

# DRAFT

## RESOLUTION NO. 08-03

**A RESOLUTION DIRECTING THE ALACHUA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TO PLACE A MEASURE ON THE BALLOT FOR THE NOVEMBER 4, 2008, GENERAL ELECTION FOR THE ELECTORS WITHIN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT TO VOTE ON THE APPROVAL OF AN ADDITIONAL ONE MILL AD VALOREM TAX FOR FOUR YEARS PURSUANT TO SECTION 1011.73(2), FLORIDA STATUTES (2007).**

**WHEREAS**, section 1011.73(2), Florida Statutes (2007), authorizes the School Board pursuant to a resolution adopted at a regular meeting to direct the County Commissioners to call an election at which the electors within the school district may approve an ad valorem tax millage as authorized under section 1011.71(7), Florida Statutes (2007); and

**WHEREAS**, section 1011.71(7), Florida Statutes (2007), authorizes a school district to levy by local referendum additional millage for school operational purposes up to an amount that, when combined with the nonvoted millage levied, does not exceed the 10 mill limit established under the Constitution; and

**WHEREAS**, the School Board has determined that it is in the best interests of the school district to submit to the voters the question of approving an additional one mill ad valorem tax for four years for necessary operating expenses.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA, IN REGULAR SESSION DULY ASSEMBLED THIS 3<sup>RD</sup> DAY OF JUNE 2008, THAT THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA, IS HEREBY DIRECTED TO CALL AN ELECTION IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE GENERAL ELECTION OF NOVEMBER 4, 2008, AT WHICH THE ELECTORS WITHIN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT MAY VOTE ON THE APPROVAL OF AN ADDITIONAL ONE MILL AD VALOREM TAX FOR FOUR YEARS AS AUTHORIZED UNDER SECTION 1011.71(7), FLORIDA STATUTES (2007), AND THE SUBSTANCE OF THE MEASURE AND THE BALLOT TITLE SHALL BE AS FOLLOWS:**

**BALLOT TITLE:** APPROVAL OF AN ADDITIONAL ONE MILL AD VALOREM TAX FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT OPERATING EXPENSES.

**BALLOT QUESTION:** Shall the Alachua County School District's ad valorem millage be increased by a total of one mill for critical operating expenses including funds to provide school nurses; maintain elementary music and art programs, middle school band programs, quality school library programs, elementary guidance programs, and academic/career/technical magnet programs; and update classroom technology to begin July 1, 2009, and end four years later on June 30, 2013?

\_\_\_\_\_ **YES FOR APPROVAL**

\_\_\_\_\_ **NO FOR REJECTION**



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## **Frequently Asked Questions about the School Funding Referendum**

### ***Why does the district need a property tax increase?***

During the 2007-08 school year, Alachua County Public Schools lost nearly \$9 million in state funding. Under the new budget adopted by the Florida Legislature, the district will lose at least another \$5 million, and possibly more if our allocations are cut again mid-year, as they were in 2007-08. By the time school starts in August, the district will be receiving \$272 less per student than we started with in 2007-08, a decrease of about 7%.

The federal government has also informed school districts nationwide that Medicaid reimbursement funds, which are used locally to pay for most of our school nurses, are on the chopping block. That means a loss of nearly \$1 million for Alachua County Public Schools. More importantly, it means that without a new source of funding, most of our schools will lose their nurse. Congress is considering whether to maintain the Medicaid reimbursement funding until April of 2009, but even if that happens, it would be only a temporary reprieve.

To balance the district's budget, the School Board is cutting administrative and district-level positions and expenditures and is considering a number of other cost-cutting measures, including a reduction in magnet busing, consolidation of under-enrolled schools, less funding for updated technology and other options.

As a result of the budget situation and the state's class size law (which limits class sizes in core academic subjects) the pupil-teacher ratio in elective courses like music and art will have to increase, the number of offerings will be reduced. Additional funding for special programs, such as magnets, is also being cut. Such programs are an integral part of the district's success, but they cannot be maintained at their current levels due to the current budget crisis.

### ***How much money would this increase bring in, and what would the money be used for?***

It's estimated that a one-mill increase would bring in about \$13 million a year. That's less than the district has lost since the beginning of the 2007-08 school year, but it would allow the district to keep school nurses, maintain art, music and other elective and special programs, update classroom technology, continue to provide a full range of counseling services at the elementary level—in short, maintain those programs and services that have helped our district and our students achieve a high level of success.

### ***How much would this increase cost me?***

The district is seeking approval for a one mill increase in property taxes. One mill is equivalent to \$1 for every \$1000 of the assessed value of a property.

The median just value of a home in Alachua County is less than \$145,000. For the average homeowner with a \$25,000 homestead exemption, a one mill increase would cost about \$120 a year, or about \$10 a month.

Under state law, the increase could only be in effect for four years. After that, voters would have to approve to extend it or the increase would end.

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***When would this millage rate increase take effect?***

If approved by voters, the one mill for schools would take effect in July of 2009. Obviously the district would not be able to budget the funds until the 2009-10 school year, which means we'll have to continue to look for ways to cut costs to get through the 2008-09 school year.

