

SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
MAX D. WALKER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
35 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.
QUINCY, FLORIDA

September 3, 2026

Immediately Following Final Budget Hearing at 5:01 P.M.

This meeting was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman; Ms. Cathy S. Johnson; Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon; Mr. Steve Scott; and Mr. Charlie D. Frost. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 6:08 P.M.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

2. AGREEMENT/CONTRACT APPLICATION

a. Capital Health Plan Insurance Renewal Fiscal Impact

The Board discussed whether it could absorb the additional cost of increasing its contribution toward employee health insurance from 75% to 78%. Mrs. Bruner's presentation indicated that the Board had the financial capacity to absorb the increased contribution.

Ms. Judith Mandela, President of GCCTA addressed the Board and asked the Board to consider covering 78% of the cost of employee health insurance. She explained that the rising costs of living, including higher prices and gas expenses, have placed additional financial burdens on employees. She noted that some employees are unable to afford health insurance, while others are dropping their coverage because of the increasing costs. She urged the Board to consider increasing its contribution to 78% to help ease the financial burden on employees.

Mr. McMillan stated that the Board's goal is to absorb as much of the cost as possible for employees. He added that, if it were within his authority and the Board had the financial means, employees would not have to pay anything toward their insurance.

Mrs. Bruner reiterated that the financial figures presented showed the Board could absorb 78% of the insurance cost if it chose to do so.

Mr. McMillan entertained a motion. Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve agenda item #2a. The motion was seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

Ms. Hannigon stated for the record and clarified that although the Board had previously voted on the matter, the earlier vote was contingent upon receiving certain funding information.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

3. SCHOOL FACILITY/PROPERTY

a. 2025 – 2026 5-Year Work Plan

Fund Source: N/A

Amount: N/A

Mr. Hudson introduced the Five-Year Work Plan, explaining that it is generated through the district's financial system and provides information regarding capital outlay balances and planned expenditures over a five-year period.

Ms. Johnson asked whether the projected balances in the plan should eventually reach zero if the funds are allocated across the five-year period. Mrs. Bruner responded that the balances do not necessarily have to reach zero. Ms. Johnson asked whether the purpose of the plan was to demonstrate how funds would be distributed over the five-

year period. Mrs. Bruner explained that the system does not directly correspond with the district's other financial systems. She stated that the State uses the report as a general planning guide. She noted that the figures for 2025–2026 were based on the best available information regarding expenditures, revenues, and projected costs at the time the report was prepared. She stated that the remaining balances may be carried forward to future years and assigned to subsequent projects. She stated however, the system does not always capture every expenditure or provide an appropriate category for every existing balance. She added that the 2026–2027 figures were based on the budget recently approved by the Board. She stated that some expenditures shared with charter schools may fluctuate, and the figures should be considered estimates. She explained that Pages 2 and 3 of the report address expenditures by project and category. She stated that these figures do not directly align with the district's skyward financial system. She stated that the State requires the district to report anticipated spending by specific categories, which requires staff to gather and organize the information manually.

The Board requested additional clarification regarding the figures, including heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) expenditures and the reasons for differences in funding across categories. Board members also expressed a desire to receive the information earlier to allow sufficient time for review.

Ms. Hannigon asked about the deadline for submitting the Five-Year Work Plan. Mrs. Bruner explained that the absence of figures in certain sections does not necessarily mean the district is prohibited from reporting those items. She also indicated that Mr. Hudson was responsible for aspects of the process. Ms. Hannigon explained that knowing the submission deadline would help the Board and administration plan ahead and avoid delays. She suggested placing the deadline on the district's calendar so the Superintendent and staff could begin reviewing and preparing the plan well in advance. Mr. Hudson stated that the plan is normally completed early in the process. He stated however, he was unsure of the specific deadline because the district typically submits it early.

Mr. Key clarified that, despite its title, the Five-Year Work Plan is an annual report outlining projected expenditures over the next five years. He explained that the report is normally submitted around April, allowing it to be completed before July. He acknowledged that the district's school-related transitions and other ongoing activities may have contributed to the delay this year. He stated that the administration would work to ensure the report is submitted on time in the future. He also emphasized that the State-required Five-Year Work Plan is different from the district's separate five-year strategic plan, which includes facilities planning.

