

TENTATIVE BUDGET HEARING

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
 MAX D. WALKER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
 35 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.
 QUINCY, FLORIDA 32351

August 5, 2025

5:30 P.M.

The tentative budget hearing 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 tentative budget hearing was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 5:38 p.m.

2. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Mr. Leroy McMillan.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. PUBLIC HEARING – Tentative Budget and Millage Rate

- a. Approval of Resolution Number 2025-01 for the Tentative Millage Rates for the 2025 – 2026 fiscal year

Fund Source: General Fund and Capital Project

Amount: Refer to millage rates and amounts stated on the Resolution

Mr. McMillan welcomed everyone to the Gadsden County School Board's Public Hearing on the Tentative Millage to be Levied and the Tentative Budget for 2025 – 2026.

Mrs. Bruner read Resolution Number 2025-01

WHEREAS, the School Board of Gadsden County, Florida did pursuant to Chapters 200 and 1011, Florida Statutes, approve tentative millage rates for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026; and

WHEREAS, at the public hearing and in full compliance with Chapter 200, Florida Statutes, the School Board of Gadsden County adopted the tentative millage rates for fiscal year 2025-2026 in the following amounts:

	Tentative Millage Levy	Proposed Amount To Be Raised
Required Local Effort (including Prior Period Adjustment)	3.0000	\$8,380,868.93
Capital Outlay	1.5000	\$4,190,434.46
Basic Discretionary Operating	0.7480	\$2,089,629.98
Discretionary Capital Improvement	0.0000	\$0.00
Additional Voted Millage	0.0000	\$0.00
Debt	0.0000	\$0.00

The total millage to be levied is 0.90 percent more than the roll-back rate.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the School Board of Gadsden County adopted each tentative millage rate for the fiscal year July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026, by separate vote prior to adopting the tentative budget.

Mr. McMillian stated that we will give the general public the opportunity to speak. He stated that everyone here represents the general public. He stated that currently there was no one from the public to speak. He stated that with Mrs. Bruner reading resolution number 2025-01, he entertained a motion to approve as presented in the resolution.

Mr. Scott moved to motion the approval of Resolution Number 2025 - 01 as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

5. Approval of Resolution Number 2025- 02 for the Tentative Budget for fiscal year 2025 – 2026

Fund Source: All Funds Budget

Amount: Refer to tentative budget

Mrs. Bruner stated to the Board that what you have before you are exactly what was published in the newspaper. She stated that when we get to the final budget, there will be some adjustments based on the anticipated revenues. She stated that some of the numbers have come in for the grants that were in this initial tentative budget, so we'll be able to update those numbers. Mr. McMillan asked this would be in the form of an amendment or a change? Mrs. Bruner stated that it will be when we have the final budget hearing. She stated that a very detailed summary budget will be presented at that time. She stated that's a long spreadsheet with all the details, but as far as the numbers, these are the numbers that were printed in the newspaper.

Mrs. Bruner read Resolution Number 2025-02

A RESOLUTION OF THE GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD ADOPTING THE
TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026

WHEREAS, the School Board of Gadsden County, Florida did pursuant to Chapters 200 and 1011, Florida Statutes, approve tentative millage rates for the fiscal year July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026;

WHEREAS, the School Board of Gadsden County set forth the appropriation and revenue estimate for the Budget for fiscal year 2025-2026.

WHEREAS, at the public hearing and in full compliance with Chapter 200, Florida Statutes, the School Board of Gadsden County adopted the tentative millage rates and the budget in the amount of \$99,861,813.81 for fiscal year 2025-2026.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the attached budget of the School Board of Gadsden County, including the millage rates as set forth therein, is hereby adopted by the School Board of Gadsden County as a tentative budget for the categories indicated for the fiscal year July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026.

Mr. McMillian entertained a motion to approve Resolution Number 2025 – 02 for the tentative budget as presented.

Mr. Charlie D. Frost made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2025 – 02 for the tentative budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson.

