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4446-1A Hendricks Avenue • PMB 353 • Jacksonville, FL 32207 • (904) 274-2110  
info@DuvalCBS.com

## IMPORTANT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### 1. WHY DOES THE SCHOOL DISTRICT NEED THE HALF-PENNY?

There are three main reasons.

1. Duval county school buildings are, on average 44-years old, the oldest buildings in the state. Our schools lack the high-technology infrastructure needed to provide a modern education.
2. We expect secure school campuses, buildings that allow students to learn in safety. It is extremely hard and costly to provide security for facilities built for the Leave It To Beaver era, before today's violent realities.
3. Maintaining and repairing old buildings uses capital money that should be going to enhance classrooms.

### 2. HOW DID THE SCHOOL DISTRICT GET SO FAR BEHIND?

Since 2008, the state has cut funding for school maintenance by 24%. The district now has a maintenance shortfall of \$243 million. Without the half-penny, that shortfall is expected to grow to \$1 billion in five years. Many schools have low student enrollment and need to be combined with students of other schools to improve efficiency and increase teaching resources. At the same time, schools in high growth areas of the county need new schools to relieve overcrowding and reduce the number of portables.

### 3. WHAT WILL THE FUNDS RAISED THROUGH HALF-PENNY BE USED FOR?

The half-penny is estimated to raise, on average, approximately \$117 million per year over 15 years. The money will fund projects for new construction, reconstruction, improvements to existing school facilities, removing portables, safety, and security improvements, and technology upgrades.

### 4. WHO PAYS THE HALF-PENNY?

Everyone who buys taxable goods in Duval County will pay, including non-residents who are passing through, come here to shop, and people vacationing at the beach.

### 5. HOW MUCH WILL THE HALF-CENT COST ME?

A family of four with an income of \$55,832 (the median income in Duval County) will pay an estimated \$64. per year. Necessities like groceries, medicine, and gasoline will not be taxed. For large purchases, such as a car, only the first \$5,000 is subject to the half-penny, meaning the maximum amount paid on any single purchase is \$25. Currently, voters in 62 of 67 counties in Florida have passed a local optional sales tax.

### 6. WILL THIS HALF-PENNY LAST FOREVER?

No. The proposal voters are being asked to approve for 15 years will start on January 1, 2021, and sunset on December 31, 2036. Only if voters approve it again in another election will it continue.

### 7. HOW WILL I KNOW IF THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IS DOING WHAT IT SAYS IT WILL DO WITH THE MONEY RAISED?

The School Board will appoint a 24 member, independent, oversight committee made up of county residents who will have complete access to all the records necessary to ensure that the money is being spent as promised.

## **8. WHY A SALES TAX? WHY NOT RAISE IMPACT FEES, OR PROPERTY TAXES, OR ASK THE LEGISLATURE FOR MORE MONEY?**

The half-penny provides a sustainable funding source that is created by a broad base of taxpayers beyond our local property owners.

- We could ask voters for an additional property tax (General Obligation Bond), but this would not produce the money we need, and the burden would fall solely on property owners. Using a property tax, only property owners would pay.
- Duval County does not collect impact fees. Even if it did, impact fees would never produce enough money to meet the financial needs of our school district. Additionally, impact fees can only be used in the area where they are collected. Many of the schools that are most in need of replacement and renovations are in established areas where impact fees cannot be used.
- The legislature has been asked for years to increase the locally allowed millage rate for schools, but the legislature has not changed the current maximum and has indicated an unwillingness to do so in the future.

## **9. DOESN'T THE LOTTERY MONEY FUND EDUCATION?**

The school district receives some money from the lottery program to provide funding to meet the constitutional requirements of the class size amendment, school recognition, and school improvement programs. The amount of money the district receives from the lottery is small in proportion to the total budget. The lottery money received from the state is enough to run our schools for approximately one day.

## **10. IF THE DISTRICT STOPPED WASTING MONEY, SURELY WE WOULD HAVE ENOUGH TO BUILD SCHOOLS.**

The district has not been wasting money. Duval County Public Schools, in accordance with Florida statutes, was successfully audited in 2019 by the Office of Program Policy Analysis (OPPAGA) and Government Accountability in anticipation of a referendum to ask voters to approve a half-penny for school infrastructure. Oversight, accountability, and evidence of our sound financial management includes: Consistent, clean audit reports from both state and federal agencies.

## **11. WHAT ARE ADVANTAGES OF USING A HALF-PENNY TO HELP FUND SCHOOLS?**

There are several advantages.

- The half-penny spreads the burden to everyone, including people passing through the county, our out of town visitors, and shoppers.
- All the money raised from the half-penny stays in Duval County. Not a penny goes to Tallahassee or Washington.
- Because all the money will be spent here, over 15-years, it will provide \$1.7 billion in local economic stimulus.
- By law, the funds can only be used for school infrastructure—things that last, new schools, building renovations, technology, safety, and security.

## **12. HOW MANY OTHER COUNTIES HAVE THE HALF-PENNY FOR SCHOOLS?**

The school system has stretched money further than almost all other counties in Florida. Sixty-two of Florida's 67 counties collect some form of local sales surtax. Duval County is one of the last counties to ask voters for approval.

## **13. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE REFERENDUM DOES NOT PASS?**

Without the half-penny, the school district will have to increase borrowing diverting even more money away from the classroom. On the money already borrowed, the school district currently spends approximately \$25 million each year for debt service; that equals \$68,493 per day. These are real dollars going to a bank, rather than into our classrooms. Failure to get new funding will mean increasing the amount spent on debt service, thus reducing the money available for maintenance at existing schools. Our students will face a future in dilapidated buildings, short on technology, safety, and security.

## **14. I DON'T HAVE CHILDREN OR GRANDCHILDREN IN SCHOOL. WHY SHOULD I SUPPORT THIS?**

There are five very important reasons to vote for the half-penny.

1. Research shows that a successful, high-quality public education system is the most important single economic driver in a community.
2. It promotes increased property values, higher incomes, better jobs, and healthy communities. Businesses, professionals, and highly skilled workers relocate to communities based on the merits of the school system, both for their children and for future employees.
3. The children who sit in our classes today are the people who will someday handle your medications, bank deposits, and repair your car. The quality of their education will directly affect your quality of life.
4. Our parents, grandparents, and neighbors chose to invest in education for each of us—we now have an obligation to invest in the next generation.
5. A high-quality school system benefits everyone's bottom line.