Ms. Hannigon stated that she had only recently received the report by email from Mrs. Bruner and had not yet had an opportunity to review it fully. She observed that the report appeared to be prepared in reverse order because the 2025–2026 figures reflected actual or estimated expenditures, while future-year figures would be developed and refined during subsequent planning cycles. Mrs. Bruner explained that the 2025–2026 column included actual figures where available and estimates based on expenditures. She stated that because the report's categories do not directly correspond with Skyward, staff cannot simply generate a report from the accounting system. She stated instead, considerable manual work is required to compile the information. She noted that the district initially had limited historical baselines for preparing the report. She stated that with assistance from staff, the district was able to complete the required submissions. She stated that going forward, the district is establishing more reliable baselines and implementing project codes to improve the collection and organization of financial information. She stated that these codes should help staff identify projected expenditures, outstanding purchase orders, and anticipated project costs for 2026–2027 and subsequent years. Ms. Hannigon asked whether the district's accounting software could be customized to make the reporting process more automated and less dependent on manual data entry. She noted that the proposed project codes appeared to be a step toward that goal.

Mrs. Bruner continued her presentation by reviewing the report's project, revenue, expenditure, capacity, and infrastructure sections. She explained that Pages 2 and 3 identify the schools and sites associated with district projects. She stated that some site names in the State system have not been updated and may refer to former school properties rather than their current uses. She stated for example, the GEMS designation continues to identify the former Quincy property because that is the name recognized by the State. Similarly, the listing for the former alternative school site remains in the system even though students are no longer assigned there. She explained that the report includes capital outlay funding supported by the one-and-one-half-mill levy. She stated that the 2025–2026 column reflects actual expenditures or the best available estimates, while the 2026–2027 column contains projections intended to align with the approved budget. She noted that this was the first year the district had been able to present dollar amounts in these categories that could also be compared with the approved budget. She explained that the revenue section includes one-and-one-half-mill revenue, Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funding, and other revenue sources. She stated that funding for the new school does not fall under PECO and is instead reported in another revenue category. She stated that the district must also show how available balances will be carried forward and assigned to projects.

Ms. Johnson asked why the report showed revenue figures without corresponding expenditure figures in certain categories. Mrs. Bruner explained that the district had no projects to report in those categories for the current year or planned for 2026–2027. She stated that the district cannot assign dollar amounts to every category unless expenditures are anticipated. She stated that some figures were initially entered as estimates or placeholders and would be refined as the district improved its planning process. She further explained that the report reflected a snapshot in time and did not capture all funding associated with the new school. She stated consequently, the report showed approximately \$68 million in one section rather than the total amount available for the project. She noted that balances may be carried forward, but the State’s reporting system requires the plan to remain balanced and not show a negative balance.

Ms. Hannigon followed up on Board Member Johnson’s question and asked whether the approximately \$1.9 million figure shown on Page 4 represented actual available funds and whether those funds were being carried forward. Mrs. Bruner clarified that the figure did not necessarily represent a complete accounting of funds being carried forward. She stated that the report captures only certain expenditures and reflects the information available when it was prepared. She stated that the figures should align more closely with the district’s financial information as the new reporting cycle progresses.

Mrs. Bruner then reviewed Page 5, which includes the sales tax referendum section. She explained that the district did not yet have sales tax referendum revenue to report. She reiterated that approximately \$68 million was reflected in the report for new school construction, although the district had more funding available for the project. She stated that approximately \$81 million was reflected as available for the new school at the time of reporting. She stated that this figure did not mean that no expenditures had occurred. She stated that rather, the report reflected the project’s financial position at a particular point during 2025–2026. She stated although most of the expenditures were expected to occur during 2026–2027, the State reporting format required the figures to be entered in the appropriate reporting period.

Mrs. Bruner explained that the capacity section required the district to calculate student stations and full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment projections. She stated that the projected FTE figures had to align with the allocations shown elsewhere in the report. She stated that because enrollment projections are uncertain and some schools serve multiple grade levels, assigning the figures to the correct categories required additional work. She also explained that Crossroad Academy had a separate section asking whether the district owned the property. She stated that the report’s classroom and infrastructure sections address classroom capacity, relocatable classrooms, class-size reduction, and anticipated construction. She noted that the district did not have complete information for all categories and would be better positioned to provide updated figures after actual 2026–2027 data became available. She stated that relocatable student stations generally refer to portable classrooms. She stated that the district had figures for 2025–2026 but had not projected future changes because plans for relocating buildings and facilities were not yet established. She stated that the district had no leased property to report in the applicable section.