Ms. Hannigon asked what does the remainder of the budget calendar look like? Mrs. Bruner stated that once the motions are adopted, then we have a certain number of days to hold the final budget hearing. She stated that after the motion is approved, the date for the final budget hearing will be presented. She stated that will keep the Board in line with the TRIM calendar, and we won't have any violations with the State during that time frame. She stated that the State has released their forms and spreadsheets for what they

call the budget summary. She stated that the budget summary looks a lot like what you saw when we submitted the AFR. She stated that at the final budget hearing, we would go through the budget summary in detail line by line, by funds, by category, and where these dollars will be allocated. She stated that this tentative budget was based on the numbers that we had available to the district at the time. She stated that we do know that we're going to have some changes to the revenue amounts. She stated that adjustments will have to be made to the expenditures because we have to make sure that our expenditures are tied to our available revenues. She stated that if you look at the budget summary, the first column under the revenues that's general funds, which we know will be coming to us. She stated that according to the State from our required local effort, special revenue is food service in any of our federal grants and then debt service is our loan. She stated that we have two years left on the loan for Havana Magnet School. She stated that capital projects is money that we receive for the new school. So those are our four buckets of funding and then we make sure that our expenditures balance to our fund. Ms. Hannigon stated that our next budget hearing will be our final budget hearing. She wanted to know if a workshop would be scheduled before the final budget hearing, or we looking to go line by line in our final budget hearing. She asked if there are any proposed changes during that meeting can the changes be made at that time. Mrs. Bruner stated that in this area we don't really have a lot of say so. She stated that if we get funding for ESE students that's the only place that we can use the funding, we don't have an option. She stated that the majority of the budget summary is that type of funding items so this is where it goes. Mrs. Bruner stated that those expenditures are tied to various programs. She stated that there are very few things that we have wiggle room to do anything differently. Ms. Hannigon stated please keep in mind I am the newest Board member here and I stand to be corrected. She stated that with this being our second budget meeting and only having one remaining, is what we're doing here tonight does this meet your expectations regarding this budget process. Mr. Key stated that is going to be yes, because pretty much everything that we are receiving is already outlined as in funding and it is tied to how we have made expenditures last year. Ms. Hannigon stated that she was surprised that we do not see a comparison to fiscal year 25 compared to fiscal year 26, just to see if there are changes. She stated that maybe that will be shared in the next meeting, Mr. Key stated that the way that the State has all of this lined up, there is almost no way you really can do that. He stated that goes back into the AFR that's do September 11th, and the budget they have you working on at the same time as the report. He stated that all of these things you're working on are hand in hand. Mrs. Bruner stated that's exactly accurate, it's very hard to nail down a lot of these numbers because we have to approve it. She stated that the final budget hearing is scheduled for early September, but the ARF is not due until September 11th and so, a lot of it is very high level and a lot of it is already put in its bucket. She stated that in this bucket, they give you the money, but they tell you exactly where you have to spend it. She stated that there is not a whole lot of wiggle room and we just literally followed the formulas and dropped the numbers in place. Ms. Hannigon asked a historical question, in the past has the Board had an opportunity or taken the opportunity to express their wish list. She stated that she understands the revenue funding that is allocated; it is very specific to its usage. She stated that during the budget process there would be more of a conversation regarding the needs of the district. She stated that certain challenges that the district is facing and within these various funding processes, how can we address the needs within the district. She asked has there been room for those kind of discussions and whether it has or has not, will there be room for those types of discussions now. She stated that what about the district conversation regarding the needs, the shortfalls, the shortcomings? How does the budget tie to where we want to see this district move forward? Mr. Key stated that for the shortcoming, no. He stated historically we did not; however, Board Member Johnson actually started the conversation of having budget conversations early in February. He stated that we can start taking a look at how we're spending and what are the priorities. He stated that when you start working on the priorities, how do we shift, how do we get there? And so those are the type of things that we need done ahead of time. He stated that in the future we're going to have to start having this conversation, like January, February, or March. Ms. Hannigon stated that having been exposed to some public governmental budget processes, she took it for granted that more discussion of the budget would be a part of this process, not just in our see the numbers, approve the numbers, but just go home and add to that. She stated that considering what we are facing on a federal level, which is so uncertain, as well as what we are facing on a local level with the building of the school, I would just think that there would be more discussion. She stated that I think I said this at the last meeting that I just

would expect that there would be more discussion because of all that we're facing going forward, because of all the uncertainties we would just have a conversation about what our priorities are as a district. She stated that for herself personally, having the opportunity to participate in the recent professional learning conference, she was thoroughly impressed with the Professional Learning Department's presentation. She stated that as a Board member she wants to have that conversation regarding how we can ensure that services like this for our teachers or our staff will remain in place. She stated that she expected that there would be more conversation considering again, what we're faced with federally, what we're faced with locally.

