

FINANCIAL FACTS

Highlights from the Proposed 2023-24 Budget



2023-24 Proposed Budget Strikes A Balance: Competitive Compensation with No Millage Rate Increase

Keeping the School District competitive in its pay structure while covering huge State increases in health insurance costs — without raising the tax rate — has been a big challenge for CCSD this spring. The District's annual zero-based budgeting process, however, strikes just the right balance to meet the needs of Georgia's ninth largest school district.

At the May 18, 2023 School Board meeting, CCSD Superintendent Dr. Brian V. Hightower presented the Board of Education with a proposed total budget of \$832.8 Million for the 2023-24 school year, which includes new school construction and debt service. The General Fund (day-to-day operations) budget is proposed at \$538 Million.

"Preparing the budget is my most important role, as it ultimately drives the success of our students," he said. "This year's challenge is to keep our salaries and benefits for teachers and support staff as competitive as possible to retain and recruit the best of the best for our students' benefit. There is no better investment."

The budget, which was developed over the course of six months by Chief Financial Officer Kenneth Owen and an ad hoc budget committee of staff, begins annually with School Board members establishing funding priorities for the District. These priorities can be found on [page 13 of the budget](#). The School Board tabled the budget for a 30-day public review and will hold three public hearings for input, with formal adoption planned at its meeting June 15.

In response to an increasingly competitive labor market in the Metro Atlanta area and concerns about teacher shortages in key areas, CCSD conducted in-depth analyses of its salary schedules over the last year, and many changes were incorporated for 2023-24 (*see Salary Adjustments, p. 3*).

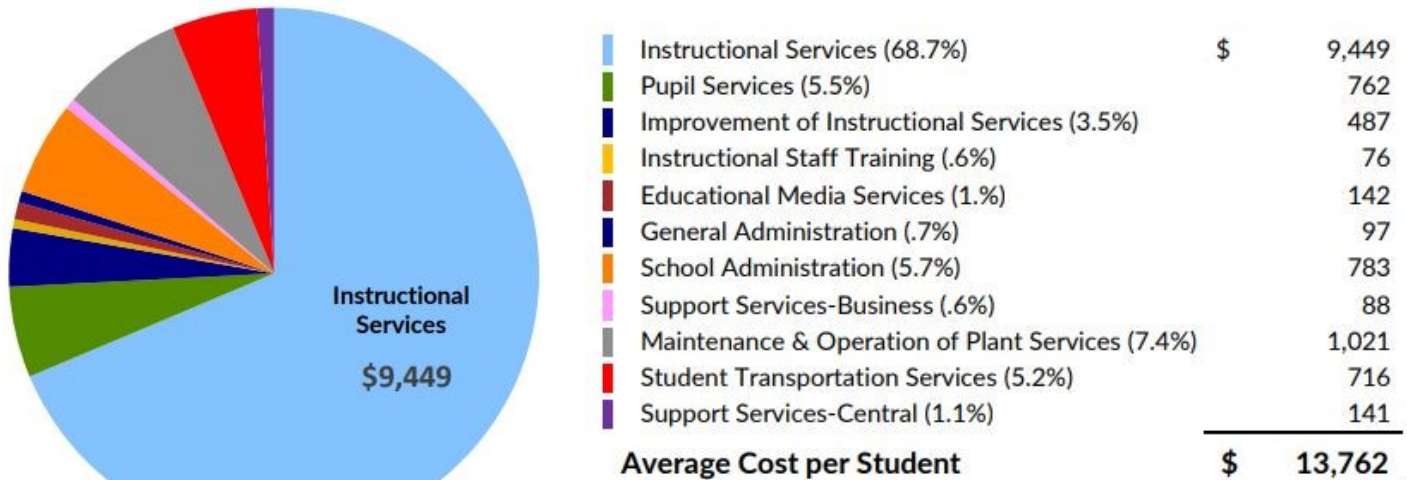
A big challenge in the budgetary process was the late release of information relative to big increases in the cost of the State Health Benefit Plan. The employer paid share of the health benefit premium is increasing 67% in 2023-24 for certified employees, jumping from \$945 per month per employee to \$1,580 per month per employee. The rate for classified staff is increasing from \$945 per employee per month to \$1,195 per employee per month, with additional increases beginning in the 2024-25 and 2025-26 budgets.

State Health Benefit Cost Bump:

CCSD will pay \$635 more per month for every insured certified employee (\$7,620 annual additional cost per employee) in 2023-24.

The increase for classified employees will be phased in, starting with \$250 more per insured employee per month (\$3,000 annual additional cost per employee), and \$385 more per month spread over the next two budget cycles.

OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURES PER STUDENT: FY2024



Based upon anticipated student enrollment of 41,635

ANTICIPATED REVENUE FY2024

TOTAL STATE REVENUE

\$ 265.5 MILLION

TOTAL LOCAL REVENUE

\$365.2 MILLION

TOTAL FEDERAL REVENUE

\$ 45.4 MILLION



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

CCSD STAFFING 2023-24

Includes federally funded positions

5,264 Full and part-time employees

- **2,963** Certified teachers
- **1,202** Non-instructional support staff
- **895** Instructional support staff
- **204** School administrators

School District Tax Rate: the Millage Rate Explained

MILLAGE RATE BREAKDOWN	Tentative 2023-24 Millage Rates
State of Georgia Required Local Effort Quality Basic Education	4.88
Assessment by County Government for Reimbursement of Tax Collection Costs (2%)	0.33
CCSD Maintenance & Operation	11.24
Debt Service	1.5
TOTAL MILLAGE	17.95

The millage rate, which in conjunction with the assessed value of property, determines the overall tax bill for the owner. Millage rates are set annually by each governing body in the county.

