



Steve Barnette  
Superintendent

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

June 11, 2024

# **Board of Education Approves FY2025 Budget Supporting Students, Teachers, & Staff**

## **Maintains Current Tax Rate While Enhancing School Operations**

The Paulding County Board of Education has adopted a budget for the upcoming school year that:

- Funds operations to support teaching and student learning,
- Addresses enrollment growth with the opening of Crossroads Middle School and provides more than \$37 million in funding for classroom additions and renovations at North Paulding High School, Northside Elementary School, Roberts Elementary School, along with multiple school renovation projects,
- Supports safety and security enhancements with additional funding,
- Continues the district's 1-to-1 program to provide technology resources for all students,
- Provides a \$2,500 pay increase for teachers and certified staff, and a 4.1 percent pay increase for classified support staff – including bus drivers who will continue to receive sign-on bonuses and attendance bonuses, and . . .
- Holds the current property tax millage rate.

The Fiscal Year 2025 budget anticipates enrollment of 31,935 students, an increase of 1.1 percent, or nearly 350 students. The budget is based on the current property ad valorem millage rate of 17.675 for Maintenance & Operations (M&O). Since approved in 2023, the current school property tax millage rate is lowest it has been in at least 18 years.

“One of the school board’s primary responsibilities is approving an annual budget that provides the resources needed to support the education of Paulding County students,” said Board of Education Chair Deborah Collett. “I am proud that in this budget we were able to support our teachers and staff, as well as funding critical initiatives of the district, while maintaining the same millage rate as last year. This is great news all around, and I am thankful for the hard work of the school district’s finance team to make it happen. Given that nearly 60 percent of our budget comes from state funding, our school board is also grateful for Gov. Kemp and the support he has shown for public education.”

Superintendent Steve Barnette said, “Once again, I want to thank our Board of Education for approving a budget that supports student learning while also helping our teachers and support staff. Being able to give our employees a pay increase without raising the millage rate is a significant accomplishment. Despite the challenges we face as a low-wealth school district, and in a year where economic challenges persist, it is important that we are able to give



our employees a raise that will help our district remain competitive in the job market and will help our employees contend with the rising cost of living.”

Mr. Barnette noted that, just like many families throughout the community, the school district continues to face a range of financial challenges, including an \$8.2 million increase in health insurance costs in the approved budget. Because education is a people-oriented business, almost 90 percent of the budget is dedicated to funding the salaries and benefits of teachers and support staff. The budget directs the vast majority of per-pupil spending to the function of “instruction,” with central office-related expenditures remaining approximately half the size of comparable school districts and the statewide average.

To remain competitive in hiring and retaining top-quality educators, the budget includes a raise of \$2,500 for all teachers and certified staff plus any eligible salary scale step increases. Classified staff will receive a 4.1 percent raise along with eligible salary step increases. The higher pay will help district employees address cost-of-living increases, while also helping the district with recruitment, retention, and attendance. The budget also provides funding for school maintenance to address the upkeep of school buildings that see traffic from hundreds or, in many cases, thousands of students and staff every day.

The newly approved budget provides funding for the district’s 34<sup>th</sup> school, Crossroads Middle School. Construction began in September 2022 and a ribbon-cutting to open the new facility is planned for July 22, 2024. The 148,000-square-foot school will be home to nearly 1,000 students. The FY2025 budget provides funding for 19 new teachers and support staff who will join a number of transfers from other schools and district offices to make up the Crossroads Middle School staff.

The budget continues the focus on safety and security with additional new funding of nearly \$50,000 per school. The budget also continues the significant enhancements that have been implemented in recent years, including the new Centegix Crisis Alert System, and providing for a full-time security presence at every school, in addition to funding for School Resource Officers (SROs) through the Paulding County Sheriff’s Office and internal P.O.S.T. certified Security Officers.

The budget also continues funding the implementation of the 1-to-1 technology initiative that provides every Paulding County student a personal computer learning device.

The Board of Education approved a budget that maintains the current property tax millage rate even though growth in the tax digest is expected to be substantially lower this year. Mr. Barnette explained that property taxes are determined by two components, the property valuation and the millage rate. “Property values are determined by market trends and are set by the Board of Tax Assessors. The school district controls the millage rate, which is a percentage applied to the assessed property values,” he said.

Paulding County property owners will not pay any property tax toward retiring the school district’s long-term debt. The budget maintains the current bond millage of 0.000. Decades ago, the burden for retiring bond debt – the equivalent of more than 1.000 mill in debt service – was shifted to E-SPLOST (Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax), a retail sales tax shared by all consumers and not just property owners.

In 2022, the Board of Education also approved two additional tax relief measures for senior citizens that were subsequently approved by voters. The first measure exempted senior citizens over the age of 65 from school property taxes used to retire bond debt, and the second measure lowered the age for exemption from all school property tax from 70 to 68. Both measures are now in full effect.



## Original Fiscal Year 2025 Budget

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The Original Fiscal Year 2025 Budget was adopted by the Paulding County Board of Education at its June 11, 2024, regular meeting. Extensive documentation regarding the FY2025 Budget is available here: <https://www.paulding.k12.ga.us/Page/47372>