Mr. McMillian stated that a motion and second had been made. He asked for a vote on Resolution Number 2025-02 Tentative Budget. The motion carried with Ms. Johnson, Mr. McMillan, Mr. Frost and Mr. Scott voting "aye". Ms. Hannison voted "nay".

Mrs. Bruner stated that according to the TRIM calendar, the Final Budget Hearing is scheduled for Thursday, September 4, 2025, at 5:30 PM, Board Room at the Max D. Walker Administration Building, 35 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd., Quincy, Florida 32351.

Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon made a motion to approve the final budget hearing on Thursday, September 4, 2025 at 5:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

Mr. McMillian asked Attorney Minnis to correct him if he was wrong regarding budget hearings and if that was the only business to be conducted at this meeting. He stated that he asked because educational items by the Superintendent were on the agenda. Mrs. Minnis stated yes, and it is a public hearing. She stated that item #5 was only for informational purposes, not to vote on anything.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

5. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Key stated that on September 4th he would not be able to attend the Final Budget Hearing in person, because he will be attending his daughter's graduation from the army basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. He stated that he will try to zoom into the meeting. He stated that there was some sad news, a student passed away that attended Stewart Street Elementary School. He stated that the student lived in Gadsden Arms Apartments, his name was Kingston Molina. He asked everyone to keep the family in prayer. He stated that also today he met with the Florida High School Athletic Association, and the eight students were declared eligible to play football, but unfortunately not at Gadsden County High School. He stated that a former teacher that was employed with Gadsden County Schools was arrested. He stated that the teacher was no longer or has not been employed with Gadsden County Schools for some time. He stated that the number of vacancies are minimal at this time, but there are still a few vacancies. Mr. McMillan asked about the date for the hearing with the FHSA? Mr. Key stated that the next hearing would be in two weeks for the coach. He stated that the school has to deal with fines themselves. He stated that the hearing for the school will be within three weeks. He stated that the hearing for the coach will be for his punishment to be reversed. He stated that at the last Board meeting, he made the statement that everything was cleared, but he did not realize that from the audit that they had cleared us, but there were other things that had happened. He stated that he would not have made that statement had he known this. He stated that this was a second investigation that they launched based solely on the paperwork. He stated that paperwork that was signed by the non-traditional private school. He stated that however, because they said we received it and it became our responsibility. He stated that none of our employees signed or notarized any of the paperwork. He stated that two of the members voted that they wanted a four-game suspension and then allow the students to continue to play at other high schools. He stated that the other four voted to restore the students to play at the high school. He stated that they said that the paperwork was still falsified and Gadsden County played a role just by uploading the information even though none of our people signed off on it. Mr. Frost asked for clarification that this was just paperwork done wrong. Mr. Key stated that was correct. He stated that the Florida High School Athletic Association released the form that has at the top of it June of 2025. He stated that however, they did not release that form until July 7th. He stated that all these students at the nontraditional private school in question here had the parents to sign that form that was released on July 7th and backdated it to other dates so that's the issue, that's why

