BUDGET COMMISSION

The Geauga County Budget Commission met in special session on Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 9:02 a.m. at the Auditor's Appraisal Conference Room, 231 Main St., Chardon, Ohio.
Present: Geauga County Auditor Charles E. Walder, Geauga County Prosecutor James R. Flaiz, and Geauga County Treasurer C. P. Hitchcock.
Also Present: Chief Operations Officer, Pam McMahan, and Deputy Auditors, Tina Kloski and Kristen Sinatra

Special Meeting Advertised: **2026/2027 School District Budget Hearings and Regular Business**
Virtual attendance was offered for public viewing.

2026/2027 School District Budget Hearings were called to order at 9:02 a.m.

2026/2027 School Year School District Official Certificates of Estimated Resources
Upon the review of the school districts estimates, inside and outside millage available to be levied, renewal and/or additional levies not hereto considered for certification until after voter approval and balances and receipts adjusted as needed, it was moved and seconded as follows to certify 2026/2027 school year tax budgets by approving/adopting official Certificates of Estimated Resources for the local school districts as follows:

Auditor's Remarks: The following six slides are highlighted for Berkshire LSD but pertain to both Berkshire and West G LSD.
Information in the slides was sourced from the Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Development.
The slides specific to each school are located in that school's section.

West Geauga LSD
Motion by Charles E. Walder, seconded by Christopher Hitchcock, to approve the West Geauga LSD 2026/2027 tax budget as presented with revisions to General Fund revenue:

2026/2027 SCHOOL YEAR BUDGET HEARINGS

WEST GEAUGA LSD

Starting at
9:30 a.m. (est.)
February 19, 2026

Karen Pavlat, Treasurer attended the hearing representing West Geauga LSD.

		REQUESTED		*APPROVED BY BUDGET COMMISSION
General Fund				
Emergency Levies	Estimated 7/1/2026 Unencumbered Cash Balance	12,103,713.00		12,103,713.00
	Estimated 2026/2027 Revenue	**40,123,043.00**		40,123,043.00
	Estimated 2026/2027 Expense	40,127,629.00	*	40,127,629.00
Includes Emegency Levies	Estimated 6/30/2027 Cash Balance	12,099,127.00		12,099,127.00
*Includes transfer-out to PI		**Revenue Considered:**		**$40,123,043.00**

Reference Only

Emergency Levy Fund - West G LSD			98% collection
Values included in GF	1.86 Mills 2010	2,350,000.00	2,303,600.00
	2.93 Mills 2012	3,700,000.00	3,628,789.00
			5,932,389.00

Permanent Improvement Fund West G

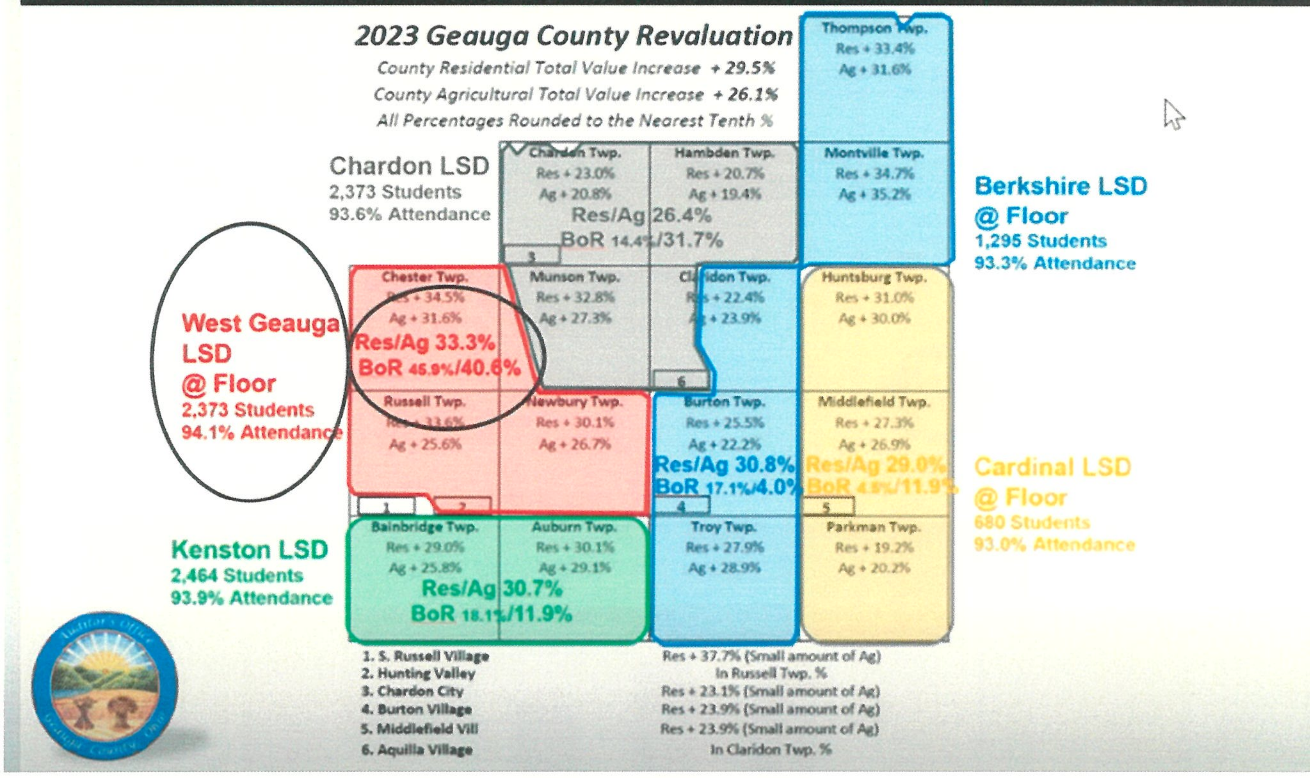
	Estimated 7/1/2026 Unencumbered Cash Balance	1,833,467.00	1,833,467.00
	Estimated 2026/2027 Revenue	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00
	Estimated 2026/2027 Expense	2,733,467.00	2,733,467.00
	Estimated 6/30/2027 Cash Balance	100,000.00	100,000.00
Transfer-in from the GF		**Revenue Considered**	**$1,000,000.00**

