

Washington County Schools See Significant Improvements Thanks to Half-Cent Sales Tax

CHIPLEY, FL – Since its passage in August 2018, a 10-year, half-cent sales tax has been a game-changer for the Washington County School District. The tax, which is set to expire in December 2029, has funded a wide range of projects aimed at modernizing facilities and enhancing educational technology.

Sales Tax Funds and Impact 💰

Over the last six calendar years, the half-cent sales tax has generated an average of \$1.4 million annually, with a total of \$9.3 million collected to date. This consistent revenue has allowed the district to make substantial and planned improvements without relying on one-time grants or bonds. According to Florida law, a half-cent sales tax cannot be used for general operating expenses, such as, salaries or instructional materials. The funds are specifically designated for capital projects in the areas of construction, renovation and improvement, major maintenance and repairs, technology, safety and security.

Technology and Infrastructure Upgrades 🖥️

One of the most visible impacts of the sales tax has been the major investment in technology. The district has used the funds to purchase new computers and laptops for both students and teachers, ensuring everyone has access to the tools they need for a 21st-century education. Every classroom now features a 75" Clear Touch interactive board, replacing outdated chalkboards and whiteboards.

Significant improvements have also been made to the district's infrastructure. A new Pre-K building was constructed to better serve the county's youngest learners, and a new modern bus barn has improved transportation maintenance. The Florida Panhandle Technical College Learning Resource Center has been renovated, and the college's technology has been upgraded, creating a more dynamic space for students and community members.

Facility Enhancements and Security 🛡️

The sales tax has also enabled a number of key facility renovations and safety upgrades. At the two high schools, classrooms have been transformed into a modern culinary teaching center, offering students hands-on career training. Both high school auditoriums have been updated with new lighting, and sound systems, creating a better experience for performances and events.

In addition to these upgrades, the district has addressed long-standing maintenance issues. The tax has funded the replacement of many HVAC systems across various school sites, improving comfort and air quality for students and staff.

Furthermore, new security systems have been installed at multiple schools, making campuses safer for everyone.

With the tax scheduled to sunset in December 2029, the school board will be requesting the tax be placed on the ballot again in November 2026 for the community to decide if they want to continue funding these crucial improvements for the next generation of students.