

2025-2026 Operational Budget Update

As we reach the midpoint of the school year, the Board Budget Committee is already focused on preparing the 2025-2026 operational budget. Community members are encouraged to get involved by accessing budget resources on the district website (www.gfps.k12.mt.us) under the *Our District* tab. Recommended resources include *School Budgeting 101* and *This is Great Falls Public Schools*, and *Budget Planning which covers the Consensus Process including budget questions that are Asked and Answered*. These resources provide valuable insights into how school funding works.

Upcoming Budget Meetings & Opportunities for Public Input

- **Community Town Hall – March 6, 2025, 5:30 pm Aspen Meeting Room District Offices Building**
This meeting will outline projected expenses and revenues for the upcoming school year and offer an opportunity for public questions and feedback.
- **Legislative Update Session – March 12, 2025, 5:30 pm Aspen Meeting Room District Offices Building**
This session is scheduled after the legislative transmittal deadline to provide an informed projection of upcoming funding decisions.
- **Board Budget Committee Recommendation – March 24, 2025**
The committee will present a General Fund Budget Levy recommendation to the full school board.
- **School Trustee & Levy Election – May 6, 2025 (if needed)**
If a levy request is necessary, Montana law requires the election to take place on this date.

Understanding School Funding in Montana

Montana's school funding system was restructured in response to a 1989 lawsuit that required the legislature to create a more equitable funding model. Prior to this, schools in wealthier districts had significantly more resources than those in less affluent areas. The new system ensures fair funding based primarily on student enrollment, with a combination of state funding and local taxpayer participation.

Local voters can approve up to **20% of the allowable General Fund budget** through levies. However, once this limit is reached, state law prevents additional funding requests beyond that threshold. Since 1989, Great Falls voters have consistently supported over **90% of the maximum** funding level allowed by law.

Projected Levy & Financial Considerations

Key financial challenges facing the district include:

- ✓ **Recruitment and retention of high-quality staff**
- ✓ **Rising health insurance costs**
- ✓ **Higher-than-normal inflation**
- ✓ **The expiration of federal pandemic relief funding (ESSER), which has helped offset costs in recent years**

Why Your Participation Matters

Community engagement is vital to ensuring that local schools continue to meet the needs of students. We encourage residents to attend upcoming meetings, review available resources, and stay informed about the budget process. Your input helps shape the future of education in Great Falls!