



SPECIAL PURPOSE LOCAL OPTION SALES TAX PROGRAM • FISCAL YEAR 2025

Gilmer County Board of Education Ellijay, Georgia

Compliance and Performance Audit Report

Greg S. Griffin | State Auditor



DOAA

Georgia Department
of Audits & Accounts

Gilmer County Board of Education

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Dr. Brian Ridley, Superintendent and Members of the
Gilmer County Board of Education

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have audited the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) records and operations of the Gilmer County Board of Education (School District) for the year ended June 30, 2025. Management of the School District is responsible for the School District's compliance with the specified requirements. Our responsibility is to determine the School District's compliance with the specified requirements based on our audit objectives.

Audit Summary

Our performance audit of the School District's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2025 found the following:

- The School District has appropriately designed internal control procedures over the SPLOST expenditure transaction cycle and those controls have been placed into operation and are being followed.
- The School District has spent the SPLOST funds in accordance with O.C.G.A. §20-2-491 and the SPLOST resolutions passed March 17, 2015, November 6, 2018, and March 21, 2023 by the voters of Gilmer County.

Introduction

Georgia Code Section §20-2-491 requires public school systems to obtain continuing performance audits for expenditure of sales tax for capital outlays if the tax generates \$5 million or more annually. The independent performance audit shall:

1. Include a goal of ensuring, to the maximum extent possible, that the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically so as to ensure that the School District receives maximum benefit from the dollars collected.
2. Provide for issuance of periodic reports, not less than once annually, with respect to the extent to which tax funds are expended efficiently and economically as described in item 1 above.
3. Provide for issuance of periodic public recommendations, not less than annually for improvements in meeting the goal specified in item 1 above.

The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is a referendum voted and approved by the Gilmer County voters in which one percent is added to the local sales tax for the purpose of funding building and renovation projects that would otherwise require financing through increased property taxes. SPLOST funds are also available for retiring general obligation bond debts incurred with respect only to capital outlay projects and to issue new general obligation bonds for specific capital outlay projects.

The School District works under the direction of the School Board and its superintendent. Projects selected for SPLOST funding are approved by the School Board. During fiscal years 2015, 2019, and 2023, the 2015 ESPLOST, 2020 ESPLOST, and 2025 ESPLOST referendums were passed by the voters of Gilmer County. The maximum amount approved to be raised from the 2015 ESPLOST, 2020 ESPLOST, and 2025 ESPLOST referendums are \$25,000,000.00, \$28,000,000.00, and \$70,000,000.00, respectively. The 2015 ESPLOST funds will be used for the following purposes as outlined in the referendum:

“(a) technology to be used to support all facilities for teaching and learning at all facilities, including computers, laptops, tablets, mobile devices, servers, wiring, wireless antennas, and other technology upgrades with necessary hardware, software, and programs; (b) the purchase of new school buses, fleet maintenance vehicles, and equipment; (c) renovations and improvements at Gilmer High School in the student common areas, restrooms, classrooms, media center, and other areas; (d) an agricultural complex including a show barn, a new cannery and other agricultural related support facilities and equipment; (e) athletic facilities renovations and improvements including a new track, turf fields, a practice field for band, athletics, and extracurricular activities bleachers, and stadium improvements and equipment; and (f) acquisition, construction, and equipping of real and personal property, site improvements, safety and security equipment, renovations, additions and improvements to facilities and upgrades; in accordance with the facilities plans of the School District, as the same may be revised in accordance with the needs of the School District.”

The 2020 ESPLOST will be used for the following purposes as outlined in the referendum:

“(a) upgrading the technology used to support teaching and learning at all facilities, including the purchase and installation of computers, laptops, tablets, mobile devices, servers, wiring, wireless antennas, and other technology upgrades with necessary hardware, software, and programs; (b) the acquisition, construction, equipping, and installation of safety and security equipment to improve security in all facilities located within the School District (c) the purchase of new school buses; (d) the acquisition, construction, and equipping of a new elementary school to replace the current Ellijay Primary School; and (e) the acquisition, construction, and equipping of a new performing/fine arts center, all in accordance with the facilities plans of the School District, as the same may be revised in accordance with the needs of the School District.”

