

Tight Budget Expected for 2020-21 School Year

CCSD Makes Strategic Cuts to Handle State Funding Shortfall and Avoid Furloughs

At the June 18 meeting, CCSD Superintendent Dr. Brian V. Hightower presented the Board of Education with a proposed operating budget of \$410.5 Million for the 2020-21 school year which accommodates almost \$25 Million in last-minute funding cuts from the State while providing a full school year with no planned furlough days for staff.

The CCSD annual budget process, which begins with School Board members establishing funding priorities for the District, was upended by the COVID-19 crisis and then further complicated by dire economic forecasts from the State, which initially called for 14% budget cuts across the board for the next school year as tax revenue estimates dropped. Chief Financial Officer Kenneth Owen led CCSD staff to move quickly to accommodate the changing financial forecast and began making strategic cuts to planned expenditures, keeping those cuts as far away from the classroom as possible. The proposed State funding cuts were later dialed back to 11%, still a substantial reduction for school districts.

CCSD budgetary savings and cost reductions include:

- Division budget cuts of 9%
- Division staffing cuts (11 positions)
- Reduction of teacher allotments by 68 positions (an average of 1.75 positions per school)
- Reduction of bus drivers (and buses) by 24 positions
- Postponed purchase of 30 school buses

The School Board tabled the budget (as per custom) for a 30-day public review and will hold three public hearings for input, then take action for formal adoption at its meeting July 16.

Budget Highlights

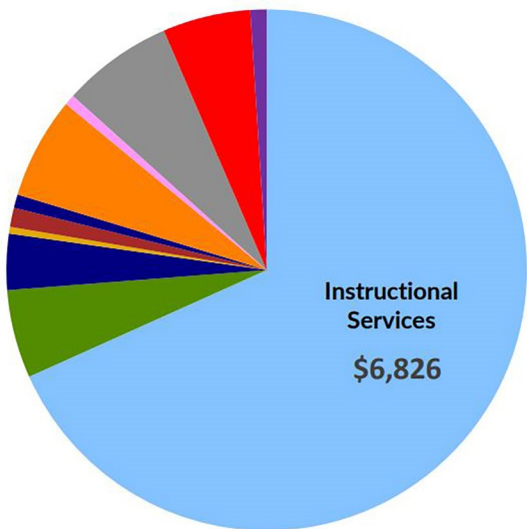
- Full school year planned (180 days) for students
- No furlough days for staff
- No increase in millage rate for taxpayers
- Longevity step increase for eligible employees
- Funding for additional health and safety measures needed for reopening of schools (cleaning, training, equipment, etc.)
- School Instruction accounts for 68.7% of spending; 91.5% of remaining expenditures directly impact students

“A balanced budget without the use of furlough days is our School Board’s top priority, as every furlough day would mean a loss of schooling for our students and a pay cut for our dedicated employees,” said Dr. Hightower. “My recommended budget also includes ample funding to increase safety measures in our schools in preparation for reopening in person on Aug. 3, which I remain truly hopeful we will be able to do.”

Public hearings on the budget and millage rate are scheduled as follows at the Dr. Frank R. Petruzielo Educational Services Facility located at 1205 Bluffs Parkway in Canton, GA:

- July 8, 11:30 am
- July 16, 11:30 am and 6:30 pm

OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURES PER STUDENT: FY2021



Instructional Services (68.3%)	\$	6,826
Pupil Services (5.5%)		548
Improvement of Instructional Services (3.5%)		347
Instructional Staff Training (.4%)		42
Educational Media Services (1.2%)		119
General Administration (.8%)		83
School Administration (6.3%)		631
Support Services-Business (.6%)		65
Maintenance & Operation of Plant Services (6.9%)		689
Student Transportation Services (5.5%)		545
Support Services-Central (1.0%)		100
Average Cost per Student	\$	9,995

Based upon anticipated student enrollment of 42,598

No Increase in School District Tax Rate for FY2021

MILLAGE RATE BREAKDOWN	Tentative 2020-21 Millage Rates
State of Georgia Required Local Effort Quality Basic Education	5.22
Assessment by County Government for Reimbursement of Tax Collection Costs (2.10%)	0.39
CCSD Maintenance and Operation	12.84
Debt Service	1.00
TOTAL MILLAGE	19.45

The millage rate, which in conjunction with the assessed value of property determines the overall tax bill for the owner, is set annually by each governing body in the county. The Cherokee County School Board has not increased its millage rate in more than 10 years.

The 5.22 mills sent to the State as part of the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) formula funding for Cherokee County this year represents \$51.2 Million of local property tax money that will become part of the State's "Equalization" allocation. Cherokee County is not eligible to receive equalization dollars, making CCSD one of the "donor" districts in the state.

