



NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Communication and Media Relations, 678-301-6021

Public hearings scheduled on millage rate adoption – Rate to remain the same, tax increase announced due to non-rollback

As required by law, the Gwinnett County Board of Education (GCBOE) will hold three public hearings as part of its process for setting the millage. The first will be at 11:45 a.m. on June 19, and the second at 6:00 p.m. on June 19, both in the Board Room at the Instructional Support Center. The third will be held on June 26 at 7:00 p.m. in the Board Room at the Instructional Support Center, located at 437 Old Peachtree Road NW in Suwanee.

The school system's Fiscal Year 2015 (FY2015) budget was adopted May 15, 2014. In setting the millage rate to support the FY15 budget, the School Board is looking to maintain the current total school millage rate of 21.85.

The budget provides resources-- both financial and human-- to help the school system accommodate its growing student population. GCPS' enrollment is expected to grow by more than 3,200 students, bringing the total projected enrollment for next school year to more than 172,000. To accommodate student growth, the system will open a new middle school at the beginning of the 2014-15 school year.

Total state revenue will increase due to a reduction in the "austerity" cuts made to the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funding formula, student enrollment growth, and increases in teacher benefit costs. While the QBE "austerity" cut is smaller than it was in FY2014, the cumulative effect of these reductions since 2003 is the loss of approximately \$815 million for Gwinnett County Public Schools. This still presents a formidable challenge to meeting the future needs of the continually growing school system.

Local revenue is also budgeted to increase by approximately \$20 million due to a projected net growth of 5% in the property tax digest, breaking a string of five consecutive years in which the net digest declined cumulatively by over 25%. Even with the projected increase, the property tax digest for FY2015 will be 22% less than it was for FY2009.

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All of the additional state and local revenue projected for FY2015 is needed to fund the projected student enrollment growth and, for the first time since the 2009-10 school year, provide a salary increase for teachers and other system employees. All employees will receive a 2% cost-of-living adjustment and, for those eligible, a longevity-step salary increase.

In order to keep the local tax digest current, the Gwinnett County Tax Assessor's Office conducts annual property value updates (reassessments) on a rotating basis. By state law, local taxing authorities, such as GCBOE, must either keep their tax collections revenue-neutral (by decreasing the millage rate to offset the gained taxes from the property value updates) or announce a tax increase (even though the actual millage rate isn't increasing). The Board is considering adopting a combined millage rate of 21.85, the same millage rate as last year's rate, and therefore required to announce a proposed property tax increase. This means that taxpayers whose property has not been reassessed will see no change in their school tax bill.

The total school millage rate is made up of two portions-- the maintenance and operations (M&O) millage and the debt-service millage. Funds generated by the M&O millage pay for the day-to-day operations of the school system, including employee salaries, instructional materials, student transportation, and school utility costs. The debt-service millage is used to pay down the School Board's long-term debt from bond referenda passed over the years to pay for school construction.

The M&O millage is recommended to remain at 19.80 mills and the debt-service rate is recommended to remain at 2.05 mills. This will result in a total recommended millage rate of 21.85 mills.

Citizens may address the Gwinnett County Board of Education at any of the three public hearings. A sign-up sheet will be available at the hearings for those wishing to speak. There is no need to sign up in advance of the meeting date.

A copy of the adopted budget is available for public review on the school system's website at www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us or through the school system's Budget Department. For information, call 678-301-6200.