The 2025 ESPLOST will be used for the following purposes as outlined in the referendum:

“(a) a new performing/fine arts center; (b) significant renovations, construction, improvements, additions and equipment to Ellijay Elementary School; (c) improvements and equipment for the Gilmer College & Career Academy including agricultural facilities and greenhouses; (d) athletic facility additions, improvements and equipment to current facilities, including GHS gym, marching band practice facility, softball facilities and construction of a wrestling facility; (e) curriculum materials to include textbooks (including e-books), lab equipment and band instruments and upgrading technology used to support teaching and learning at all facilities, including computers, laptops, tablets, mobile devices, servers, wiring, wireless antennas, and other technology upgrades with necessary hardware, software, and programs; (f) new school buses, fleet maintenance vehicles and equipment; and (g) acquisition, constructing and equipping of real and personal property, site improvements, safety and security equipment, HVAC, renovation of roofing, plumbing, and electrical upgrades, and any renovations, additions and improvements to facilities and upgrades in accordance with the facilities plans of the School District, as the same may be revised in accordance with the needs of the School District?”

Audit Objectives

The overall objective of the performance audit was to evaluate whether the tax funds are expended efficiently and economically so that the School District is receiving the maximum benefit from the dollars collected. The specific audit objectives were:

- Determine if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed on March 17, 2015, November 6, 2018, and March 21, 2023.
- Determine whether there is an efficient and economic means of monitoring program performance within a projected timeline, to evaluate the validity of expenditures, and to evaluate the timely completion of each project.
- Determine if management of the School District is following Board approved procurement policies and procedures.
- Determine if administrative controls were established and appeared to be adequate to ensure the responsible fiscal management of the sales tax proceeds received by the School District.
- Provide for the issuance of periodic reports at least annually with respect to the extent to which expenditures are meeting the goals described in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.
- Provide for the issuance of public recommendations at least annually for improvements in meeting the goals described in O.C.G.A. §20-2-491.
- Determine that all SPLOST sales tax revenue is properly recorded.
- Determine that SPLOST activity reports are presented to those charged with governance.

Audit Scope and Methodology

We were engaged to conduct a performance audit of the SPLOST program. The audit focused on the School District's compliance with state and local laws and mandates and the receipts and expenditure of sales tax proceeds for allowable SPLOST purposes. This audit covers the year of the SPLOST program from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. From a listing of disbursements made during the specified time frame, we tested 27 individually significant items totaling \$9,173,023.11. In addition, of the remaining population, we sampled 6 of 51 items totaling \$68,974.29. In total, we tested \$9,241,997.40 or 96% of the total SPLOST disbursements for the audit period.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Planning

Prior to conducting the audit, we determined mutual expectations in performing the engagement and meeting timelines. We discussed policies and procedures, methodologies, and other relevant aspects of the School District's SPLOST program with relevant staff. We requested various schedules from the School District's staff and discussed with them the date the fieldwork was expected to begin.

Preliminary Analytical Review

The preliminary analytical review (PAR) provided direction to our audit approach. In this analysis, we developed expectations related to projects, program documentation, key personnel, program organization, and account balances and relationships among those account balances. During the audit, tests were designed to confirm the expectations developed during our PAR. We also performed a PAR to analyze the laws governing SPLOST funds and to identify in advance the critical audit risk areas.

Risk Assessment

Our audit approach is risk-based, whereby we assess risk for each identified objective. Depending on the risk assessment, we performed substantive or analytical procedures, or a combination of both, to test the related objectives. These assessments were made during the planning process and throughout the engagement.