Total millage for Tax Year 2026 (2027 Collection) West G		MFG Homes	Net DistTY25CY25
4.50	Inside General Fund	General Fund	18,354.00
0.00	Inside Permanent Improvement	Emergency	2,640.18
38.80	Outside (voted) General Fund	Perm Impr	895.13
4.79	Emergency Levies	State Credits	14,267.44
0.00	Permanent Improvement	Total	36,156.75
48.09	Total Mills Rounded		

Value of 1 Mill TY25CY26 1,263,769.80

**Tentative approval subject to vote of the Budget commission*

2023 Sexenniel/2024/2025 BoR/School Map



School Assessed Values

Geauga County School Districts
Assessed Value Comparison

	TY2025 Valuation				Change in Valuation					
	Res/Ag	Other	Public Utility	Total	Res / Ag	Percent	Other	Percent	Public Utility	Total
Kenson LSD	1,081,774,680	118,337,180	24,523,393	1,224,635,253	8,756,620	0.72%	4,663,780	3.94%	1,131,333	4.61%
Chardon LSD	823,894,960	107,671,030	36,851,857	968,417,847	4,559,380	0.47%	(1,539,730)	-1.43%	2,222,477	6.03%
West Geauga LSD	1,141,278,370	66,842,260	55,649,173	1,263,769,803	5,487,150	0.43%	666,190	1.00%	1,836,493	3.30%
Berkshire LSD	441,162,170	50,835,680	19,693,872	511,691,722	3,549,330	0.80%	1,602,390	3.15%	1,009,252	5.12%
Cardinal LSD	355,060,860	95,902,410	22,734,219	473,697,489	6,608,960	1.40%	2,617,630	2.73%	1,362,019	5.99%
Total	3,843,171,040	439,588,560	159,452,514	4,442,212,114	28,961,440	0.75%	8,010,260	1.82%	7,561,574	4.74%

The Above Includes Overlap Values

School Taxation Ranking

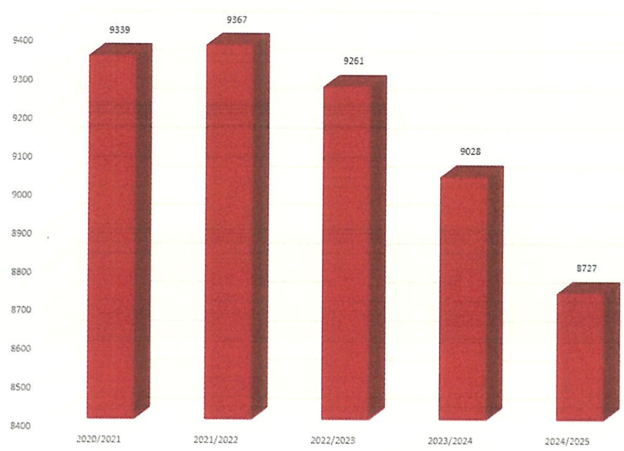
Geaua County
School Taxation Evaluation
Tax Year 2025/Collection 2026

Residential Effective Rates

	Full Rates		Inside*		Current	Perm						Total Eff.
	Rate	Rank	General	Perm Improv.	Expense*	Improv.	Bond	Classroom Facilities	Emergency	Substitute	Total	Rank
Kenston LSD	89.760000	1	4.500000	0.000000	23.210935	0.998860	2.770000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	31.479795	1
Chardon LSD	80.680000	2	3.500000	1.000000	24.816403	1.388650	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	30.705053	2
West Geauga LSD	48.090000	5	4.500000	0.000000	16.545053	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	4.790000	0.000000	25.835053	3
Berkshire LSD	52.230000	4	4.500000	0.000000	15.508001	0.000000	2.450000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	22.458001	4
Cardinal LSD	57.600000	3	4.000000	0.500000	16.757063	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	21.257063	5
Auburn JVSD	1.500000		1.500000								1.500000	
Lake County Financing	4.900000		1.486349								1.486349	