ANTICIPATED REVENUE FY2021

TOTAL STATE REVENUE

\$213.8 MILLION

TOTAL LOCAL REVENUE

\$254.3 MILLION

TOTAL FEDERAL REVENUE

\$24 MILLION



CCSD STAFFING

4,968 Full-time employees

- 2,781 Certified teachers
- 1,203 Non-instructional support staff
- 786 Certified instructional support staff
- 198 School administrators

CCSD is GA's 9th largest school district and Cherokee County's largest employer

Note: Detailed information about the CCSD budget and past financial audits can be reviewed on the [Open CCSD webpage](#)

Pandemic Precautions: Health & Safety Measures Added for CCSD Students and Staff as Reopening Scenarios Under Review

In addition to dealing with funding cuts from the State, CCSD has had to incorporate new spending into the FY2021 budget in anticipation of reopening schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This presented a significant challenge in creating the FY2021 budget as the School District grapples with what the next school year will look like— whether in person, digital learning, or a combination.

A CCSD ad hoc committee comprised of staff, parents and community representatives is reviewing options this summer for reopening of school in August and will share insights with Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian V. Hightower as part of his decision-making process regarding the start of school.

In preparation for multiple scenarios, the CCSD budget therefore includes funding for enhanced school and bus cleaning protocols, safety equipment, increased custodial staffing, procurement of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), as well as teacher training relative to digital teaching and learning.

The budget also incorporates strategies to signifi-

cantly increase student and parent access to digital content.

As any in-person instruction would incorporate additional health and safety precautions to protect students and staff, a cost analysis of the increased focus on health and wellness has included such measures as frequent disinfecting of high-touch areas, temperature checks, signage about hand-washing and similar wellness musts, smaller groups of students at each lunch seating, and other protocols. Adjustments for additional custodial service, cleaning supplies and PPE are budgeted at \$2.25 Million.

Given the significant impact continued Digital Learning Days would have on families, and how disruptive a hybrid of a partial in-person and virtual learning option can be for working parents, Dr. Hightower said he will make a determination about the reopening of schools in as timely a manner as possible in July. Dr. Hightower reiterated that he and his leadership team will be extremely sensitive to students, parents and employees as a plan for reopening is developed and implemented.

CCSD Keeps Administrative Costs Among Lowest in GA

The Cherokee County School District continues to rank among the lowest 10% in the state when it comes to per pupil spending on general administrative costs. CCSD's rate for FY2019 of \$143 per student is well below the state average of \$229 per student. CCSD also compares well on school-based administrative costs, where it sits in the lowest quartile among Georgia school districts. School Nutrition Services is another area where CCSD stands out for financial efficiency, in the lowest 10% for program costs.

2019 GENERAL ADMIN COSTS PER STUDENT

CHEROKEE COUNTY	\$143
CHEROKEE CHARTER	\$389
CLAYTON	\$247
COBB COUNTY	\$177
DEKALB COUNTY	\$253
DOUGLAS COUNTY	\$160
FAYETTE COUNTY	\$143
FULTON COUNTY	\$261
GWINNETT COUNTY	\$208
HENRY COUNTY	\$116
ROCKDALE COUNTY	\$274

Source: GOSA

Ed SPLOST Update



Cherokee County voters overwhelmingly approved the 2016 Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (Ed SPLOST) for capital improvement projects across the District. The tax is approved for five years, and funds are budgeted in FY2021 to:

- Finalize construction of the classroom addition at Mill Creek Middle School
- Begin construction of a classroom addition at Woodstock Middle School
- Begin construction of an auxiliary gymnasium at Woodstock High School
- Complete construction of an Agricultural Science building at Creekview High School
- Renovate athletic facilities at Etowah High School stadium
- Construction and equipping of a Healthcare Science Lab at Sequoyah High School
- Non-bonded Ed SPLOST funds are used to purchase digital resources, student laptop computers and other devices

The District also will complete needed major repairs and renovations at existing schools using funds from Ed SPLOST. CCSD is grateful to Cherokee County voters for their continued support in narrowing the extraordinary funding gap between the School District's capital outlay needs and revenue through the 2016 Ed SPLOST renewal, which was approved by 73% of voters.

COMPLETED 2016 Ed SPLOST PROJECTS

- Installation of synthetic turf fields at all six CCSD high school stadiums
- Installation of security foyers at CCSD elementary and middle schools
- Purchase of new school buses to replace aging vehicles in the fleet



CCSD Earns High Rating from the State for Financial Efficiency

The Cherokee County School District continues to earn high marks from the State for its financial efficiency, tying for the best rating among metro Atlanta counties.

The State's Financial Efficiency Star Ratings measure school districts' spending per student in relation to those students' academic performance according to the College and Career Ready Performance Index. Ratings range from a half-star to the highest rating of five stars.

The Cherokee County School District for the third consecutive year has earned 4.5 stars, which is among the best ratings in the State. Only 10 other school districts of the 180 in Georgia earned a 4.5, with just one of those being a metro Atlanta county system; only three districts statewide earned a 5.

"Our School Board and our School District have a well-respected reputation for strong financial stewardship, as well as outstanding student achievement," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Brian V. Hightower said. "This overall rating of excellence recognizes our focus on directing funding to the classroom in order to prepare our community's emerging generation for future success."

The State's new rankings also show CCSD's average per-pupil spending of \$8,653, measured over a three-year period, places the district in the top quartile for conservative spending. Out of 180 school districts in Georgia, 150 are spending more per student than Cherokee County.

In addition to District scores, ratings are calculated for individual schools. Those schools with higher rates of poverty and which qualify for additional funding through the federal Title I program earn lower ratings due to the ratings system's formula.

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