Understanding the Control Environment and Test Key Controls

We examined the School District's internal controls related to the SPLOST program, focusing on formulating comments and suggestions for improving operations. We used a discussion memorandum format to document the relevant accounting cycles and processes from start to finish. Utilizing our understanding of the control environment, we walked through certain internal controls to provide further support for the audit.

Preparation of a Tailored Audit Program

Based upon preliminary analytical review, control documentation and walk-through procedures, audit programs were designed in order for conclusions to be reached for each audit objective.

Audit Results

Based on the results of our audit, we conclude that the Gilmer County School District's SPLOST program is operating in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations and the referendums approved by the County's citizens. The following are the specific results of our audit:

Objective #1: Determine if SPLOST funds were spent in accordance with SPLOST Resolutions passed on March 17, 2015, November 6, 2018, and March 21, 2023.

Procedures: We obtained a copy of the SPLOST Resolutions as approved by the Board of Education of the School District and the voters of the county. Using a listing of disbursements for the test period, we tested 27 individually significant items and a nonstatistical random sample of 6 of the remaining 51 expenditures in order to ensure that spending of SPLOST funding was compliant with the approved activity in the resolutions. We tested each transaction to supporting documentation such as vendor invoices.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #2: Determine whether there is an effective and economic means of monitoring program performance within a projected timeline, to evaluate the validity of expenditures, and to evaluate the timely completion of each project.

Procedures: We obtained an understanding of the monitoring and budget procedures and how the School District ensures projects are completed within project specifications, timelines, and approved budgets. We tested disbursements to ensure that the School District has policies and procedures in place to ensure that expenditures are properly approved by an individual who reviews the work to ensure that invoices submitted are valid in regard to work completed and appropriate for the SPLOST projects.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #3: Determine if management of the School District is following Board approved procurement policies and procedures.

Procedures: We obtained an understanding of the monitoring and budget procedures and how the School District ensures projects are completed within project specifications, timelines, and approved budgets. We tested disbursements to ensure that the School District has policies and procedures in place to ensure that expenditures are properly approved by an individual who reviews the work to ensure that invoices submitted are valid in regard to work completed and appropriate for the SPLOST projects.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #4: Determine if administrative controls were established and appeared to be adequate to ensure the responsible fiscal management of the sales tax proceeds received by the School District.

Procedures: We interviewed management to identify how funds were received and recorded from the State. We determined accounting controls were in place for this objective and the administrative controls were sufficient, complete and adequate. Management was interviewed in order to determine their familiarity with the controls in place. The effectiveness of the controls was tested by examining 27 individually significant items, and a nonstatistical random sample of 6 of the remaining 51 expenditures. Lastly, we reviewed the general ledger accounts to verify monthly deposits.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #5: Provide for the issuance of periodic reports at least annually with respect to the extent to which expenditures are meeting the goals described above.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the prior year performance audit report conducted by other auditors to determine if this objective was met in the previous year. In addition, this objective is being met by the publication of this report for the current year.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #6: Provide for the issuance of public recommendations at least annually for improvements in meeting the goals described above.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the prior year performance audit report conducted by other auditors to determine if this objective was met in the previous year. In addition, this objective is being met by the publication of this report for the current year.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #7: Determine that all SPLOST revenue is properly recorded.

Procedures: We confirmed with the Georgia Department of Revenue the amounts collected for and remitted to the School District.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

Objective #8: Determine that SPLOST activity reports are presented to those charged with governance.

Procedures: We obtained and reviewed the board minutes to ensure that SPLOST activity is being reported to the board on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Results: We found no exceptions as a result of these procedures.

School District Response: Gilmer County Board of Education agrees with the report.

Communication of Audit Findings and Recommendations

No matters were reported.

Closing

This report is intended solely for the information and use of the Board and management of the School District and is not intended to be, and should not be, used by anyone other than these specified parties.

Respectfully submitted,



Greg S. Griffin
State Auditor

March 10, 2026