BANACH, BANACH & CASSIDY
OUTSIDE INSIGHT®

# Michigan School Election Observations

## November 3, 2026 General Election

Prepared by Banach, Banach & Cassidy (BB&C) for Michigan school leaders and partners · November 23, 2026

## Executive Summary

Michigan voters approved $3.4 billion in school requests on November 3. Statewide, 26 of 42 school bonds passed, a 61.9% success rate. Of the six state-qualified bonds that asked for a higher tax rate, two passed. Both were BB&C campaigns.

Voters tend to approve ballot proposals they help shape. BB&C sees this pattern every election cycle.

School districts that won after a previous loss changed the request to align with what residents said they would support. Several districts that cut only the dollar amount without seeking voter input lost again.

Large bonds did well in the November 3rd general election. The six largest bonds on the ballot all passed.

Operating millage renewals passed 86.1% of the time, but two losses show they are not “slam dunks.” About 36 percent of sinking fund increases passed.

BB&C’s client school districts were two for three this election cycle. Eastpointe's successful $99 million bond and Lamphere's successful $47.3 million bond both increased the tax rate. Jefferson's $28.7 million bond failed with about 48% yes.

This report provides statewide election information, six observations, BB&C's client results, and five questions school district leaders should ask before presenting a ballot proposal. Full results by district appear in the appendix.

## The Numbers at a Glance

Bond approval fell to about 62%. Operating millages again passed at the highest rates.

| Measure | November 3, 2026 |
|---|---|
| **School bonds on the ballot** | 42 |
| **Bonds approved** | 26 (61.9%) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bonds rejected** | 16 (38.1%) |
| **Dollars approved** | $3.4 billion |
| **Dollars rejected** | About $528 million |
| **Largest bond approved** | Dearborn Public Schools, $1.51 billion |
| **State-qualified bonds asking for a tax-rate increase** | 6 on the ballot, 2 approved (both BB&C clients) |
| **Operating millage renewals approved** | 31 of 36 (86.1%) |
| **Operating millage increases approved** | 10 of 14 (71.4%) |
| **Intermediate school district millages approved** | 4 of 6 (66.7%) |
| **Sinking fund renewals approved** | 6 of 9 (66.7%) |
| **Sinking fund increases approved** | 5 of 14 (35.7%) |

## Bond approval by election

November's school finance election success rate is lower than the last two elections. The dollar total is the largest in the last five elections. Dearborn's bond alone accounted for 44% of the approved dollar total.

| Election | Percent of school bonds approved |
|---|---|
| **May 2025** | 49% |
| **August 2025** | 58.3% |
| **November 2025** | 64.6% |
| **May 2026** | 63.8% |
| **November 2026** | 61.9% |

# What We Observed

BB&C has six observations related to the November election results. Each one carries a lesson for districts planning a financial ballot proposal.

## A tax-rate increase is still the hardest ask

Most bond proposals on the ballot asked voters to keep paying a current rate. The Michigan Department of Treasury's list of state-qualified bonds shows six school districts asked for a higher rate. Only two passed: Eastpointe's 3.50 mill increase and Lamphere's 2.50 mill increase.

Both Eastpointe and Lamphere asked residents what they would support before the Board of Education finalized the ballot request. Eastpointe's survey and focus panel led the school district to cut its request from about $107 million to $99 million. Voters approved it 64% to 36% on the first try.

**Lesson.** School districts that need a tax rate increase should test the amount with residents before the Board of Education finalizes its ballot proposal. Research costs less financially and emotionally than conducting a second election.

## Second tries win when the request changes for a reason

At least five bond proposals passed this cycle after a recent loss.

| District | Earlier result | November 3, 2026 |
|---|---|---|
| **Comstock** | Failed November 2025 ($31.8M) and May 2026 ($23.7M) | Passed, $23.7M |
| **Brighton** | Failed May 2026 ($156.3M) | Passed, $90.3M |
| **Lake Orion** | Failed November 2025 ($272M) | Passed, $116M |
| **Lamphere** | Failed twice in 2025 | Passed, $47.3M with a 2.50 mill increase |
| **Allendale** | Failed twice | Split in two: $66.7M passed, $27M failed |

Some school districts reduced the ballot amount and lost again. Gwinn went from $48.1 million to $25 million on its fifth try in recent years. St. Johns went from $99.8 million to $40 million. Hopkins tied 1,091 to 1,091 in May and lost again in November. Yale drew 34% yes in May and lost again.

