

Executive Summary:

OCPS launched a strategic campaign to renew the half-cent sales tax, a critical funding source initially approved in 2002 and renewed in 2014, that funded significant infrastructure enhancements including a 75% reduction in portable classrooms and the renovation or replacement of 136 schools. Facing a projected \$4 billion shortfall over 10 years for critical infrastructure and maintenance, OCPS aimed to secure continued support. The renewal passed with a decisive 72.06% approval, the highest margin for a school district half-cent sales tax referendum in Florida.

Research:

OCPS research to understand community needs included surveys using the ThoughtExchange platform that revealed priorities like updated AC, technology, shaded playgrounds, and renovated bathrooms, which informed targeted messaging. Analysis of demographics, past campaigns, and election results helped identify key audiences.

A partnership with the Orlando Regional REALTORS® Association provided polling data, showing 66% support for continuation and a 41% preference for a 10-year renewal, directly informing 10-year ballot language. Research also addressed concerns about a failed county transportation sales tax two years earlier and the potential impact of a competing sales-tax initiative on the same ballot.

A PFM Group Consulting study found that 51-55% of Orange County sales taxes are paid by non-residents/tourists, informing campaign messaging. Analysis of facility-focused posts on Facebook and LinkedIn revealed 28% higher engagement than other content, informing targeted content showcasing the tangible benefits of the half-cent sales tax.

Planning:

Based on research, OCPS developed a communication plan with core messages on student success, fiscal responsibility, and community benefits. Audiences were segmented, and a multi-channel strategy was implemented using traditional and social media, events, and presentations. To mitigate the potential negative impact of a competing county transportation sales tax, OCPS proactively engaged with county commissioners, whose decision not to pursue another transportation tax cleared the way for a focused campaign on the half-cent sales tax renewal.

Campaign Goal: Achieve at least 50% voter approval in the November 5, 2024, general election.

Objectives: Modify ballot language for broad appeal; research target audiences and messages; create awareness among key audiences; identify and equip advocates.

Implementation:

To ensure consistent and impactful messaging throughout the campaign, the district developed key talking points that were prominently featured in all promotional materials. They included:

- **The need for continued investment:** Emphasizing the ongoing need for school construction, renovation, and technology upgrades to provide students with the best possible learning environments.

- **The positive impact of the sales tax:** Highlighting the tangible benefits achieved since the initial implementation of the tax in 2002, such as the reduction of portable classrooms and the renovation or replacement of 136 schools.
- **Fiscal responsibility and transparency:** Underscoring OCPS's commitment to responsible stewardship of taxpayer dollars and the oversight provided by the Citizens' Construction Oversight and Value Engineering (COVE) committee.
- **Community benefits:** Emphasizing the economic impact of school construction projects, including job creation and the multiplier effect of investment in the local economy.
- **No tax increase:** Clearly communicating that a "for" vote would not increase taxes but simply continue the existing half-cent sales tax.
- **More than 50% of sales taxes paid by visitors/non-residents:** Emphasizing the benefit to the community of our thriving tourism industry.
- **Ballot item placement:** Understanding the November ballot was lengthy, emphasizing the half-cent sales tax continuation was the LAST item on the ballot, anecdotally using the phrase "Last on the ballot, first in your heart."

The external campaign formally launched at the June 2024 State of the Schools address, strategically held at a historic high school whose campus had been replaced as part of the previous sales tax, visually demonstrating the impact of continued funding. The event featured a powerful video that included former district leaders, community partners and regional influencers explaining the importance of continuing the sales tax. Community outreach intensified after the August primary and consisted of traditional media outreach (news releases, pitched stories, editorials), social media engagement, and 20+ presentations to community groups, associations, local officials, and political candidates.

OCPS collaborated with Change4Kids, an advocacy organization crucial in the 2002 referendum and 2012 renewal, which developed direct mail campaigns and distributed yard signs, a strategic partnership due to legal restrictions preventing direct district advocacy. Superintendent Maria Vazquez held 15 town hall meetings across the district to engage directly with community members and address their questions and concerns. School board members recorded videos to share on their social media channels. The videos were recorded at schools they represent and either highlighted things that had been accomplished as part of the previous sales tax or needs that would be addressed with the continuation.

Evaluation:

The half-cent sales tax continuation passed with 72.06% approval, the highest margin for a school district half-cent sales tax referendum in Florida. It will secure an estimated \$4 billion over 10 years for school construction, renovation, and technology upgrades and demonstrated the effectiveness of OCPS's strategic communication efforts. Highlighting the ballot item's placement contributed to one of the lowest "undervotes" of all ballot questions.

The campaign's impact extended beyond the ballot box, as demonstrated by strong engagement across digital platforms: Over 300,000 individuals were reached across all platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X), demonstrating a substantial and sustained campaign impact. Over 32,000 video views highlighted the effectiveness of visual content in conveying the campaign's messages. Strong average post engagement across all platforms reflected successful community interaction and information dissemination.