Mrs. Bruner also discussed plans for the new prekindergarten-through-eighth-grade school, which is expected to provide an appropriate number of student stations. She stated that the report referenced the consolidation of at least four schools and the elimination of surplus student stations, including space in the West Wing of Building 400 at Gadsden County High School. She stated that it also included information concerning full-time exceptional student education (ESE) enrollment.

Regarding school closure and facility planning, Mrs. Bruner explained that the School Board had reevaluated the location for the new school and determined that the Shanks site was the preferred location. She stated that the existing school would be demolished, and the new school would be built at that site. She further explained that the former Stewart Street property was identified for storage and possible administrative office use. She corrected an outdated statement in the report concerning the George Munroe site, explaining that the language should indicate that the property would be sold rather than retained. She also clarified that the Carter-Parramore site was identified as a storage and training facility. She stated that the report included a possible long-term option to relocate students from Greensboro to West Gadsden Middle School and convert the school to a prekindergarten-through-eighth-grade facility.

Mr. McMillan emphasized that the public needed to understand that the Greensboro relocation and school conversion were possibilities, not established plans. Mrs. Bruner agreed and confirmed that no date had been assigned to the potential change. She continued reviewing the long-range maintenance and capacity sections. She explained that some figures had been prepopulated in the state system and had not been revised by the district. She stated that the report also referenced the construction of a new prekindergarten school in Quincy and plans to relocate the Head Start department to the former Stewart Street site after the new school opens, subject to the applicable renovations. She stated that additional renovations were anticipated at schools that would remain open

or become consolidated. She stated that the report also indicated that GEMS, George Munroe, and Stewart Street properties were included in future facility planning. She stated that certain vacant land associated with the former GEMS location was identified for sale during 2026–2027. She stated that, as future consolidations occur, properties may be sold or repurposed. She explained that the wording was intended to remain general because future decisions had not all been finalized. She concluded the presentation by reviewing the 20-year maintenance and capacity section, noting that the information in that section had also been prepopulated in the State system.

Ms. Hannigon noted that the 10-year maintenance section did not contain information in the referenced pages. She expressed hope that, when the district begins preparing the next work plan, greater attention would be given to long-term maintenance costs. She emphasized that maintaining school facilities after construction is a significant challenge for school districts and should receive substantial discussion and planning. She stated that she looked forward to reviewing the next report and hoped the Board would have more opportunity to participate in the process.

Mr. Frost observed that additional revisions would likely occur as the district continued working through the process. He noted that the document is a state-required report and serves as a general guideline, rather than a final representation of every future district decision.

Mr. Charlie D. Frost made a motion to accept the Superintendent’s recommendation to approve agenda Item 3a, the 2025–2026 Five-Year Work Plan. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Scott.

Ms. Hannigon asked whether the report could be amended after submission or whether a revised report would have to be submitted separately. Mr. Key explained that some of the confusion arose from the distinction between the State-required Five-Year Work Plan and the district’s separate five-year strategic plan, which incorporates facilities planning. He stated that the State determines the requirements for the work plan and provides guidance on its completion. He noted that State representatives had visited the district approximately two weeks earlier to assist staff with documenting facility information.

Mr. Scott stated that both plans allow for some flexibility and that the state-required work plan serves as a general guideline. Mrs. Bruner explained that, earlier in the reporting process, the State system could be unlocked to allow corrections and resubmission. She stated that she would locate the corrected printed version of the report and ensure that Board members received the appropriate wording, noting that the version previously emailed might not have included all corrections.