they're saying falsified. Mr. McMillan stated that he did not want to withhold anyone in wrongdoing. He stated that he was just surprised how this is all coming about when we have school choice. Ms. Hannigon asked if the school district would be responsible for legal representation for the coach, or will the legal representation be the responsibility of the coach. Mr. Key stated that the attorney that was present at the meeting today decided to take this on pro bono. He stated that there are a lot of responsibilities that are going to have to be considered. He stated that they are going to start looking at the actions that were considered that had to take place regarding this. Ms. Hannigon stated that in regards to the hearing in three weeks from the standpoint of legal representation, how would you handle this or are we even going to have legal representation? Mr. Key stated that moving forward there are going to be some things we are going to have to change. He stated that he do not thing that the students should be held responsible for the adult's decisions. He stated that there will have to be some conversation with district staff and Attorney Minnis who will let us know how to proceed. Ms. Hannigon stated that on a positive note, she was grateful as a resident of Gadsden County to see the level of representation and support that we had online and on campus. She stated that she know that there has been recent changes at the high school. She stated that she just want to say from what she saw in the room that day, I try not to single out people with my HR background, but where credit is due, it's due. She stated that hats off to Assistant Principal James Vernon. She stated that she was thoroughly impressed and appreciative as a Board member with his resilience and not to say aggression, but to an extent of aggression because he just refused to back down when it came to defending our school, our students, and our staff. She stated that she absolutely respects that even though things did not really end in our favor, just to see how the team gathered. She stated that she would say whatever she can to sway or influence their decision. She stated that she was truly excited about the upcoming school term, even with the negative aspect of what we are facing. She stated that she was just focusing on the positive. She stated that while the spotlight is shining on Gadsden County, let's turn this around for our good, turn this negative to positive. She stated that to let's do some self-reflecting. She stated that it sounds like the Superintendent is already doing that regarding changes that he's looking at making and have already made. She stated that the worst part of all of this definitely is those students, those young men who planned on being a part of Gadsden this upcoming school year. She stated that's the worst part for her because at the end of the day, yes, they are athletes, but they're human beings and students. She stated that the emotional impact and even the mental impact that this decision could have on them, that's my greatest concern. She stated that at the same time to flip the script on that I will say if these young men were to ever face such a consequence, I'm glad that it's now and not later because I'm sure all of them have dreams and aspirations to go much further in athletics. She stated that there is a lesson to be learned. She stated that she was glad that they learned it now. She stated that she was looking forward to our bounce back, our comeback and really going further than we did this past year. She thanked the Superintendent for speaking up and not letting down either. She stated that we represented well, spoke up, and stood up for our students.

6. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Ms. Johnson asked when will the Board be able to get a copy of all of the account balances? Mrs. Bruner stated that she can have them at the next meeting.

Ms. Hannigon stated that she would continue to talk about athletics. She stated that this is an opportunity to talk about athletics even in our budget talks.

Mr. Frost stated that the one thing he love about Gadsden County is whatever you throw at us, we are able to bounce back. He stated that he learned about the financial business is that they give us money, but our hands are tied on how we're able to spend it. He stated that at one time the Board sat down and went line by line on the budget. He stated that so much was cut one time we couldn't even afford a lawsuit. He stated that Gadsden County is going to make it to the top. He stated that he was Gadsden County strong. He stated that we are going to get it right.

Mr. McMillan asked Mr. Key how much and when will the teachers get their school supply monies? Mr. Key stated \$300 and it is going to be distributed through Class Wallet. He stated that the teachers already have that information. Mr. McMillan stated that he thought last year we said we wouldn't us Class Wallet again. Mr. Key stated that because of the timeframe the district had to give out checks last year. Mr.

