



**BUILD A BETTER
TOMORROW**
for our children!



E-SPLOST for Houston County Schools

Houston County School District Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (E-SPLOST) Questions & Answers

What is an E-SPLOST?

An Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (E-SPLOST) is a one-cent sales tax that lasts a maximum of five years or until the established cap is reached. Legislation enacted in 1985 allows school districts the option to ask voters for the ability to levy and collect a one percent sales tax to help fund school improvements. It can be used to pay for capital projects or to retire debt, but cannot be used to pay government operating expenses, such as salaries.

When is the E-SPLOST vote?

Voters may vote March 16, 2021, between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. at their precinct. Early voting will be offered February 22 – March 12, 2021, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at these locations:

- Board of Elections Office, Government Building, 801 Main Street, Perry;
- Houston Health Pavilion Conference Center, 233 N. Houston Road, Warner Robins (west side, back of building);
- Central Georgia Technical College, Roy H. "Sonny" Watson Health Sciences Building, 71 Cohen Walker Drive, Warner Robins.

What is the voter registration deadline?

In order to vote in this election, voters must be registered by February 16, 2021.

Will the E-SPLOST increase my property taxes?

No. The E-SPLOST is a consumption tax, not a property tax. It is charged on goods purchased in Houston County, regardless of where the purchaser resides.

Will the E-SPLOST increase the sales tax?

No, it would be a continuation of the current sales tax, remaining at the current level of seven percent. A "Yes" vote would simply extend the current one percent sales tax for an additional five years. It is estimated that up to \$190 million will be collected over the five-year period. Collections on the 2022-2027 E-SPLOST would begin April 1, 2022, beginning once the current E-SPLOST ends March 31, 2022.

Why an E-SPLOST?

An E-SPLOST is an equitable, consumption tax shared by those who make purchases in Houston County, to include numerous visitors. It provides a method to fund the cost of educational improvements with contributions by any and all who make a purchase in the county, not just property owners.

Why is the E-SPLOST referendum being held now?

Under Georgia law, school districts may place special referendums on voter ballots in either March or November. The current E-SPLOST will expire March 31, 2022. By placing the continuation option before voters prior to the expiration, it allows the school district to plan in advance for funding and also allows no lapse in funding.

Why is the school district proposing to sell bonds in the E-SPLOST extension?

By selling bonds, the school district will be able to immediately address some of its most dire needs. Bond money would allow the district to immediately begin work instead of waiting for the proceeds to be collected.

Why isn't the money being used for teacher salaries and curriculum development?

By law, an E-SPLOST can only be used for certain capital projects, like buildings, furnishings, buses, and computers. It cannot be used for salaries or for day-to-day operational expenses of a school district. However, passing this sales tax vote will free up funds for the Board of Education to meet its required financial obligations without having to rely on more property taxes.

How much money would be raised and how long would this sales tax be in place?

The E-SPLOST one-cent tax extension would be for a limit of \$190 million or five years, whichever comes first.

Isn't the E-SPLOST just a perpetual tax?

No. It must be voted on by citizens and is limited to a five-year cycle and a dollar limit, whichever comes first. Houston County voters approved an E-SPLOST in: 1997 (1997-2001); 2001 (2002-2007); 2005 (2007-2012); 2011 (2012-2017); and 2016 (2017-2022).

What would the school district do with the money raised from the E-SPLOST extension?

Money raised from the E-SPLOST extension would be used to: improve the safety and security of our students and staff; address facility needs through three new schools and upgrades/renovations across the county; update technology across the district; and provide buses for safer transportation. Overall the funds would be used to create better, safer learning environments for our students.

What projects are planned for the 2022-2027 E-SPLOST for our schools?

The priorities are safety and security, facilities, technology, and transportation. All 39 campuses schools would benefit from a continuation of the E-SPLOST. Completion of the planned projects is contingent upon sufficient funding and cost at time of implementation.



Funds would primarily be used to:

- ★ construct, furnish and equip a middle school;
- ★ construct, furnish and equip two elementary/primary schools;
- ★ build a Performing Arts Center near Freedom Field;
- ★ add classrooms based on growth;
- ★ upgrade HVAC at schools;
- ★ renovations, such as lighting, flooring, paint and roofing, at majority of campuses;
- ★ improve parking and traffic flow;
- ★ replace sidewalk canopies;
- ★ upgrade security alarms and cameras;
- ★ add perimeter security fencing;
- ★ enclose exterior breezeways;
- ★ maintenance on fire protection equipment;

- ★ upgrade internet infrastructure, e.g., bandwidth, WiFi, and access points;
- ★ refresh, replace and upgrade classroom technology hardware and software; and
- ★ purchase school buses and transportation equipment.

Has the current 2017-2022 E-SPLOST been a success?

Yes! We did what we said we would do. Safety has been enhanced, facility needs addressed, and improvements made in technology and transportation. Every school in the district has been improved in some way. The highlights follow.

