

# The citizens of Baldwin County face a critical choice on March 23.



**W**e can say YES to protecting the quality schools that have long been at the center of community life here. Or we can choose not to act and allow the greatest school funding shortfall in Alabama's history to take its full toll on our county school system, our local economy and our quality of life.

**That's why it's important for each of us to understand the facts.**

## Why do we need the penny sales tax?

- ✓ Alabama sales and income tax revenues that provide much of our statewide funding for education have decreased significantly over the past two years.
- ✓ In addition, Baldwin County has been hit hard by falling property values and a loss of ad valorem tax revenue – another important source of local education funds.
- ✓ Just two years ago, the school system held a healthy fund balance of \$22 million. Since then, the state has cut funding to the Baldwin County schools by a total of 11 percent in 2009, and so far this school year, by another 7.5 percent. Consequently, Baldwin County's fund balance has been exhausted in an effort to maintain local school staffing and vital services.
- ✓ Bottom line? Our school system is operating with \$61 million less this year than in 2008 and, to date, \$45 million has been borrowed to ensure cash flow and meet payroll.

## What will an extra penny mean to the Baldwin County Public Schools?

- ✓ It will provide \$25 million per year for 3 years to fund the day-to-day operations of the school system. NONE of these funds will be used for new construction or redistributed to other counties as part of equity funding.
- ✓ Current instructional programs and students services can continue.
- ✓ Critically needed classroom and school support staff can be rehired.
- ✓ The Board of Education will have a 36-month period of recovery under a new administration to develop a comprehensive strategic plan, continue cost reductions and begin work with the community to seek long-term funding solutions.

## What happens if the measure fails?

- ✓ Up to 400 positions (teachers and school support staff) will be cut, leading to more students in already overcrowded classrooms.
- ✓ Transportation services will be further reduced, ending school bus access for many children.
- ✓ Supplements to pay coaches and band directors will be eliminated along with funding for other enrichment programs.
- ✓ District accreditation will be lost if academic standards set by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools are not maintained. (Many colleges do not accept applications from graduates of non-accredited high schools.)
- ✓ Every school system employee will be at risk for termination. (Alabama's Fair Dismissal Act and state tenure laws allow for tenured and non-probationary personnel to be let go when funds for salaries are not available).
- ✓ At least two schools will close.
- ✓ School system debt will accrue at a staggering rate over the next 36 months - up to \$5 million by this October and reaching \$31 million by February 2013.
- ✓ Property values will suffer as schools decline and new businesses and young families choose to locate elsewhere.

Most agree that Alabama laws must change to ensure stable, adequate funding for public education. In the meantime, Baldwin County students are looking to us to maintain the quality learning opportunities they need to compete with others across the nation and around the world.

## Vote YES on March 23.

For our children. For our community.