Geauga Enrollment Trend

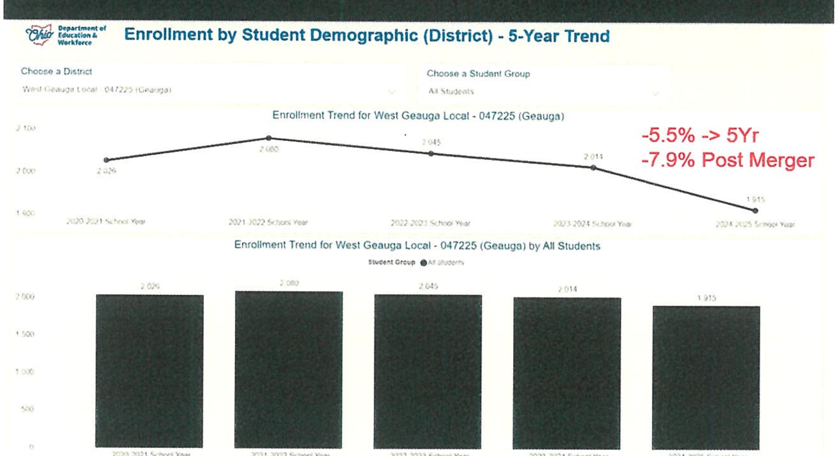
Student Enrollment - Geauga County



County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr

* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Enrollment

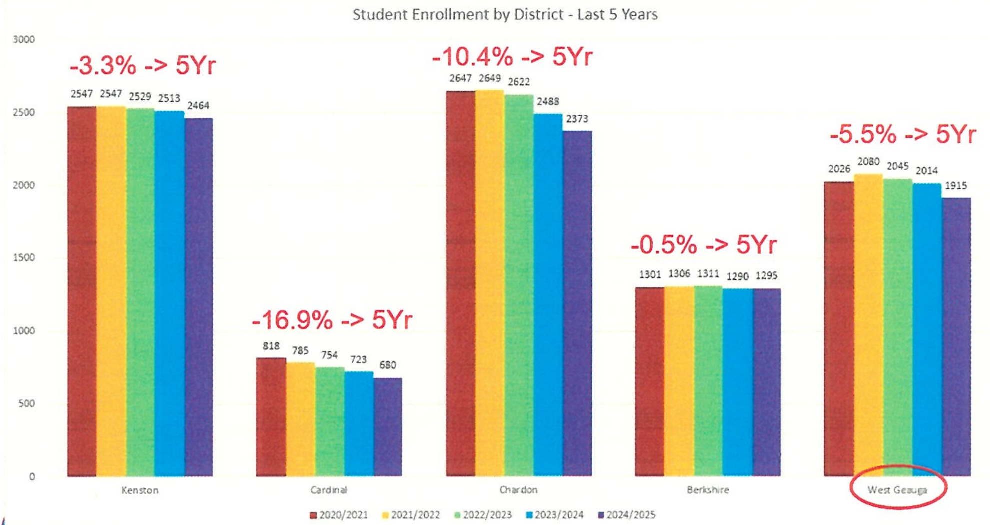


-5.5% -> 5Yr
-7.9% Post Merger

County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr

* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Geauga Enrollment Trend by District



County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr

* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

West Geauga Budget Submission Summary

- General Fund & Emergency Fund (Adjusted):

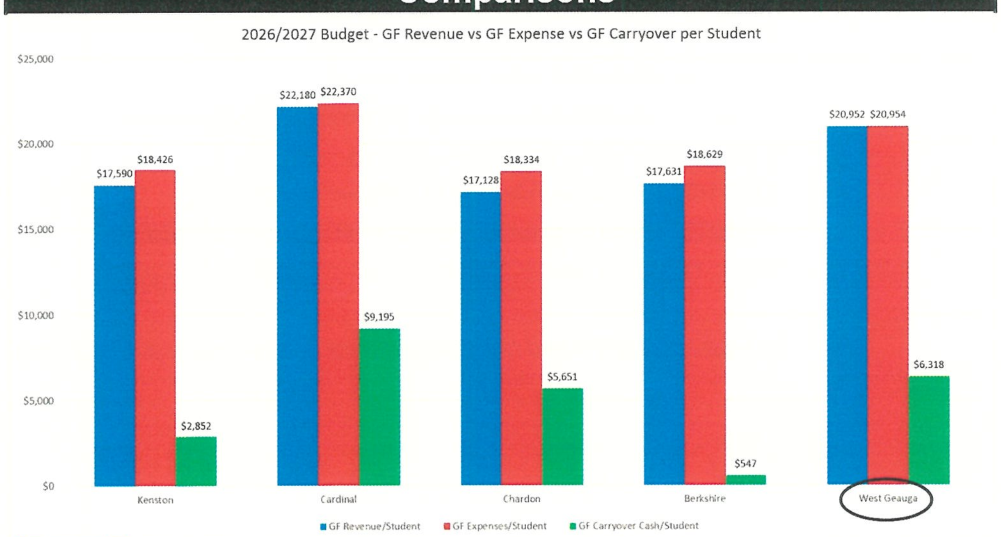
Beginning Balances	$12,103,713	⬇
Revenues (Adjusted)*	$40,123,043	⬆
Expenses	$40,127,629	⬆
Ending Balances	$12,099,127	⬇

- Estimated Cash as % of Expenses 30.1% ⬇
- GF Revenue per Student** $ 20,952 ⬆
- GF Expenses per Student** $ 20,954 ⬆
- Carryover Cash per Student** $ 6,318 ⬇

* Recommend Budget Commission accepting corrected Other Revenue submission

** Enrollment from Ohio Department of Education Website (2024/2025 = 1,915 Students)
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Geauga Revenue/Expense/Carryover per Student Comparisons



* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Cash as % of Expense

Cash as % of Expense Traditional District Comparison

Return to Traditional District Data | Return to Selection Page

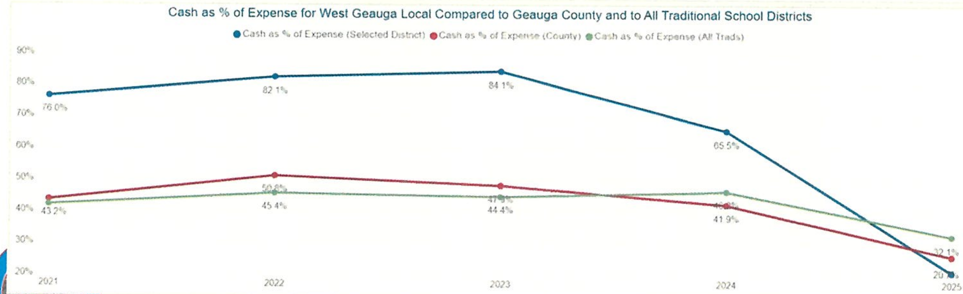
Choose a District: West Geauga Local - 047225 (Geauga)

Choose a Fiscal Year: Multiple selections

WEST G
2025 - 20.7%
2026 - 31.2%
Budget Year - 30.1%

Cash as % of Expense for West Geauga Local Compared to Geauga County and to All Traditional School Districts