By itself, reducing the amount of a ballot proposal did not automatically generate a win. Residents needed to see what changed and why.

**Lesson.** Before a second attempt, learn why the first failed. Ask the people who opposed the proposal,

and those who stayed home.

## November turnout carried large bonds

The six largest bonds on the ballot all passed: Dearborn ($1.51 billion), Chippewa Valley ($288 million), Birmingham ($240 million), Farmington ($171 million), Royal Oak ($165 million) and DeWitt ($157 million). The largest bond to fail was Hopkins at $98.7 million.

That differs from the past year. In November 2025, Lake Orion ($272 million) and Rockford ($230 million) failed. In May 2026, Brighton's $156.3 million bond failed with 48% yes.

A general election draws a larger, broader electorate than a May or August election, and large requests performed better in it.

**Lesson.** Selecting an election date is a strategy decision. Model the likely electorate for each date before selecting one.

## Operating renewals are not "automatic"

Eighty-six percent of operating millage renewals passed. Four of six intermediate school district millages passed. Both Allegan Area ESA millages failed by fewer than 750 votes.

Bridgeport-Spaulding lost its operating renewal by 98 votes, 2,731 to 2,829. Its sinking fund request failed on the same ballot.

Hemlock lost its operating renewal, 2,274 to 2,526, on the same ballot as a failed $17.8 million bond. Hemlock's superintendent said the school district will invite residents to give input, one-on-one or at a town hall, before it decides what comes next.

**Lesson.** Run a renewal as a campaign. Tell residents who pays, what the money provides, and that homeowners do not pay non-homestead millages.

## Sinking fund renewals pass. Increases struggle

About two-thirds of sinking fund renewals passed. Only 35.7% of sinking fund increases did.

Midland provides an interesting case study in school finance elections. Voters rejected its $285 million bond in May 2025. The school district then surveyed nearly 1,900 residents and asked for a 1.5-mill sinking fund instead. It passed 14,016 to 11,897.

**Lesson.** After a bond fails, a different approach can be a better next step.

## Small margins decided several races

Bridgeport-Spaulding's operating renewal failed by 98 votes. St. Charles's $10.5 million bond passed by 66. Freeland's $21.2 million bond passed by 292. Breckenridge was first listed as passing on Treasury's list, then failed by two votes in official county results. Shepherd passed by 35 votes after a failed 2024 attempt.

**Lesson.** Absentee ballots reach voters weeks before Election Day. The information campaign must be complete when they arrive, and every identified supporter must vote.

## BB&C Client Results

BB&C supported three campaigns this cycle. All three asked voters to approve tax rate increases. Two passed.

| District | Proposal | Result |
|---|---|---|
| **Eastpointe Community Schools** | $99M bond, 3.50 mill increase | Passed, 64% to 36%, first try |
| **Lamphere Schools** | $47.3M bond, 2.50 mill increase | Passed, 57% to 43% on the third try |
| **Jefferson Schools (Monroe)** | $28.7M bond | Failed, about 48% to 52% |

**Eastpointe.** A focus panel and community survey in May 2026 showed what residents would and would not support. The district cut its request from about $107 million to $99 million. It passed on the first try. Eastpointe voters had also approved a non-homestead operating millage replacement in May.

**Lamphere.** Lamphere lost two bond elections in 2025. It came back with community research behind the request and passed a tax rate increase on the third try.

**Jefferson.** The bond failed with about 48% yes. That margin makes a second attempt realistic. The next step is to learn which voter concerns influenced the no vote.

## Five Questions to Ask Before Going to the Voters

Residents vote for their own reasons, not the school district's. These five questions can help a Board of Education hear those reasons before it finalizes a ballot proposal. A short survey or focus panel can ask all five.

**Why might residents want this?** Ask residents, not staff, what they would gain. Their answers should shape the campaign message.

**How ready are voters, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = low and 10 = high?** Measure readiness by voter group before the Board of Education commits to a dollar amount.

**Why not a higher number?** Ask residents who are a 4 or 5 what it would take to get a higher rating. Their answers can show which voters the school district can still win over.