McMillan asked why we were using Class Wallet and if there was a fee for that service. Mr. Key stated that with Class Wallet there is a fee. Mr. Key stated for example, his wife is a teacher at Stewart Street Elementary School and if she purchase well over \$1000 worth of things. He stated that if she decides that she does not want to use the supply money, the money is supposed to go back to the school. He stated that is what is happening, the monies are being paid out to teachers and they leave or they are not leaving the materials that the \$300 purchased back to the school. Mrs. Bruner stated that with Class Wallet, they have several options. She stated that they expanded this year and included Amazon. She stated that the teachers can use Amazon with Prime to get any of the items that they want. She stated that they can do the reimbursement option, which means they can go anywhere else to buy their items and just submit the receipts and get reimbursed directly into their bank account; and the third option is a bunch of different educational vendors that Class Wallet carries, and they can use and purchase from those vendors. Mrs. Hannigon asked what was the date the teachers will have access to those funds? Mrs. Bruner stated that the tentative date that was given to me was August 15, 2025. Mrs. Judith Mandela stated that she was concerned that Class Wallet did not work in the past. She stated that the supply money should be given by August 1st each year. She stated that by the time teachers receive the monies school is in session and teachers' own money is spent. She asked why can't teachers receive checks to make the process go faster? Mr. Key stated that unfortunately, we will still not be able to release funds until next Friday (August 15th). He stated that it is a process that takes Human Resource and Finance to stop what they're doing in order for it to happen, and right now we're focusing on hiring teachers and other avenues within the district. He stated that the quickest turn-around is Class Wallet. Ms. Mandela stated that it took her a while to ask the question because she just naturally assumed with the conversation from last year, in the last two years that certainly, this year they would get it right. She stated that the teachers need their money as soon as possible. Ms. Hannigon asked Mr. Bruner what it would take us to meet that deadline, and what has prevented us from meeting that deadline? Mr. Key stated that actually this year, just with everything else going on that was just not one of the things that finance had on their radar. He stated that it is also the teachers that we know for example, that have been renewed and are returning teachers that have been hired after July 1st. He stated that we have until September 30th to pay them. He stated that it's not all teachers, it's actually the teachers returning to the school district. He stated that Class Wallet will ensure if we stick to this that these monies can be uploaded to the teachers that are returning July 1st. He stated that this is a very busy time of year for finance and Human Resource. He stated that he believes that Class Wallet is the answer. Ms. Hannigon asked what would it take for us to be consistent in getting those funds to our teachers prior to August 1st. She wanted to know what it would take moving forward? Mrs. Bruner stated that putting it on the calendar and our binder for actions that occur recurrently. She stated that was the biggest concern that it was never put on the calendar for this year. Mrs. Hannigon asked how soon do we have those funds in the district? Mrs. Bruner stated that Class Wallet was able to give us a discount. She stated that once we get it established and we go forward we will be able to just wire the funds over. She stated that if that happens the same day, then we would be able to set it all up and it would go a whole lot faster once it's established. Mrs. Hannigon stated that Mr. Key mentioned this is only for renewed returning teachers. So, then that brings in Human Resource as well. She stated that she doesn't remember the timing of when all of the renewal teachers was released, so, is that another component that we need to address internally to make sure that we stay on schedule? Mr. Key stated that once those teachers are renewed to return, you know they are returning without the possibility of some resignations, which normally comes after June 30th. He stated that so normally we renew everyone by June 30th. He stated that at that point this can be uploaded for those individuals that we know are returning. He stated that the statute states that for each classroom, teachers must keep receipts for no less than four years to show the funds expended to meet the requirements of this section. Any unused funds shall be deposited into the School Advisory Council account. Account of the school at which the classroom teacher was employed when the funds were made available to the classroom teacher if the school does not have a School Advisory Council. The funds shall be expended for classroom materials and supplies as determined by the school principal. He stated that is the part when people are not spending the money the proper way, we are missing out of the school being able to utilize those funds. He stated that Class Wallet would help us to ensure that unused funds are returned to the school. Mr. McMillan stated that it seems it would be so much easier if you cut a check to the teachers and let them bring in a receipt.

Mr. McMillan stated that a few years ago Board Member Scott was dealing with property that we have throughout the county that we are not using or somebody else is using it without permission. He stated that he has been working on this and the reason is to get the property back on the tax roll. He stated that he started with 2 parcels of property in Greensboro. He stated that one of the properties are owned by the 4H Group and the other one by FAA He stated that the ownership of the 4H property is at the University of Florida. He stated that the other property was given by this company for the Future Farmers of America of Greensboro, which no longer exists. He stated that he contacted the Florida Association of Future Farmers of America and was told by one of the top gentleman that historically, the chapter has dissolved. He stated that the gentleman with Future Farmers of America would speak with several of their people to find out what has been done in the past and how they handled it. He stated that he was waiting to receive a call from him to get that information to the Board. He stated that he was sure that if you have a chapter in your district they could take possession of that property. He stated that he will get Attorney Minnis to write a letter and everything needed to assure us that is the case, if that is the case, he is just waiting for him to call him back. Mr. Key stated that at one time, he thought the property actually belonged to the Gadsden County School District 4H. He stated that he was not sure if the property was now listed as such. Mr. McMillan stated that he had information on the properties that he will share with the Board. He stated that the Board needed to have some discussion on the properties.

7. The tentative budget hearing adjourned at 6:47 p.m.