Fiscal Year	2021			2022			2023			2024			2025		
District	Cash as % of Expense	Cash as % of Expense (County)	Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	Cash as % of Expense	Cash as % of Expense (County)	Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	Cash as % of Expense	Cash as % of Expense (County)	Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	Cash as % of Expense	Cash as % of Expense (County)	Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	Cash as % of Expense	Cash as % of Expense (County)	Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)
West Geauga Local - 047225 (Geauga)	76.0%	43.2%	41.7%	82.1%	50.8%	45.4%	84.1%	47.9%	44.4%	65.5%	41.9%	46.2%	20.7%	25.8%	32.1%



* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

West Geauga Budget PI Summary

- Permanent Improvement Fund (Adjusted):

Beginning Balances	$ 1,833,467
Revenues (As Certified)	$ 1,000,000
Expenses	$ 2,733,467
Ending Balances	$ 100,000

- Represents 3.6% Cash as a % of Expenses.

West Geauga School Summary

- 1mil = $1.264M @ 100% collection.
- New construction added $7.5k revenue to certain 2026 levies.
- 2023 Revaluation raised Inside Millage ~ $1.3M.
- Emergency Levies are set to expire or transition to Fixed Sum levies.
- Above the 20mil floor – (21.045mills Res/Ag).
- 2024/2025 GF Revenue increased $1.76M over 2023/2024.
- 2024/2025 GF Expenditures increased over $15.6M over 2023/2024.
- 2029 Sexennial has been moved to 2030 to better align cycles.

- ***<u>Recommend accepting post 1/20/26 other income submission & Approving Budget.</u>***

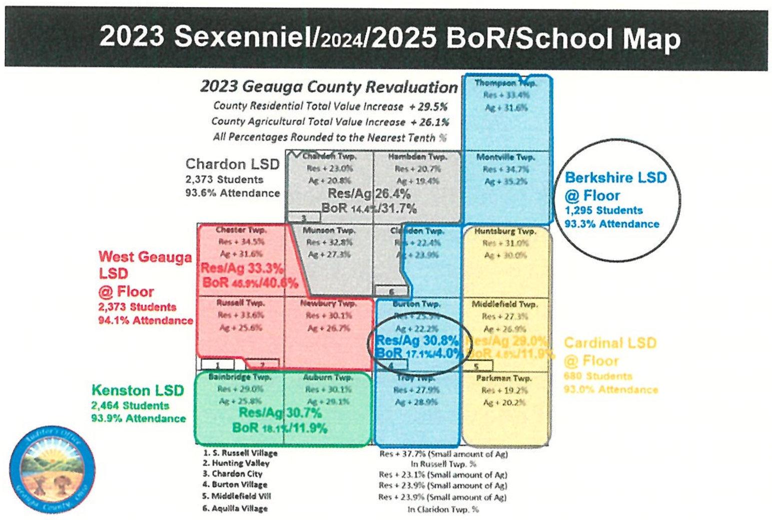
West Geauga Local School District con't

Auditor Walder reviewed the slide presentation, advising that their percentage of BOR hearings cases were after the sexennial and the larger number is last year's percentage. The volume was less last year and further added that the percentages can be misleading. West Geauga's student count is down from the State figures, but the student attendance is up; he believes it is the highest in the County at 94.1%. The territory is the highest valued in the county and the assessed values were 1.2 billion of property value. The taxing in the district, you ranked 5th in raw mileage at 48.09 mills; and 3rd in effective mileage at 25.83 mills. Auditor Walder shared that he typically takes the general fund submission and adjusts for any change in the revenue. However, the numbers which were submitted aligned with ours. The school's revenue and expenses are basically flat. The student revenue to expense per student is tightly matched. The chart from the State indicates the cash as an expense for the general fund over the last five years; West Geauga has gone from being well above to the state average this period. Reviewing the PI summary, the school is spending almost all that is in there. Due to house bill changes, there are some transitional opportunities for funding. The emergency levies are no longer permitted; the school could transition those to up to 5-year, fixed levies. Auditor Walder believes the school will be well above the floor. Auditor Walder also offered that the sentential schedule was moved to 2030, from 2029 to better align the cycles. He knows there was a post submission for revenue numbers, due to some issues that arose with the original submission. He recommended approving the budget and late submission. Treasurer Hitchcock directed them to view the blue sheet with the Budget to Actual history. He commented that he wished there was a better way to report data, as it is not a true expenditure when there are transfers included. Auditor Walder advised they are experiencing some different accounting due to the emergency levies as they now need to put the funds into the General Fund. Prosecutor Flaiz thought the budget submission was great, noting that it was a fantastic turnaround from where they were at. He commented that the school seems to be at a sweet spot with the cash carryover. He hopes the message to the community is that the school is not hoarding money, the school has the appropriate cash balances and has invested in capital expenses. Auditor Walder noted that if the emergency levy was converted, they would retain the rollback for the new 5-year period. The representatives from the school commented that this is not a good time to put it on. Auditor Walder agreed and mentioned that they were impacted by every house bill change that was made. Prosecutor Flaiz offered that the school could make the case to the residents to convert the levy otherwise it would cost them money not to convert it, with the loss of the rollback credit. Treasurer Hitchcock suggested keeping the message very simple, so everyone understands this is a pocketbook issue. Underscoring, it will cost the residents money and save the State money if this does not pass.

Voice vote: Three ayes. Motion carried.

Certificate was signed and will be delivered to the West Geauga LSD Treasurer along with Rate Resolution.