The motion was approved by a vote of 4–1, with Mr. McMillan, Mr. Frost, Mr. Scott and Ms. Hannigon voting “aye”. Ms. Johnson voted “nay”.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

4. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Key stated that we have discussed the school grades at James A. Shanks Middle School and Gadsden County High School. He stated that as he mentioned on Tuesday, Gadsden County High School has maintained a “C” grade for the past five years. He stated that while a “C” is a respectable achievement, our goal is to continue improving and reach a “B”. He stated that each year, the State increases the expectations and testing requirements used to determine school grades. He stated that he believe the required threshold is increasing by five percentage points for the upcoming school year. He stated that these changes affect schools throughout the State, not just those in Gadsden County. He stated as a result, earning an “A” will become more challenging for many schools across our district. He stated that the State has indicated that these requirements will continue to increase until certain performance benchmarks are reached, potentially around the 90% range. He stated that this creates an ongoing challenge for our district, but we recognize that we have work to do, and we remain committed to improving student performance. He stated that one concern is the frequent changes in State leadership, assessments, and academic standards. He stated that within the next couple of years, we could have a new governor and potentially another testing system, requiring our schools and students to adjust once again. He stated that hopefully, the State will establish more consistent standards rather than changing expectations every four or five years. He stated that despite these challenges, we will continue moving forward and doing what is best for our students.

Mr. Key stated that our high school graduation rate is also continuing to improve. He stated that we expect to receive the official graduation rates for the 2025–2026 school year around December. He stated that once those figures are released, we will have a clearer understanding of our progress. He stated that we have seen a steady increase in graduation rates, and we want to continue building on that success. He stated that we are also working to address some areas that need improvement at several of our schools, particularly those involving our struggling students and the support provided through our ESE programs. He stated that although these are not major issues, we recognize that some

adjustments are necessary. He stated that we are exploring ways to better serve these students throughout the county. Overall, things are moving in a positive direction.

Regarding the recent school threat, Mr. Key stated that he understand that a juvenile was arrested following an investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). He stated that the incident reportedly occurred a week or two ago, and authorities have since identified the individual responsible. He stated that had not yet confirmed which school the student attends, so he will follow up with the sheriff to obtain additional information. He stated that this incident highlights the importance of clear and timely communication among the school district, law enforcement agencies, and parents. He stated although parents were notified when the threat initially occurred, we must continue to communicate effectively as these situations develop. He stated that the sheriff's office, the Florida Department of Education, and FDLE all have roles to play in addressing these matters. He stated that we also want to remind parents to speak with their children about the seriousness of making threats against schools. Students may believe they are joking, but these threats are not taken lightly by the state or the school district. He stated that making such threats can result in a third-degree felony charge. He stated that it is important that our students understand the consequences of their actions and recognize that school safety must always be a priority.

Finally, Mr. Key acknowledged Mr. Stallworth for attending and taking an interest in one of the most important responsibilities of the School Board: the district's budget. He stated that he appreciate Mr. Stallworth's presence as a potential School Board member in the upcoming election, as well as your opponent's participation in the process. He stated that understanding the district's operations and finances is essential for anyone seeking to serve on the School Board. He thanked Mr. Stallworth for being at the meeting and taking the time to learn more about how our district operates.

5. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Ms. Johnson stated that she had no additional comments at this time. She stated that she wanted to wish everyone a safe and enjoyable Labor Day weekend. She stated that she look forward to seeing everyone when we return, including our students, faculty, and staff, as well as Mr. Key.

Ms. Hannigon stated for the information of the Gadsden County School District, one of the Quincy City Commissioners recently shared an update on Facebook regarding city matters. She stated that in that post, he stated that he had filed a code enforcement complaint concerning the condition of the former Quincy High School property. She stated that he clarified that his intention was not to create problems for the school district but rather to document the matter proactively in case further action became necessary in the future. She stated that she has not yet had had an opportunity to research the specifics of the complaint or determine what resolution he is requesting from the city's code enforcement department. She stated however, she wanted to make the Board aware that the complaint has been filed and that the matter has been discussed publicly on social media.