***Aren't property taxes in Alachua County already very high?***

Under Amendment 1, which was passed in January of 2008, the average Florida homeowner will actually pay about \$240 less per year in property taxes beginning in January of 2010. The proposed half-mill increase for schools would cost the average homeowner in Alachua County about \$60 a year.

A key reason property taxes rates are higher in Alachua County than in other counties is the large percentage of property that is off the tax rolls and the overall value of the property that *is* taxable. Property taxes bring in significantly less money in Alachua than they do in many other Florida counties.

In fact, among five similar-sized districts, Alachua gets the smallest amount of revenue per student per mill. In St. Johns County, for example, a mill brings in \$886 per student. One mill in Bay County brings in \$739 per student, and in Okaloosa it's \$629 per student. In Alachua County, that same one mill brings in just \$452 per student. The difference is even more dramatic when you look at districts like Monroe, which gets more than \$3700 per student per mill! The statewide average is \$694, 53% higher than Alachua County's figure. That puts our district at a distinct disadvantage.

One thing many citizens don't realize is that unlike their county or city taxes, by far the largest portion of their school taxes are actually determined by the state, not the local school board. Every year the state requires each district to levy a certain property tax rate in order to get its share of state dollars. During 2007-08, about 60% of your school property tax rate was actually mandated by the Florida Legislature.

By the way, the school property tax rate in Alachua County has actually decreased every year for the past eighteen years.

***What happened to the lottery money?***

Voters approved the lottery based on the promise that its revenues would supplement existing education funding. In reality, revenues from the lottery have simply replaced other revenues that schools received from the state in pre-lottery years. The state has also put many limits on the use of lottery dollars. Even if districts had complete flexibility, lottery revenues are actually very small compared to the district's overall budget. This year the lottery money Alachua County Public Schools received was enough to fund the operations of the school system for less than one day.

***Why is it that schools in Florida never seem to have enough money?***

A number of national reports show that Florida's record for funding public schools is dismal. For example, the annual 'Quality Counts' report from *Education Week* grades states based on the quality of their K-12 education systems. The report is often cited by Governor Charlie Crist and other state leaders because it ranks Florida's schools among the top 15 in the nation for student performance. However, that same report gives Florida an 'F' for school spending—and that was before the current rounds of cuts. Florida is actually ranked 46<sup>th</sup> in that category. According to the Census Bureau, Florida is ranked next-to-last among all states in per-student funding compared to wealth. This low level of funding has been the norm in Florida for years, and the trend keeps getting worse.

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***Families and businesses have to cut down on their spending in tough economic times. Why can't schools do the same?***

They do. Alachua County Public Schools has already implemented a number of cost-cutting strategies, such as those outlined above, and more are coming. However, there are limits to what school districts can cut. Many of the programs and services we provide are mandated by either the state or federal law, and such mandates are often unfunded or underfunded. For example, the state mandates that the district transport all students living more than two miles from their school, but only reimburses us for about 60% of the cost.

Even in this tight budget year, the state legislature has passed a law requiring, among other things, new end-of-year tests in addition to the FCAT. However, that requirement comes with no additional funding.

And, like families and businesses, we are also faced with rising costs. For example, a gallon of diesel fuel cost us \$2.27 at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year. It's now up past \$4 a gallon, and still rising. And Alachua County Public Schools needs more than 27,000 gallons of diesel *every week* to run our school buses.

Significant cuts in funding, rising costs and state and federal mandates have all led to what has become a 'perfect storm' in terms of funding for our schools.

***I thought the school system was going for a sales tax increase? Wouldn't that solve the schools' financial problems?***

A sales tax increase could be used **only** for facilities, **not** for operating expenses. While our facilities needs are certainly very extensive, the district is extremely concerned about its ability to maintain those programs and services that are essential to the educational success and the health and well-being of our students.

There is a community-based initiative involving the Gainesville Area Chamber of Commerce and other organizations and individuals that is considering bringing before voters a sales tax referendum to fund land conservation, school facility improvements, transportation and other 'quality of life' issues. However, details such as when the increase would be put before voters and what it would pay for have not yet been worked out.

***I don't have children in the school system. Why should I have to pay for schools?***

A strong, thriving community can't exist without strong, thriving schools. You may not have children in Alachua County Public Schools, but your future pharmacist, accountant, plumber and many of the other citizens you depend on each day are currently attending our schools, and we all have a stake in ensuring that they are getting a good education. Those children will one day become the taxpayers who help support this community, and the better-prepared they are to be productive citizens, the better quality of life we will all enjoy.

From an economic standpoint, good schools are a critical recruiting tool for any community. When businesses and individuals are looking to relocate, one of the first questions they ask is "How are the schools?" High quality schools that project an image of a community that values education will help draw those businesses and professionals to Alachua County. That means more jobs, new programs and technologies, greater economic development and a higher standard of living for our citizens. An investment in schools is an investment in the future for all of us.

***For more information, please contact the Alachua County Public Schools Public Information Office at (352) 955-7253, ext. 228 or through e-mail at Jackie.johnson@gm.sbac.edu.***