Berkshire LSD – 2026/2027 budget:
Motion by Charles E. Walder, seconded by James Flaiz, to approve the Berkshire Local School District 2026/2027 budget as presented:



School Taxation Ranking

Geauga County
School Taxation Evaluation
Tax Year 2025/Collection 2026

Residential Effective Rates

	Full Rates		Inside*		Current	Perm						Total Eff.
	Rate	Rank	General	Perm Improv.	Expense*	Improv.	Bond	Classroom Facilities	Emergency	Substitute	Total	Rank
Kenston LSD	89.700000	1	4.500000	0.000000	23.210095	0.999480	2.770000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	31.479795	1
Chardon LSD	80.680000	2	3.500000	1.000000	24.816403	1.389050	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	30.705050	2
West Geauga LSD	[illegible]	3	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	3
Berkshire LSD	52.250000	4	4.500000	0.000000	15.508001	0.000000	2.450000	0.000000	0.000000	0.000000	22.458001	4
Cardinal LSD	[illegible]	5	4.000000	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	5
Auburn JVSD	1.500000		1.500000								1.500000	
Lake County Financing	4.900000		1.488349								1.488349	

School Assessed Values

Geauga County School Districts
Assessed Value Comparison

	TY2025 Valuation				Change in Valuation					
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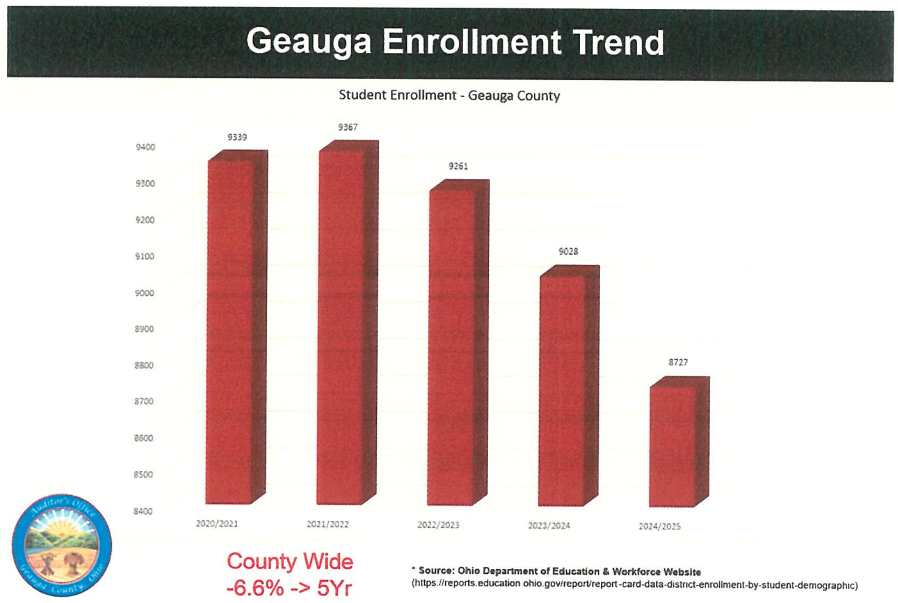
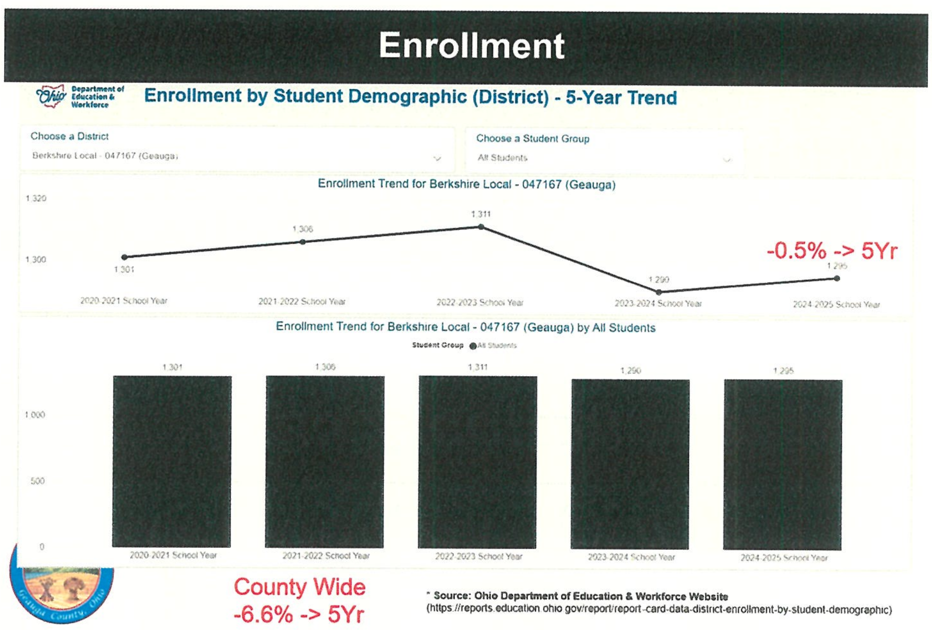
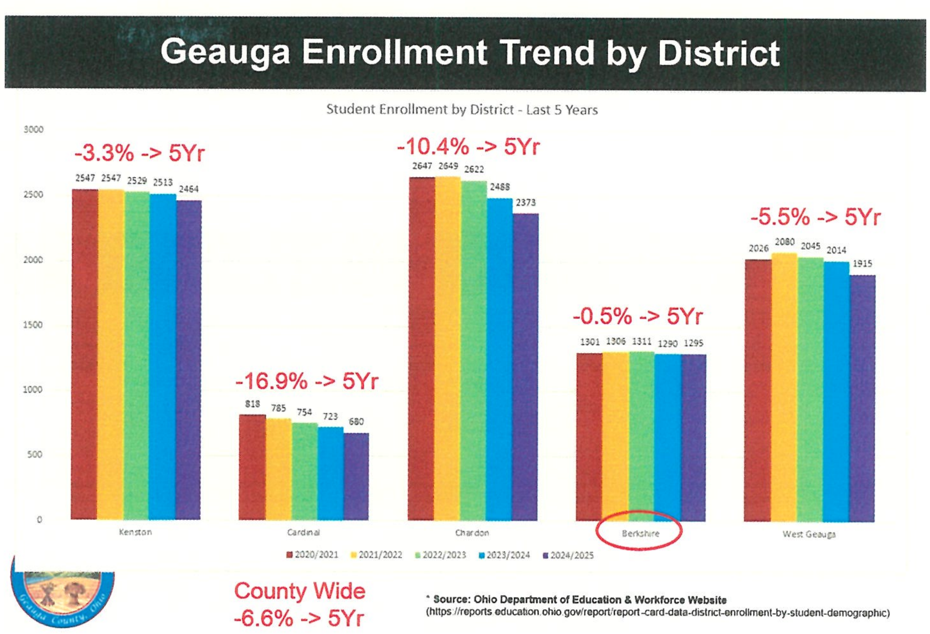
The Above Includes Overlap Values