**What would be different if the work were done?** Ask what people picture: a secure entrance, a cooler classroom, a shorter bus ride.

**Why does that matter to them?** The answer shows which projects to emphasize in your messaging. Report the answers people give in their own words. Then move to the smallest next step: a building tour, a community meeting, or an absentee ballot application.

## About This Report

BB&C publishes Election Observations after each Michigan school finance election. County canvassers certified the results on November 17. Bond counts use Treasury's certified totals for state-qualified bonds and county results for the rest. Operating and sinking fund millage counts come from Gongwer News Service. Intermediate school district counts and district results come from county clerks, the Michigan Department of Treasury, Decision Desk HQ, the Builders Exchange of Michigan, and local news reports. Where sources disagree, we note it in the appendix.

Banach, Banach & Cassidy is a Michigan-based community research and engagement firm. For 30 years, BB&C has conducted community surveys, focus panels, and ballot campaigns for school districts.

## Contact

To talk through what these results mean for your school district, contact:

Kelsey Birkmeier, BB&C's CEO, kelsey@banach.com (586-623-2986)

Or Mark Birkmeier, BB&C's EVP, mark@banach.com (419-979-6154)

# Appendix: November 3, 2026 Results

All 122 school ballot measures on the November 3 ballot, passed first, then failed, each in alphabetical order. Millages are labeled renewal or increase only where the ballot language confirms it. BB&C clients are marked.

* Not yet confirmed against official county results. These rows use unofficial Decision Desk HQ totals or county results not yet marked official, and could change. Chippewa Hills is counted as passed on unofficial totals and is included in the statewide bond count. The Builders Exchange of Michigan lists it as failed.

