

FAQ's to be included with requests for calls and letters to Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) members.

Links to additional information:

- [GCS Facilities Master Plan Fact Sheet](#)
- Guilford Education Alliance [Resources on GCS Facilities](#)
- [Spreadsheet](#) of Schools, Plans and Priorities
- Triad City Beat [article on the Board of Education request](#)
- Additional GCS Facilities Master Plan Info: <https://www.gcsnc.com/Page/62685>

What is meant by “GCS facilities”?

GCS facilities are all physical buildings and associated properties used by the Guilford County School System: Elementary, Middle, and High School buildings including school yards and outdoor athletic facilities, buildings housing alternative schools, GCS administration buildings, and equipment maintenance facilities. [?? is this reasonably accurate?]

What is the Board of Education planning to do with the money they requested?

There are 10 broad categories of work to be done on GCS facilities

- Major repairs at 56 schools;
 - Fully renovating 19 schools;
 - Rebuilding 22 schools on existing sites;
 - Constructing 7 new schools on new sites;
 - Constructing new additions at 3 schools to alleviate overcrowding and manage future student enrollment growth;
 - Closing 13 school buildings and 11 administrative buildings that are underutilized
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- Upgrading safety and security at 100% schools;
 - Upgrading technology at 100% schools;
 - Improving learning environments district-wide;
 - Eliminating mobile classrooms district-wide; and,

How did the Board of Education and the County Commissioners determine all this work was necessary?

In December 2017, Guilford County Schools hired MGT of America Consulting, LLC to conduct a **School Assignment Optimization Plan** for eliminating underutilization in some schools and overcrowding in others and a **Facility Condition Assessment** to identify and classify maintenance, repair, and technology needs in all existing schools and other GCS facilities.

School and district buildings were assessed, scored and ranked based on the overall condition of the facility, educational suitability for 21st century learning, technology infrastructure and site, including age of facility infrastructure, quantity and size of appropriate academic and support spaces, and space utilization compared to short and long term student enrollment projections.

You can see the complete Facility Condition Assessment Report [here](#).

How did the School Board come up with the \$1.6 billion figure they put in their request?

Based on these studies, the consultants, Guilford County Board of Education, and the Guilford Board of County Commissioners developed a **Facilities Master Plan (FMP)** which included estimates for all of the necessary work that had been identified.

The total estimated cost of all the necessary work was \$2.1 billion.

The \$1.6 billion figure is based on an estimate of how much of the work can be completed within the next 10 years.

Why do we have so much work that needs to be done all at once?

The necessary work represents more than 10 years of neglected maintenance and repairs. The last approved funding for major repairs and new construction was in 2008, and it did not cover all of the work for which funds were requested.

In general the Board of Education (BOE) is responsible for identifying needs related to facilities, and the Board of Commissioners reviews requests from the BOE annually and approves those they will fund. All facilities related funding comes from the County.

Funding for repairs has been requested regularly since then, but no significant funds have been approved. The studies on which the current request is based were funded by the Guilford County Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education.

Where is money going to come from?

The money required by the Guilford County Schools comes from three primary sources:

- The Federal Government
- The State of North Carolina
- Guilford County (which defines our school district)

Each of these sources provides funds for specific purposes. Guilford County is responsible for building and maintaining the physical school facilities, so all of this money will come from the County.

Can the County afford to spend \$1.6 billion on this work?

The Board of Commissioners is in the process of deciding how much of the requested amount they will fund at this time. All of the work in the Facilities Masters Plan must be done to provide our children with a safe and fully functional learning environment, so it will all need to be funded eventually. None of the work is optional.

We know from past experience that delaying repairs and upgrades increases the cost when the work is eventually done. Unattended repairs can even lead to making it most cost effective to demolish a school and rebuild it from scratch.

How is Guilford County going to come up with \$1.6 billion?

Even stretched out over ten years, this funding cannot come from the County's regular budget. The County Commissioners are considering placing a proposal on the November ballot to raise the sales tax in Guilford County by one quarter of one cent per dollar. If this proposal is approved by the voters it would provide revenue to fund part of the work required.