Geauga Enrollment Trend
Student Enrollment - Geauga County
9339
9367
9261
9028
8727
2020/2021
2021/2022
2022/2023
2023/2024
2024/2025
County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr
* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)


Enrollment
Enrollment by Student Demographic (District) - 5-Year Trend
Choose a District
Berkshire Local - 047167 (Geauga)
Choose a Student Group
All Students
Enrollment Trend for Berkshire Local - 047167 (Geauga)
-0.5% -> 5Yr
Enrollment Trend for Berkshire Local - 047167 (Geauga) by All Students
1,301
1,306
1,311
1,290
1,295
2020-2021 School Year
2021-2022 School Year
2022-2023 School Year
2023-2024 School Year
2024-2025 School Year
County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr
* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)


Geauga Enrollment Trend by District
Student Enrollment by District - Last 5 Years
-3.3% -> 5Yr
2547 2547 2529 2513 2464
-16.9% -> 5Yr
818 785 754 723 680
-10.4% -> 5Yr
2647 2649 2622 2488 2373
-0.5% -> 5Yr
1301 1306 1311 1290 1295
-5.5% -> 5Yr
2026 2080 2045 2014 1915
Kenston
Cardinal
Chardon
Berkshire
West Geauga
2020/2021 2021/2022 2022/2023 2023/2024 2024/2025
County Wide
-6.6% -> 5Yr
* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Berkshire Budget Submission Summary

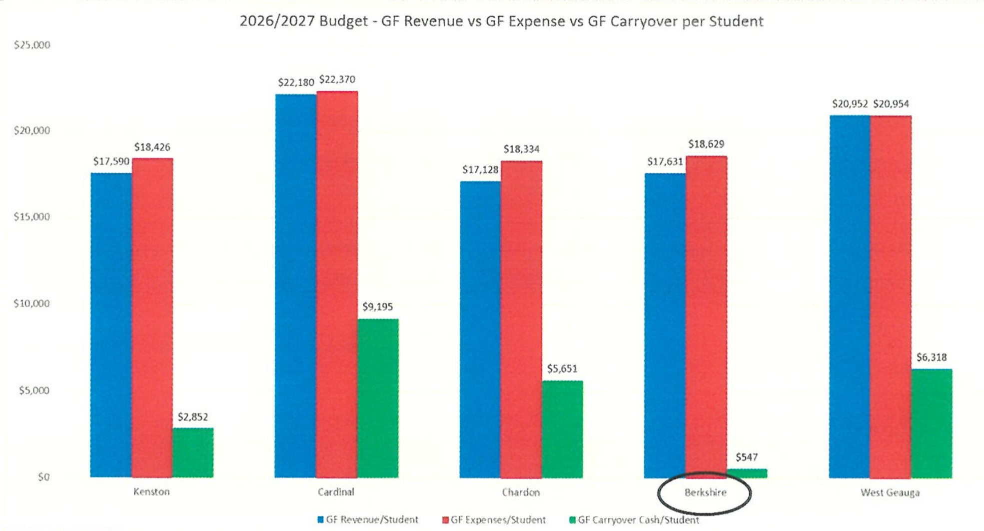
- General Fund (Adjusted):

Beginning Balance	$ 2,001,510	↓
Revenue (As Certified)	$22,831,565	↑
Expenses	$24,124,698	↑
Ending Balance	$ 708,377	↓

- Estimated Cash as % of Expenses 2.9% ↓
- GF Revenue per Student* $ 17,631 ↑
- GF Expenses per Student* $ 18,629 ↑
- Carryover Cash per Student* $ 547 ↓

* Enrollment from Ohio Department of Education Website (2024/2025 = 1,295 Students)
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Geauga Revenue/Expense/Carryover per Student Comparisons



* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Cash as % of Expense

Cash as % of Expense Traditional District Comparison

Return to Traditional District Data | Return to Selection Page

Choose a District: Berkshire Local - 047167 (Geauga)

Choose a Fiscal Year: Multiple selections

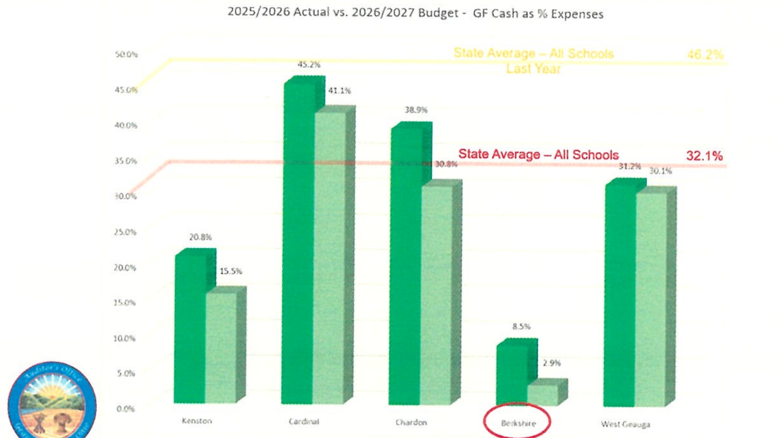
BERKSHIRE
2025 - 12.5%
2026 - 8.5%
Budget Year - 2.9%