| District | Type | Amount | Result |
|---|---|---|---|
| Allendale (Prop 1)* | Bond | $66.7M | Passed |
| Alpena-Montmorency-Alcona ESD* | ISD millage (special education) | | Passed |
| Bear Lake | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Beecher | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Big Jackson | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Birch Run | Sinking fund renewal | | Passed |
| Birmingham | Bond | $240.0M | Passed |
| Breitung Township* | Sinking fund renewal | | Passed |
| Brighton | Bond | $90.3M | Passed |
| Brimley | Bond | $15.0M | Passed |
| Camden-Frontier | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Central Montcalm* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Charlevoix | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Cheboygan* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Cheboygan* | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Chippewa Hills* | Bond | $29.9M | Passed |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Chippewa Valley | Bond | $288.0M | Passed |
| Clinton* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Coloma* | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Comstock | Bond | $23.7M | Passed |
| Comstock Park | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Concord | Operating millage | | Passed |
| COP ESD* | ISD millage (special education) | | Passed |
| Copper Country ISD* | ISD millage (special education) | | Passed |
| Dansville* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| De Tour | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Dearborn | Bond | $1.51B | Passed |
| DeWitt | Bond | $157.0M | Passed |
| Eastpointe (BB&C) | Bond | $99.0M | Passed |
| Escanaba* | Operating millage increase | | Passed |
| Farmington | Bond | $171.0M | Passed |
| Ferndale | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Freeland | Bond | $21.2M | Passed |
| Goodrich* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Grand Haven* | Bond | $98.6M | Passed |
| Grand Ledge* | Bond | $123.5M | Passed |
| Hale* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Harrison* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Hartford | Operating millage | | Passed |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hartland | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Hastings | Bond | $24.8M | Passed |
| Holt* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Howell | Operating millage increase | | Passed |
| Howell | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Hudsonville* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Imlay City* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Ironwood* | Bond | $12.5M | Passed |
| Jonesville | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Kaleva Norman Dickson* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Kalkaska* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Kelloggsville | Bond | $38.1M | Passed |
| Kenowa Hills* | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Lake Orion | Bond | $116.0M | Passed |
| Lamphere (BB&C) | Bond | $47.3M | Passed |
| Les Cheneaux* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Linden | Sinking fund renewal | 1.1603 mills | Passed |
| Mackinaw City* | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Manistee* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Mason County Eastern* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Merrill | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Midland | Sinking fund | 1.5 mills | Passed |
| Montrose | Sinking fund renewal | | Passed |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mt. Morris | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Nottawa | Bond | $4.4M | Passed |
| Onekama | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Ontonagon* | Bond (buses) | $0.5M | Passed |
| Oxford* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Paw Paw | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Redford Union | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Riverview | Bond | $30.0M | Passed |
| Rockford | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Romulus | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Royal Oak | Bond | $165.0M | Passed |
| Saginaw ISD* | ISD millage (CTE) | | Passed |
| Saugatuck | Bond | $49.5M | Passed |
| Schoolcraft | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Shepherd | Bond | $14.9M | Passed |
| South Haven | Operating millage | | Passed |
| St. Charles | Bond | $10.5M | Passed |
| St. Louis | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Stanton Township* | Operating millage | | Passed |
| Taylor | Operating millage renewal | | Passed |
| Waterford | Operating millage | | Passed |
| White Pigeon* | Sinking fund | | Passed |
| Wyandotte | Operating millage | | Passed |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Allegan Area ESA | ISD millage (CTE) | | Failed |
| Allegan Area ESA | ISD millage (special education) | | Failed |
| Allendale (Prop 2)* | Bond | $27.0M | Failed |
| Almont* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Au Gres-Sims* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Benzie Central* | Operating millage | | Failed |
| Benzie Central* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Boyne Falls | Operating millage | | Failed |
| Breckenridge | Bond | $12.4M | Failed |
| Bridgeport-Spaulding | Operating millage renewal | | Failed |
| Bridgeport-Spaulding | Sinking fund increase | | Failed |
| Britton Deerfield | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Central Lake | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Durand | Bond | $30.3M | Failed |
| Gwinn | Bond | $25.0M | Failed |
| Hemlock | Bond | $17.8M | Failed |
| Hemlock | Operating millage renewal | | Failed |
| Holly | Bond | $97.6M | Failed |
| Hopkins | Bond | $98.7M | Failed |
| Houghton Lake* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Hudsonville* | Sinking fund renewal | | Failed |
| Jefferson (BB&C) | Bond | $28.7M | Failed |
| Mason County Eastern* | Sinking fund | | Failed |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Meridian | Bond | $14.0M | Failed |
| Mesick* | Bond | $17.1M | Failed |
| Mio-AuSable* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Parchment | Bond | $41.0M | Failed |
| Perry* | Bond | $27.8M | Failed |
| Pinconning* | Bond | $19.9M | Failed |
| Posen* | Operating millage | | Failed |
| Reed City* | Bond | $10.8M | Failed |
| St. Johns | Bond | $40.0M | Failed |
| Summerfield | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| Tri County Area* | Operating millage | | Failed |
| Tri County Area* | Sinking fund | | Failed |
| West Branch-Rose City* | Operating millage | | Failed |
| Yale* | Bond | $20.0M | Failed |

## Appendix: Sources


1. Bridge Michigan, Majority of Michigan school bonds pass in Nov. election, November 5, 2026
2. Builders Exchange of Michigan, November 2026 School Bond Proposal Update
3. Michigan Department of Treasury, Unofficial Qualified School Bond Election Results for 11/03/2026 (distributed by email)
4. Bridge Michigan, Most school bonds pass in Tuesday's election, May 2026
5. Bridge Michigan, November 2025 school bond results
6. Bridge Michigan, August 2025 school bond results
7. Bridge Michigan, May 2025 school bond results
8. Michigan Department of Treasury, 2025 School Bond Qualification and Loan Program Annual Report, Appendix A
9. WSGW, November 2026 Unofficial Election Results
10. WNEM, Hemlock voters reject school bond proposal and operating millage renewal, November 5, 2026
11. Citizen Portal, Midland steering team recommends sinking fund, June 2026
12. WOOD TV, One bond proposal passed, one rejected in third try from Allendale Public Schools, November 4, 2026
13. Decision Desk HQ, November 3, 2026 Michigan election results by county (votes.decisiondeskhq.com)
14. WHMI, November 3rd General Election Unofficial Results

15. WDIV, 2026 General Election Results for Monroe County School District Boards, Millages
16. Gongwer News Service, 2026 Local Ballot Issues summary (gongwer.com/elections)
17. County clerk election results for the November 3, 2026 election, including Allegan, Barry, Kalamazoo, Saginaw and Van Buren counties