- ★ Security systems, to include cameras, upgraded across district
- ★ Access control upgraded district-wide
- ★ Fire protection equipment replaced at all sites
- ★ Perimeter fencing installed
- ★ Parking and traffic flow improvements at 12 schools
- ★ Purchase of 69 school buses
- ★ Built Bonaire Primary School
- ★ New competition gyms at Houston County High, Northside High, Perry High and Warner Robins High
- ★ Multipurpose athletic facility addition at Veterans High in progress
- ★ Classroom addition at Northside High and underway at Veterans High
- ★ Auditorium renovations at Northside High, Perry High, and Warner Robins High
- ★ Auditorium renovation pending at Houston County High
- ★ Renovated Perry High's Herb St. John Stadium
- ★ Canning plant renovation
- ★ HVAC upgrades at 9 sites
- ★ Chromebooks added for students, teachers and media centers
- ★ Computer workstations for teachers
- ★ Interactive panels for classrooms and media centers
- ★ Media center touch panel self check-out stations
- ★ Upgraded network cabling in several schools
- ★ Instructional materials, to include digital resources
- ★ Upgraded data center and phone system district-wide

Since 2002, E-SPLOST funds have added a total of 1,916,344 square feet and 900 classrooms, in addition to renovating more than 1,042,178 square feet of instructional space.



How much is the current 2012-2017 E-SPLOST expected to generate in revenues?

Approximately \$130 million by the time it expires on or before March 31, 2022. The use of E-SPLOST and property taxes are audited by external agencies and firms. To view the district's latest Annual Audits and E-SPLOST Performance and Operational Reviews, please visit <https://www.hcbe.net/financebusiness>.

How were facilities needs identified?

An extensive needs assessment was completed by construction experts with input from school faculty and staff, maintenance personnel, central office employees, and Board members. Surveys were completed and work order histories analyzed to identify areas of greatest needs and cost savings.

Why do we need three new schools?

Based on current and projected enrollments, two elementary/primary schools are needed to relieve overcrowding at Matt Arthur Elementary School and Langston Road Elementary. A middle school is needed to relieve overcrowding at Bonaire Middle and Perry Middle. The additional classrooms will help meet the needs of our community.

Where would the new schools be located?

Currently the plan is to build the new elementary/primary schools in the vicinity of Matt Arthur Elementary School and Langston Road Elementary. The middle school would be built to relieve overcrowding at Bonaire Middle and Perry Middle. This site would be determined closer to the time of construction, based on the growth trends in Houston County.

Why are technology upgrades necessary?

Technology is everywhere and can be found in almost every part of our lives. The unexpected transition to virtual school due to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasized the need for all students to have greater technology access. In preparing our students to be college and career ready, we must continue to incorporate current technologies into the classroom. Digital tools and electronic resources are needed to enhance teaching and learning. The state implemented online testing for all grades, requiring sufficient infrastructure as well as the need to prepare our students to be comfortable working online. As our society becomes increasingly more technology dependent, our students need to experience various digital devices and platforms. Providing classrooms where digital learning is the norm will help our students be more successful now and in the future.

What technology upgrades are planned?

Our technology goal is to support teaching and learning by providing quality digital resources. We must continuously refresh, replace and upgrade existing classroom technology to include hardware and software, as well as provide for enrollment growth. To provide the necessary technology, our district needs to maintain an adequate technology infrastructure to support new and emerging technologies. The internet infrastructure upgrade will improve bandwidth, WiFi, and access points. Virtual school opportunities will continue to improve for our online classes and support.



What is planned for transportation?

Our district needs school buses to safely and adequately transport students. With the 2017-2022 E-SPLOST, 69 school buses were purchased. Even with this improvement to our fleet, it is aging, with 59 percent of our buses over 10 years old and an average age of 12.6 years. Our buses are driven a total of more than 3,000,000 miles a year to meet the transportation needs of our students. The demand is increasing as our student population increases. Local costs are also increasing. In the past few years, the state has drastically decreased its contribution to student transportation costs and the district currently pays 88 percent of the total cost.

What happens if the E-SPLOST does not pass?

Without an extension of the current E-SPLOST, there would be a number of lost opportunities for the students of Houston County. The E-SPLOST is the primary source of funding to build and maintain quality facilities for students and a key funding source to ensure that technology for students and teachers is updated. To fund these opportunities without an extension of the E-SPLOST, the Board would have to raise property taxes. Currently, our school district's property tax is in the lowest 10 percent in the state. For 2020, our district's millage rate of 13.297 mills ranks 166th out of Georgia's 180 school districts. Passage of the E-SPLOST extension would allow us to maintain our low school millage rate using a consumption tax rather than relying solely on property taxes for needed school improvements.

Why should people who do not have children in school support the E-SPLOST extension?

This keeps ad valorem taxes low. Additionally, the children are not the only ones who benefit from excellent schools. The social and economic strength of a community are greatly influenced by the school district. Good schools mean well-prepared citizens, a strong labor market, and an inviting atmosphere for living and working. One of the key questions asked by industrial/commercial or residential prospects looking to move into a community is, “What is the quality of the schools?”

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Isn't there a City of Warner Robins election on the same date, March 16?

Yes, the City of Warner Robins also has a special election scheduled for March 16, 2021. Anyone may vote early Feb. 22 – Mar. 12 at any of the three locations listed above. City of Warner Robins voters will be able to vote in both special elections at the same location, but on different ballots.

On Election Day, Mar. 16, some City of Warner Robins voters will be able to cast both County and City ballots at one location, while a small percentage of City voters will need to visit two locations.

Voters should check their My Voter Page, www.mvp.sos.ga.gov, or call the voter registration office, (478) 987-1973, to verify their polling location.

How do I make sure that I'm registered to vote or find out where I vote?

Visit the [Houston County Board of Elections website](#). You may also visit the Georgia Secretary of State's [My Voter Page](#).