

HALF-PENNY SALES TAX **FAQ**

The School Board is asking voters to approve a half-penny sales tax to improve public school buildings.

On May 7, 2019, the Duval County School Board voted to approve a resolution seeking a referendum on a half-penny sales tax increase over 15 years to pay for a \$2 billion plan to upgrade our school buildings at a cost of \$6 a month for the average Duval County family. The Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF) has been following the issue closely. As an independent research-based organization, JPEF supports the half-penny sales tax as a necessary new revenue source to pay for much-needed school improvements to help close the opportunity gap for children from low-income families.

WHY ARE OUR SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN NEED OF SUCH COSTLY REPAIRS?

Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) has the oldest school buildings

in Florida. Many were built more than 50 years ago, and they're no longer suited for the way children learn today. Meanwhile, the cost of maintaining them continues to increase as they get older, in some cases taking away funding from other areas of need.

Funding from the state has decreased over the years, especially since the 2008 recession, and therefore, DCPS hasn't been able to keep up with the need for building upgrades. Duval County is the only county in Florida that doesn't collect any local funding beyond property taxes. Other counties have impact fees or sales taxes to support schools.

WHEN DO WE VOTE?

The School Board voted on May

7, 2019 to seek a vote through a special election in fall 2019. City Council declined to place the measure on the ballot in 2019. In 2020, the Council voted to place it on the ballot for the general election on November 3, 2020.

WHAT DO VOTERS THINK ABOUT A TAX INCREASE TO FUND PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

JPEF's annual poll has shown for six consecutive years that Jacksonville residents would be willing to approve a small tax increase in support of our schools. In our 2019 poll, 78.5 percent of voters said they would support a small tax increase for school facilities.

Many other districts around the state of Florida have pursued similar tax referenda, and voters



JACKSONVILLE
PUBLIC
EDUCATION
FUND

Powering Potential

Learn more at jaxpef.org.

have overwhelmingly supported them.

WHAT DOES THE TAX REFERENDUM HAVE TO DO WITH THE DISTRICT'S FACILITIES MASTER PLAN?

In 2019, Superintendent Dr. Diana Greene and the School Board approved a facilities master plan based on a facilities consultant's review of every school building in Duval County. The \$2 billion plan affects every school in the district — including upgrades to schools, the construction of new schools, and the consolidation of some schools where the student population has declined over the years. The plan is available at ourduvalschools.org.

The sales tax would fund this plan, but the vote isn't on the facilities plan itself. What residents will decide is whether they will contribute the revenue to fund the plan through a half-cent sales tax. If you have input on the facilities plan, you should reach out to your representative on the School Board. You can find out which School Board member represents you at jaxpef.org/advocacy-center.

HOW WILL THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC AFFECT THIS ISSUE?

The drop in funding for school facilities began during the last recession in 2008, when tax revenue was lower because of the slow economy. The coronavirus pandemic is also likely to affect the amount of revenue the sales tax raises, but it's unclear right now how much. A small sales tax increase would help protect our schools from the economic downturn, helping ensure our students can learn in quality facilities.

COULD WE USE A HALF-CENT SALES TAX TO PAY FOR EXPENSES OTHER THAN PUBLIC SCHOOL BUILDINGS, SUCH AS TEACHER SALARIES?

The law restricts the way the district can spend the revenue from a half-cent sales tax; it's only possible to spend it on capital infrastructure. The advantage of sales tax funding is it can be approved once by voters for a longer period than other funding sources. The School Board has requested a 15-year sales tax. According to state law, millage increases are only valid for four

years, so the district would have to go back to voters every four years to ask them to re-approve the increase.

WHAT OTHER FUNDING SOURCES COULD WE PURSUE FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Alternative funding sources, such as a millage (property tax) increase, could be used for other purposes, including increasing teacher salaries. For example, St. Lucie passed a millage increase in 2019 to fund school safety and teacher salaries through a special election by mail.

WOULD THE REVENUE BE USED ONLY FOR TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS OR WOULD IT ALSO PAY FOR FACILITIES IN PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Revenue sharing with charter schools was the big issue that stalled the referendum in 2019. In 2020, the Florida Legislature passed a measure requiring any sales tax revenue for public schools to be shared on a per-student basis with charter schools. That arrangement would apply in Duval County if voters approve the sales tax.



JACKSONVILLE
PUBLIC
EDUCATION
FUND

Powering Potential