To fund all of the work, it will be necessary to make a small increase in property taxes. If this increase is required, it will also be on the November ballot and must be approved by the voters of Guilford County.

If we're going to raise taxes to pay for this work, why do we need to issue bonds and pay interest on them on top of the cost?

A bond is a loan made to the issuer—Guilford County in this case—by the purchaser of the bond. Guilford County will issue bonds to pay for this project for the same reason you borrow money to build a new home. You get to start at once rather than waiting until you've saved enough money to pay cash.

The tax increases that will pay for the work are set up to pay for the work over an extended period of time to make the increases as small as possible. But in order to start the work right away and improve our schools as quickly as possible, we need to borrow money to get started now, and then, as with a new home, pay back the money over 20 years or more.

Why not wait until we have the money we need to do the work rather than increasing taxes and paying interest on bonds?

Some of the repairs and construction is required for health and safety reasons and to relieve overcrowding so waiting is not an option. The cost of undone general maintenance and repairs increases over time because of deterioration. The longer we delay the more the necessary work will cost.

We also need to build new schools to serve children of families who are moving into Guilford County. Without these schools there will be increases in long distance bussing especially for middle and high schools.

The FMP identifies work to be done in every school and in many cases the amount of work is extensive. Spreading the work out over time will make it much easier to manage, and allow for adjustments to the plan as work goes on. In the best case this work will take up to 15 years to complete. Within that time our needs may change significantly, especially regarding integrating technology into the learning experience.

Given the pandemic and the recession that is expected to follow it, isn't this a bad time to be committing to spending this much money?

No, it's actually a good time to do that. When there is a recession, injecting money into the local economy in the form of wages and payments for materials is one of the best ways to get things moving again. The federal government will undoubtedly have large scale stimulus programs but this is money that will largely be spent here in Guilford County and neighboring areas.

The work, and therefore the spending, will be spread out over ten years. At this time the Board of Commissioners is simply requesting permission to issue bonds and raise taxes. There is no commitment to spend or issue bonds for any specific amount, just an upper limit. If recovery from the recession takes longer than anticipated the work could be scaled back appropriately.

The bonds don't need to be issued all once. The County can issue bonds in series to cover the anticipated expenses of the next period. That means interest doesn't accrue on money that is just sitting in the bank.

And we should not forget that investment in public education pays for itself in the long run. Students who are well educated are more valuable employees and do better in college. Businesses need educated and skilled employees, and a quality public education system is always an important consideration when companies look for a location to set up new operations.

So what happens next?

The BOE has made its formal request for funds. Now:

- The County Commissioners will vote at their scheduled meeting on May 21 on how much funding to provide, which will determine what requests they must make from the state.
- On June 18, there will be a public hearing to allow input to the BOCC related to the FMP and its funding.
- The BOCC must then formally ask for appropriate referendum items to be placed on the November ballot. This must be done by July. If this deadline is missed, the referendum will be delayed until November, 2022 at the earliest, and all activity may be halted until then.
- The people of Guilford County vote on the referendums on November 2.
- If the referendums pass, plans will be developed for starting the work.

Is that all there is to it?

Those are the milestones, but nothing is guaranteed. We will need to take on each of these items as they come along.

Right now, there are clear indications that at the May 21 BOCC meeting, the Commissioners will vote to request permission to pursue funding in an amount less than \$1.6 billion. We believe they should make their initial request for the full amount for two reasons:

- This initial request commits them to nothing, but it sets a ceiling on what is possible. So even if they make the initial request for \$1.6 billion, their final decision could be to approve less; \$900 million, \$700 million, even \$350 million are numbers that have been discussed. None of these options are excluded. But if the initial request is made for, say, \$700 million, then funding levels higher than that are no longer possible.
- The public hearing on this issue won't occur until June 21. We believe the BOCC should not make a limiting initial request before the people have had an opportunity to be heard. The BOCC has even said it wants to hear from the people, so why limit your options before you do?

After a decision is made on the level of funding, we will need to track its progress to see that it, in fact, does get put on the ballot.

The most important step then is to make a big effort to make Guilford voters aware of the issue, provide them with all the facts related to the state of the schools, and get them to stand up and be counted in favor of providing a good education for our children.