Mr. Key stated that since the property is located within the City of Quincy, he believe there may be an opportunity for the City, the Gadsden County Commission, and the School Board to work together to address the property's condition and determine its future use. He stated that our resources are limited, but perhaps the city and county have resources or funding opportunities that could help us determine whether the building can be renovated, demolished, or otherwise addressed. He stated that he has not yet reached out to Senator Simon because funding was not available at the time. He stated however, he remain hopeful that we can identify potential sources of financial assistance. He stated that he think some people assume that the school district can simply produce millions of dollars to address these types of issues. He stated that the reality is that we do not have millions of dollars sitting around to fund projects of this magnitude. He stated that some of the same individuals who oppose the proposed sales tax also expect the district to find the money necessary to address significant facility needs. He stated that raises an important question: He asked where will the funding come from? He stated that he was aware of the concerns surrounding the property, and he has already spoken with the city manager about the possibility of developing a partnership among the school district, the city, and the county. He stated that if no one intends to use the property in its current form, we should explore what can be done with it in the long term to benefit the community. He stated that this is one of the options we are continuing to explore because the property's condition is a legitimate concern. He stated however, addressing it will require substantial financial resources. He stated that if it cost more than a quarter of a million dollars to prepare the gun range site, he can only imagine how much it would cost to address a building of this size. He stated clearly, this will require careful planning and significant investment.

Mr. Key stated that he also wanted to address some of the misinformation circulating on social media. He stated that he has seen claims regarding the alleged misuse or embezzlement of funds involving the school district. He stated that some of these statements appear to be shared without a clear understanding of the circumstances or the facts. He stated that he has had to refrain from responding to some of these comments because spreading unverified information does

not help our community. He stated that unfortunately, some of these claims appear to be influencing public opinion about the proposed sales tax. He stated that we must make sure that our citizens have accurate information about the district's financial challenges and the resources needed to support our schools. He stated that people regularly travel to Leon County and spend money there, where local sales tax revenue helps support public schools. He stated that we need to consider how we can work together here in Gadsden County to support our own schools and community. He stated that ultimately, the question is whether we are willing to work together for the betterment of Gadsden County or continue to tear one another down. He stated that he hope the School Board, the City of Quincy, and the county commission can collaborate to develop a long-term plan for the former Quincy High School property that benefits the entire community.

Ms. Hannigon stated that within the scope of her role, she was reaching out to several individuals to determine whether there is interest in developing the property. She recognized that redevelopment can raise concerns among residents about what may be built in their neighborhoods. She stated however, our goal is to identify an individual or organization that can put the property to productive use in a way that benefits the community as a whole. She stated that hopefully, by the deadline established by the Board, we will have an interested party prepared to present a reasonable offer for consideration.

Mr. Frost stated that he was not very familiar with Facebook, so when people discuss what is being said on social media, he sometimes finds himself disconnected from those conversations. He stated however, he want to emphasize that Facebook should not determine the decisions we make for the school district. He stated that what concerns him most is how people speak about the children of Gadsden County. He stated that these are the same children who attend our schools, participate in our communities, and sit in our Sunday school classes. He stated that they are members of our families and communities, and they are the children we represent. He stated that we must remember our responsibility to these students and keep their best interests at the forefront of every decision we make.

Mr. McMillan stated that at our previous meeting, when the Corrections Officers Training program was presented, he challenged the Board members to demonstrate their support by making individual donations to the foundation supporting the program. He stated that it costs approximately \$1,800 per student to participate in this class. He stated that if we genuinely want to support this program and help these students succeed, we need to put our money where our mouths are. He encouraged each Board member to consider making a donation. He stated that checks should be made payable to the Morris A. Young Foundation. He stated that we also received an update from Mrs. Bruner regarding Grandparents' Day. Havana Magnet School will now hold its Grandparents' Day celebration on the 23rd. He stated that additionally, the former Quincy High School property is currently being offered for sale. He stated that he believe we should allow the established deadline to pass before making any further decisions. He stated that we need to give interested parties an opportunity to submit offers before determining the next steps.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that the deadline for the Greensboro property is September 18, and the deadline for the former Quincy High School property is October 16. Mr. McMillan stated that October 16 will be the deadline for the former Quincy High School property. He stated however, once that deadline passes, the Board need to determine the next steps. He stated that the Board must decide whether to proceed with a sale or consider other options for the property. Dr. Jackson stated that in consultation with Board Attorney Minnis, she was informed that certain procedural requirements must be completed before any district property can be sold. She stated that those requirements will be brought back before the Board at the next meeting so that the appropriate procedures can be reviewed and addressed.

6. The meeting adjourned at 7:16 P.M