Supporting Materials

Informational Flyers (English and Spanish)

ALL ABOUT THE HALF-CENT SALES TAX REFERENDUM
FOR ORANGE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ON NOV. 5 2024 **VOTE**

YOUR VOTE MATTERS!

Orange County voters will decide Nov. 5 whether to continue a half-cent sales tax that pays for:

- School Construction
- Renovations and Replacements
- Maintenance
- School Technology
- Safety and Security

FOR MORE INFO
SCAN OR GO TO
youdecide.ocps.net

The sales tax question will be the last item on the ballot

THE TAX
A vote for a continuation will not increase taxes. Tourists and non-residents pay more than 50% of sales taxes. The sales tax has helped reduce portable classrooms by 75%.

THE NEED
75 OCPS schools will need renovation or replacement by 2035. Without the tax, OCPS will be short \$4 Billion for school construction. There is no state or federal funding for school construction.

THE IMPACT
School construction results in an average of 1,850 jobs a year in Orange County. Each dollar spent on school construction results in \$1.58 back into our economy.

BEFORE AFTER **SEE THE RESULTS FOR YOURSELF!** BEFORE AFTER

TODO ACERCA DEL REFERENDUM SOBRE EL IMPUESTO DE VENTAS DE MEDIO CENTAVO
PARA LAS ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS DEL CONDADO ORANGE

EL 5 DE NOV DE 2024 **VOTA**

¡TU VOTO IMPORTA!

Los votantes del Condado Orange decidirán el 5 de noviembre si se continúa con el impuesto sobre las ventas de medio centavo que paga por:

- Construcción de Escuelas
- Renovaciones y Reemplazos
- Mantenimiento
- Tecnología Escolar
- Protección y Seguridad

PARA MÁS INFORMACIÓN ESCANEAR O VAYA A youdecide.ocps.net

La pregunta del impuesto sobre las ventas será el último punto en la papeleta electoral

EL IMPUESTO
Un voto a favor para la continuación no aumentará los impuestos. Los turistas y los no residentes pagan más del 50% de los impuestos sobre las ventas. El impuesto sobre las ventas ha ayudado a reducir los salones de clases portátiles en un 75%.

LA NECESIDAD
75 escuelas de OCPS necesitarán renovación o reemplazo para el 2035. Sin el impuesto, OCPS tendrá un déficit de \$4 billones para la construcción de escuelas. No hay fondos estatales ni federales para la construcción de escuelas.

EL IMPACTO
La construcción de escuelas genera un promedio de 1,850 empleos al año en el Condado Orange. Cada dólar utilizado en la construcción de escuelas genera un reembolso de \$1.58 a nuestra economía.

ANTES DESPUÉS **¡COMPRUEBE USTED MISMO LOS RESULTADOS!** ANTES DESPUÉS

Presentation (Sample Slides)

Before Sales Tax

Since 2002
136
replaced or renovated schools funded

75%
reduction in portables

Ballot Title and Ballot Summary

The ballot title and summary was adopted by the School Board April 23 and the Board of County Commissioners May 7 and reads as follows:

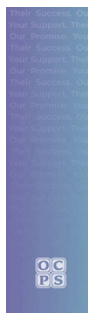
OFFICIAL BALLOT **BOLETA OFICIAL**

ONE-HALF CENT SALES SURTA FOR SCHOOL FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION, IMPROVEMENT, LAND ACQUISITION, AND TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION.

SHALL THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA, CONTINUE THE ONE-HALF CENT SALES SURTA TO FUND THE CONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOL FACILITIES, AND LAND ACQUISITION, LAND IMPROVEMENT AND DESIGN AND ENGINEERING COSTS, INCLUDING ANY BOND INTERESTS, AND THE COST OF RETROFITTING AND PROVIDING TECHNOLOGY IMPLEMENTATION, BEGINNING JANUARY 1, 2028 AND ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2035, SHARED PROPORTIONATELY WITH CHARTER SCHOOLS AS LEGALLY REQUIRED, WITH CONTINUED OVERSIGHT BY AN INDEPENDENT CITIZENS' COMMITTEE?

FOR THE ONE-HALF CENT TAX

AGAINST THE ONE-HALF CENT TAX



- October 2: Local Vote-by-Mail Begins
- October 7: Deadline to Register to Vote
- October 21 - November 3: Early Voting
- November 5: General Election Day

youdecide.ocps.net

Website (www.youdecide.ocps.net)

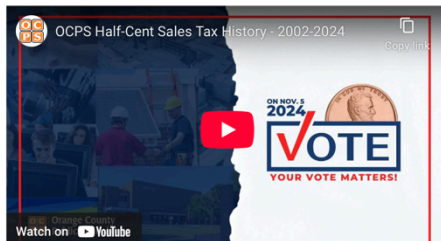


Orange County Public Schools / Departments / Public Relations / Half-Cent Sales Tax

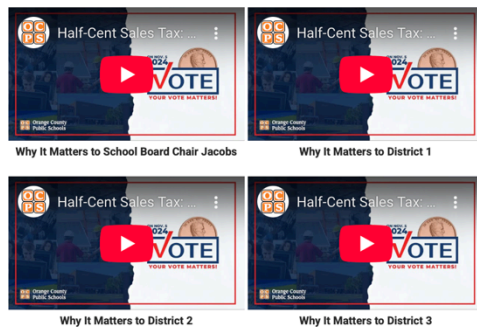


A referendum on the November 5, 2024, ballot will ask voters whether to continue the half-cent sales tax for district capital needs for ten years.

