuss the details of their upcoming capital referendum and answer questions. Other districts statewide are holding similar information sessions in an effort to help residents understand the impact of their referendums and bolster support for the measures.