

Gardendale City Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is Gardendale forming its own school system?

What started as a grassroots effort among Gardendale parents to gain local control of their schools grew into a movement that was supported by not only parents, but by community leaders, business owners, and other stakeholders. Research shows that schools benefit from being in a community more directly invested in their success, leading to higher academic achievement rates, lower dropout rates and greater community pride.

It is the intent of the Gardendale Board of Education and Administration to have the ability to focus specifically on what matters to the parents and students in the Gardendale area: academics and curriculum, diverse course offerings, achievement in athletics and in the arts, as well as community service and civic participation. Ultimately, this is about Gardendale having more local control, and access to greater resources which will directly benefit our children. And we believe this will encourage young families to move into Gardendale.

2. How does Gardendale's vision fit in with the Alabama State Department of Education's PLAN 2020?



Reference: <https://www.alsde.edu/sec/comm/Pages/tour.aspx>

Recently, several Gardendale officials, including the superintendent and school board president, had the opportunity to hear state Superintendent Dr. Tommy Bice discuss the future of education in Alabama. What we heard was a large-scale version of what we hope

to accomplish in Gardendale, and that gave us a renewed hope for the education of future generations.

The goal of PLAN 2020, Alabama's strategic plan for education, is to prepare all students to be successful in college and/or a career upon graduating from high school. Dr. Bice stated that there has never really been a collective plan for education from top to bottom (pre-kindergarten through college) in the state and said educators need to address the needs of students in their entirety. He encouraged educators to utilize an innovative system of educating students and urged us to "think outside the box" when deciding what education in our districts look like. For one system, that example meant extending the school day or even year. For another district, it meant project-based learning or a different style of teaching. We are excited to have the ability to help shape what teaching and learning looks like in Gardendale and what best benefits our children, as research shows a one-size-fits-all approach to education doesn't work for every student.

3. What do you feel is the most important factor when it comes to increasing student achievement?

According to the Harvard University Center for Educational Policy Research, data consistently demonstrates that teaching is the single-most important school-based factor in a student's academic growth. To this point, it becomes that much more imperative that school systems make sure they are investing in our educators and providing them with the professional development and support needed to effect change in the classroom.

Educational speaker and author Harry K. Wong summed it up this way:

"The bottom line is that there is no way to create good schools without good teachers. It is the administrator who creates a good school and it is the teacher who creates a good classroom."

Please give credit. Harry K. Wong, Ed.D., 943 N. Shoreline Blvd., Mountain View, CA 94043

In Gardendale, we strongly subscribe to this philosophy and want to create an atmosphere in which the staff at each school works as a productive team with clear and measurable goals based on a community-led strategic plan. We also want to make sure that each teacher is afforded the opportunity to work within a professional learning community with colleagues that challenge and support each other as professionals, as we all know it is critical that our own learning never stop. It would be the hope in time and in line with prior studies that the new city system would have the ability to add more teachers to the

classroom, thus reducing class sizes and allowing Gardendale to expand course offering and electives.

4. Speaking of teachers, what will happen to the staff currently in the Gardendale schools?

Tenure will follow current employees to the new Gardendale Schools. However, it is common practice during the formation of city school systems for some employees to transfer to the county school system in which they previously worked. In addition, natural attrition due to retirements and employees leaving for jobs in other systems is always to be expected each year. Though there are a number of uncertainties regarding the retention, potential for attrition, and retirement of staff it is without a doubt that all staff members at the current Gardendale Schools will play a critical role in development. The Board of Education and Administration look forward to partnering with staff, hearing from them, and holding further discussion regarding their past experiences and views in making the new city system one that they are proud to work in.

5. What will having its own school system mean for Gardendale's future?

We believe that having local control over the city's schools will give the community a sense of pride and ownership. As aforementioned, research has demonstrated that schools benefit from being in a community that is directly invested in their success. From an economic standpoint, forming a city school system in Gardendale should allow us to flourish. Dr. M. Keivan Deravi, professor of economics at Auburn University- Montgomery, conducted an analysis of Gardendale and several surrounding cities with their own school systems. He projected the average property values in Gardendale in six years to be \$203,100 up from \$182,000, a net gain of \$21,000. He also predicted that by the sixth year of operating our own school system, there will be a population increase of 900 people, adding \$700,000 in recurring annual sales tax revenue to Gardendale.

6. How can Gardendale afford its own school system when it is such a small city with a traditionally low tax base?

Gardendale had the unique opportunity of watching other cities form their own systems, giving us the ability to study what would and wouldn't work for us. We enlisted the help of education consultant Dr. Ira W. Harvey, who helped Alabaster with its separation from

Shelby County schools. He conducted a financial feasibility study in May 2013 that concluded Gardendale could, indeed, afford to form its own school system.

As Dr. Harvey suggested, the Gardendale City Council in September 2013 enacted a 5-mill property tax increase, and voters approved an additional 5-mill increase two months later, for a total of 10 mills. Altogether, that 10-mill increase is expected to yield an additional \$2 million annually to fund education in Gardendale.

Gardendale Schools currently operate with 30.1 mills of tax revenue in the county system that goes to support operation and function of the schools. With the additional millage approved in 2013, we are confident in our ability to effectively operate our locally controlled school system with 40.1 mills. Only the mature systems of Vestavia Hills and Mountain Brook are operating with more millage.

7. As you prepare to start separation negotiations with Jefferson County, is there anything you can tell parents of students who currently attend the Burkett Center, the International Baccalaureate School or vocational courses on the campus of Gardendale High School?

We know how distressing it must be to not have concrete answers, and we ask for your patience and understanding while we try to iron out the details of our separation agreement with Jefferson County schools. No matter what happens, please know that Gardendale school officials have the best interest of all children and families impacted and they will be on our minds even as we sit at the negotiating table. As soon as these details are finalized, we will let the public know so that they can plan accordingly.

Additional Information:

Financial Feasibility Study conducted by Dr. Ira W. Harvey:

http://www.cityofgardendale.com/FILE_UPLOADS/Harvey-GardendaleFeasibilityReport-5-14-2013.pdf

Pro-forma Budget:

Scenario 1 --

http://www.cityofgardendale.com/FILE_UPLOADS/CRI%20Budget%20Scenario%201%20Gardendale%20Schools.pdf

Scenario 2 --

http://www.cityofgardendale.com/FILE_UPLOADS/CRI%20Budget%20Scenario%202%20Gardendale%20Schools.pdf