Half-Cent Sales Tax History Video



A community effort led to a half-cent sales tax for school construction and maintenance in Florida's Orange County Public Schools in 2002. The tax, which has funded the replacement or renovation of 136 schools, was extended in 2014 and will be on the ballot again in November 2024.



Resources

[Half-Cent Sales Tax FAQ Flyer](#)
How does OCPS use the half-cent sales tax? Why is it on the ballot Nov. 5? Learn more here.

[Spanish Version](#)

[Portuguese Version](#)

[Haitian Creole Version](#)

[Vietnamese Version](#)

[Arabic Version](#)

[List of OCPS Schools Needing Renovations by 2035](#)

These schools will be at least 25 years old by 2035 and in need renovation or replacement.

[2002 Sales Tax List of 136](#)

This is the list of 136 projects approved by Orange County voters in 2002 as part of the initial sales tax ballot measure. Some of the schools were closed or projects combined. Voters renewed the tax in 2014. To date, sales tax funds have been used to fund 136 school construction projects, including some that were not on the original list.

Ballot Language

One-half cent sales surtax for school facilities construction, improvement, land acquisition, and technology implementation.

Shall the School Board of Orange County, Florida continue the one-half cent sales surtax to fund the construction, reconstruction and improvement of school facilities, and land acquisition, land improvement, design and engineering costs, including any bond indebtedness, and the cost of retrofitting and providing technology implementation, beginning January 1, 2026 and ending December 31, 2035, shared proportionately with charter schools as legally required, with continued oversight by an independent citizens' committee?

for the one-half cent tax
 against the one-half cent tax

[Spanish Version](#)

[Portuguese Version](#)

Social Media Examples

Melissa Byrd - Orange County School Board Member, District 7
October 28, 2024

A big part of the renewal of the half penny sales tax is about school building equity. Watch this video as I describe how important it is that all schools have quality facilities. Not all schools have strong PTA's or alumni networks to fundraise. That doesn't mean that those children deserve less. Early voting is open! The half penny sales tax renewal question is the last question on the ballot.
Orange County Public Schools

Orange County Public Schools

Playground Sun Shades
Playground sun shades are becoming a necessity in Florida. OCPS School Board Member Melis...

1 share

View insights Boost post

516 1 71

Liked by coco_ocps and others
ocps_official Today is Election Day! 🇺🇸

The last item on the ballot is for the continuation of the half-cent sales tax. Check out what it does for OCPS and our students at youdecide.ocps.net. (Link in bio)

Orange County Public Schools
Published by Pio Orange
July 5, 2024

Ever wonder how the half-cent sales tax makes a major difference for our kids and the Orange County community?
Find out more at youdecide.ocps.net! #ocps #ocpsmeanssuccess

33 2 comments 13 shares

Like Comment Send Share

Orange County Public Schools
Published by Pio Orange
July 22, 2024

Have you seen the latest pics of **Atwater Bay Elementary -OCPS?** The little Stingrays are going to love their new home!
You can check it out in person during the sneak peek on Wednesday, July 31 from 4 - 6 p.m. This amazing new school is another project made possible by Orange County's half-cent sales tax.
#ocps #ocpsmeanssuccess Pam Gould - District 4 School Board Member

You, Atwater Bay Elementary -OCPS and 63 others 5 comments 2 shares

Social Media Examples (continued)

Orange County Public Schools
Published by Pio Orange
November 5, 2024

A message from OCPS Superintendent Maria Vazquez:
On behalf of the students, employees and families of Orange County Public Schools I want to say a huge thank you to voters for their overwhelming support of the continuation of half-cent sales tax for school construction and renovation. The approval means our schools will continue to receive much need renovations including the replacement of roofs, air conditioning, and electrical systems along with necessary upgrades in secu... See more

OC PS Orange County Public Schools

WOULD LIKE TO SAY

CHANGE 4 KIDS *Thank You* **ORLANDO REGIONAL REALTOR ASSOCIATION**

TO THE FOLLOWING BUSINESSES FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF CHANGE 4 KIDS & THE HALF-CENT SALES TAX

ABC **AdventHealth** **CPPI** **Disney** **Gilbane** **Rosen Hotels & Resorts** **UNIVERSAL**

Special thanks to the Change 4 Kids chairs:
Dick Batchelor, Cliff Long & Eddie Fernandez

42 4 comments 9 shares