The 4.88 mills sent to the State ("local fair share") as part of the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) formula funding for Cherokee County this year represents \$69.76 Million of local property tax money that will become part of the State's "Equalization" allocation. The County Government deducts \$5.5 Million to cover its costs of tax collection.

Cherokee County is not eligible to receive equalization dollars, making CCSD one of the mandated "donor" districts in the state.

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

Salary Adjustments Add Up to Over \$20M in 2023-24 Budget

The proposed budget includes \$20.45 Million in employee pay increases for teachers, support staff and part-time workers. All 30+ employee salary schedules were reviewed, evaluated and adjusted to ensure CCSD is competitive for attracting and retaining quality teachers and support staff for our students.

All CCSD teachers paid on the teacher salary scale will receive an increase of \$4,500 (this includes the Governor's promised \$2,000 increase) as well as any annual step increase for which they are eligible. Assistant principals also will receive an additional \$4,500 plus a step.

Classified staff will receive a step to include a 3% cost of living increase. Speech Language Pathologists and Psychologists will receive an additional \$6,000 plus two additional days of compensation, as well as any steps for which they are eligible.

Retention /signing bonuses of \$1,000 for full-time employees and \$500 for specific, permanent part-time employees will be included in September paychecks.

FISCAL NOTES



- A starting CCSD teacher with a Bachelor's degree will make **\$53,500** beginning in the 2023-24 school year.
- The Cherokee County School Board has maintained a balanced operating budget with no increase in the local tax rate during the last 14 years — and a reduced rate in FY2023.
- The last 11 CCSD external audits have been “clean” with NO findings.
- The FY2024 Budget will benefit from a fully funded State education budget, with no “austerity reductions” being passed along to local school districts!
- 69% of the General Fund/Operating Budget is appropriated directly to School Instruction.
- Cherokee County seniors (age 62+) are eligible to exempt school taxes on the first **\$485,500** market value of their home. Click [HERE](https://cherokeega.com/Tax-Assessors-Office/homestead-exemptions/) for details. (<https://cherokeega.com/Tax-Assessors-Office/homestead-exemptions/>)

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 FY2022 of \$156 per student is well below the state average of \$274 per student and third lowest in Metro Atlanta. CCSD also compares well on school-based administrative costs, where it sits in the bottom third among Georgia school districts for spending. Where does CCSD rank highly for spending? Instruction! CCSD spends more per student on Instruction than two-thirds of other Georgia districts.

2022 GENERAL ADMIN COSTS PER STUDENT

CHEROKEE COUNTY	\$156
CHEROKEE CHARTER	\$362
CLAYTON	\$249
COBB COUNTY	\$221
DEKALB COUNTY	\$550
DOUGLAS COUNTY	\$164
FAYETTE COUNTY	\$159
FORSYTH COUNTY	\$ 83
FULTON COUNTY	\$374
GWINNETT COUNTY	\$205
HENRY COUNTY	\$134
ROCKDALE COUNTY	\$329

Source: GOSA

Ed SPLOST Update

Cherokee County voters approved an extension of the Education SPLOST penny in November 2021 to fund much needed construction and renovations for schools. The sales tax extension passed with 75% approval from voters.

Construction projects currently underway include:

- Cherokee HS Replacement
- Free Home ES Replacement

Projects slated to begin in 2023-24

- Creekland MS Addition and Drive Improvements
- Creekview HS Addition/Auxiliary Gym
- Woodstock HS Classroom Addition
- Sequoyah HS Athletic Facility Improvements

Projects planned for 2024-2025

- Etowah HS Athletic Improvements Phase II
- River Ridge HS Auxiliary Gym
- Oak Grove ES Renovation

Construction project updates are part of each School Board meeting agenda, and a Five-Year Facility Plan with timelines for all major projects can be viewed on the website under [Support Services](#).

Some of the non-construction items that will be paid for with Ed SPLOST funds – without utilizing bonds – this year include student computer purchases and technology infrastructure, replacing aging school buses, and \$7.2 Million worth of maintenance and renovation throughout the District's 40 school campuses.



Up to 30 new school buses will be purchased with General Operating Funds for 2023-24.



BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- Provide annual longevity-step increases for all eligible employees;
- In addition to the Governor's \$2,000 per year per teacher salary increase, provide a \$2,500 per year per teacher salary increase to the Teacher Salary Schedule, a higher starting teacher pay and larger step increases between steps;
- Provide a 3% cost of living adjustment for all eligible classified staff;
- Provide full-day instructional support in all kindergarten classrooms through additional part-time paraprofessional staff;
- Implement new curriculum materials, textbooks and digital content in the areas of mathematics, literacy, English language arts and career education;
- Begin to extend digital devices to all middle and high school students to support the in-class personalized learning (1:1) initiative;
- Allocate up to 100 additional teacher allotments to provide students additional learning opportunities;
- Allocate additional staff to address student and school needs in specific program areas, such as speech language pathologists, school psychologists, occupational therapists, deaf/hard of hearing interpreters and diagnosticians;
- Continue to allocate three behavioral coaches and an additional two school nurses, four school psychologists and one additional social worker to further support students in need of those services;
- Continue to allocate high school student success coaches to identify students in need of additional assistance in meeting graduation requirements;
- Increase the required employer premium in the State Health Benefit Plan (SHBP) for all employees;
- Continue the conversion of all indoor lighting to LED; and,
- Continue mechanical modernizations and roof repair/replacements on older buildings.