Cash as % of Expense for Berkshire Local Compared to Geauga County and to All Traditional School Districts

Fiscal Year / District	2021 Cash as % of Expense	2021 Cash as % of Expense (County)	2021 Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	2022 Cash as % of Expense	2022 Cash as % of Expense (County)	2022 Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	2023 Cash as % of Expense	2023 Cash as % of Expense (County)	2023 Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	2024 Cash as % of Expense	2024 Cash as % of Expense (County)	2024 Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)	2025 Cash as % of Expense	2025 Cash as % of Expense (County)	2025 Cash as % of Expense (All Trads)
Berkshire Local - 047167 (Geauga)	27.3%	43.2%	41.7%	31.0%	50.8%	45.4%	22.4%	47.9%	44.4%	18.8%	41.9%	46.2%	12.5%	25.8%	32.1%

* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Geauga 2025/2026 Actual vs 2026/2027 Budget GF Cash Comparisons



* Source: Ohio Department of Education & Workforce Website
(https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-district-enrollment-by-student-demographic)

Berkshire School Summary

- 1mil = $512k @ 100% collection.
- New construction added $5k revenue to certain 2026 levies.
- 2023 Revaluation raised Inside Millage ~ $548k.
- 3.65mil Bond Levy.
- At the 20mil floor – (20.008mills Res/Ag).
- 2024/2025 GF Revenue increased $773k over 2023/2024.
- 2024/2025 GF Expenditures increased over $1.6M over 2023/2024.
- 2029 Sexennial has been moved to 2030 to better align cycles.

- ***Recommend Approving Budget.***

2026/2027 SCHOOL YEAR BUDGET HEARINGS

BERKSHIRE LSD

Stating at 9:00 a.m. February 19,2026

Beth McCaffrey, Treasurer attended the hearing representing Berkshire LSD.

	REQUESTED	*APPROVED BY BUDGET COMMISSION
General Fund		
Estimated 7/1/2026 Unencumbered Cash Balance	2,001,509.73	2,001,509.73
Estimated 2026/2027 Revenue	**22,831,565.00**	22,831,565.00
Estimated 2026/2027 Expense	24,124,698.00	24,124,698.00
Estimated 6/30/2027 Cash Balance	708,376.73	708,376.73
Projected impact on RETax from HB 186 $1,173,273	**Revenue Considered:**	**22,831,565.00**
Permanent Improvement		
Estimated 7/1/2026 Unencumbered Cash Balance	0.00	0.00
Estimated 2026/2027 Revenue	0.00	0.00
Estimated 2026/2027 Expense	0.00	0.00
Estimated 6/30/2027 Cash Balance	0.00	0.00
	Revenue Considered:	**0.00**
Bond Levy		
Estimated 7/1/2026 Unencumbered Cash Balance	393,705.09	393,705.09
Estimated 2026/2027 Revenue	**1,228,571.82**	1,228,572.00
Estimated 2026/2027 Expense	1,216,106.28	1,216,106.28
Estimated 6/30/2027 Cash Balance	406,170.63	406,170.81
	Revenue Considered:	**1,228,572.00**

Total estimated millage for Tax Year 2026 (2027 Collection)

4.50	Inside General Fund		
45.30	Outside (voted) Gneral Fund	Value of 1Mill TY25	$511,691.72
0.00	Permanent Improvement		
2.45	Bond Levy		
52.25	Total Mills		
1.7	Burton Public Library		
53.95	with Library		

MFG Homes revenue	Total distribution TY24CY24
General Fund	76,038.10
Permanent Improvement	0.00
Bond Levy	10,490.78
State Credits	25,718.43
TOTAL	112,247.31

Tentative approval subject to vote of the Budget Commission

Form GCA-002

Berkshire LSD cont:

Auditor Walder presented his slides. Their res/ag was average at 31%, first year BOR at percent ratio was 17.1 and dropped to 4% last year. He cautioned to be careful with percentages because the volume last year was lower than anticipated. The school's assessed value is a half billion dollars, which represents about a 5% changeover the prior year reporting. Berkshire LSD ranks fourth in both full and effective rate millage. He continued by reviewing the data for the school sharing the student attendance level is 93.3% with student count at 1295; noting that the school has flat enrollment (most districts in the State are experiencing a decline in enrollment). The projected adjusted general fund numbers: beginning balance is down. Auditor Walder shared, it is clear that the expected expenses are exceeding certified revenues again this year. Cash as a percentage to expenses is 2.9%. The general fund revenue per student is $17,660 with expenses at 18,600 resulting in a cash carry-over per student at $547.00; incredibly low. Auditor Walder stated that the 2023 reevaluation did increase the school's inside millage by about half a million dollars. However, the legislation is looking to cap that to inflation and that will impact the additional revenue from unvoted increase. The sexennial has been moved out one year to 2030, from 2029. Auditor Walder recommends approving the budget as submitted. Treasurer Hitchcock advised these are very dangerous times. The trend is unhealthy financially, but nonetheless it is what it is. The sexennial has been moved out one year. Therefore, we would see less of an effect of any change to people's property tax values until 2030. You need to convince voters this is very much of an issue. If they do not pass this now it will cost the voters more. The whole board needs to do this and make the case. The move of the Amish community to the area was discussed along with what that impact is having on the school. Prosecutor Flaiz was happy the revenue and expenses were closer to each other this year and was happy with the cash balance.

Voice vote: Three ayes. Motion carried.

Certificate was signed and delivered to the Berkshire LSD Treasurer along with Rate Resolution.

(A Rate Resolution for each school district was prepared and delivered for presentment to the respective BOE for their consideration and vote. The executed resolution is to be returned to the Auditor's Office (ORC 5705.34) by April 1st.)

School Tax Budget Hearings Concluded:
School Tax Budget Hearings ended at 9:33a.m.

Public Comment:

Sarah McGlone requested the documents from today's hearing.

General Discussion:

Auditor Walder commented, the taxpayers have spoken. It's the Budget Commission job to test the budgets, it's the taxpayers' place to say if a levy should pass or fail. Not citing any particular school district, but certain taxing entities across the State have created an environment making it difficult to get the public support that they need.; which is affecting their ability to perform their duties. This is why the initiative to abolish property taxes has roots. I do not disagree that the numbers are worrisome. The historical solution has been to go the taxpayers when there is a problem. They should be the last people to go to, not the first. There are other options available and those include what the Prosecutor spoke about yesterday. Sometimes merging with other entities is a cost-effective solution. All options need to be presented to the taxpayers. Treasurer Hitchcock added, in two years' time, if their spending methodology maintains the same, they will be in emergency status, and the State will step in, and we know that is not good. Auditor Walder commented if property tax abolishment goes though, we are going to shift all our responsibly to the State. That is not good either. So those are not the only two options on the table that are available. I would have thought with the growing angst of the public, there would be a lot more conversation coming from the taxing entities on different ways to skin the cat. Such as how do we get the same service out to our taxpayers for less money? Do we do that by joining forces, reducing services, or do that by changing paradigms? Do we offer more virtual access to things? Those are all conversations that are necessary. The Budget Commission does not have this authority. Therefore, they need to speak up. They need to be part of the solution and not just be the victim. Prosecutor Flaiz thinks that the two districts that had huge issues with the cash balances both are in a great place right now; they got the cash balances down and invested in capital projects. They have done a great job. When you look at the districts that had tax issues on the ballots, two lost badly. The one that passed was the district without the 20-mill floor adjustment. Prosecutor Flaiz continued, I do not believe that was a coincidence. They needed that money and they had the best budget this year. They were rewarded for that. Schools with ballot issues which failed had the 20-mill floor issue. There were some communication issues; people do not like it when their taxes skyrocket. Auditor Walder shared that 66% of the schools (prior to the recent HB change) in the State were at the floor. Taxpayers felt cheated that they did not get a vote. Taxpayers want to be asked, not told, which is a legitimate argument for a taxpayer to have. It falls on deaf ears. Schools feel it is owed to them, which was the same pushback the Budget Commission experienced. They don't appreciate that it is taxpayer money, it never becomes theirs, it is always the taxpayers. One of the two is adjusted; the changes in the House bill just took West Geauga off the floor, instantly. Prosecutor Flaiz noted Berkshire had the huge windfall and they just gobbled it up and spent it; they are worried about their cash balances. West Geauga got that windfall and we took it away. Auditor Walder advised that this is going to be a year-long conversation. He has seen Townships with the same challenges. Are any townships investigating fire districts? They are not having a conversation. It is mentioned and everyone's alarms go up; why? It's just a conversation. The same is true for police districts and roads. There are all kinds of avenues that can change the methodology of taxing, which could benefit the taxpayer. Prosecutor Flaiz said he gets daggers from a lot of the fire departments. He is not a fire department guy. I look at the numbers. The fact we have all these fire departments is insane. And how much money they are taking from the taxpayers to have all these little fire departments around the County. It makes no sense. It is not economically feasible. It is driving a lot of the issues on the township level with property taxes. But if a loss is identified, you should be thinking of consolidating. Look at all the problems Auburn is having. Bainbridge has a great facility. Troy's fire department was destitute at one point. They were having a ton of problems, and now you have a fire department right next door to them. Watching the abolishment talks, it's understandable where they come from, because no one ever talks about funding the fire department. The only way to make this happen is to take this draconian measure of just cutting the funding. I am not saying that is a good idea; but they cannot force those conversations. Auditor Walder added the problem is everyone wants to have a conversation with all the fire chiefs; that is not where the conversation should happen. The legislative branch of government is the authority on how the fire department operates. The trustees need to be having a conversation. The mayors and councils should be having the conversation. The conversation has been reduced to the effected parties. You never go to the source and say that they need to change something. But nobody wants to touch it at the elected levels. That is true across the State. He did not see any classes on educating trustees and fiscals on how to approach consolidated services. It was all minutiae. Everyone is looking for magic. There is no magic. The magic is we must start thinking differently. The pressure points are only going to get greater closer to the election. The County for example, why are they not thinking of what they can do to reduce the load? You have Mental Health group that gets taxed, JFS group that gets taxed, and the Department of Aging group that gets taxed. Can they find any common ground between the three disciplines? There is no conversation. Prosecutor Flaiz added, there are 21 road departments in the County. Treasurer Hitchcock shared that he saw the man on the sidewalk collecting signatures for the abolishment of taxes He advised Geauga is lucky to be well off, and yet we are letting the legislature though the submission of the petition control how we operate. Auditor Walder noted that if you compare Geauga County taxes to Concord, they are taxed at incredibly high numbers. He continued, offering that that doesn't mean we should be ok, but we are so low on the totem pole compared to other Counties that are mad and upset. How are you going to get the entire State to see this?

Being no further business to conduct it was moved by C.P. Hitchcock to adjourn the February 19, 2026 - special meeting at 9:51 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles E. Walder, Auditor
Secretary/Budget Commission

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