

ERROR

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rate that would generate more than 4% more revenue than the prior year would require a public hearing. District Finance Officer Brooke Gibbs explained that an exoneration is not included in that figure, and the original increase was due to a five-cent exoneration.

An exoneration occurs when there has been an error in the valuation or tax bill of a property, which leads to that property receiving a refund. The exoneration allows the taxing district to recoup the funding they had anticipated receiving prior.

Following the approval of the rates, it was determined that the exoneration was included by mistake, due to an error on the part of the Property Valuation Administration.

Marshall County Property Valuation Administrator Tony Henson declined to be interviewed but provided a written statement, which read in part: "On Tuesday, August 19, 2025, I became aware, via a journalist, that the Marshall County School Board was 'increasing their tax rates due to an error in the Marshall County PVA office.'

"After a few phone calls and some research, it became apparent that an error had been made on a form that my office submitted to the Department of Revenue in June. A total on one of the pages of that report erroneously included a number from a different category. This resulted in a very large number, allowing the school board to calculate a tax rate significantly higher than expected."

Henson's statement went on to say that the mistake was corrected and

FY24-25	FY24-25	FY24-25	FY25-26	FY25-26	FY25-26
Rate	Exoneration	Adopted Rate	Proposed Rate	Exoneration	Proposed Total Rate
Real Estate	44.8 cents	44.8 cents	44.7 cents	0.2 cents	44.9 cents
Personal	44.8 cents	44.8 cents	44.8 cents	0.2 cents	45.0 cents
Motor Vehicle	44.8 cents	44.8 cents	44.8 cents	0.2 cents	45.0 cents
Utilities	3.0 percent	3.0 percent	3.0 percent	0.0 percent	3.0 percent
Occupational	0.5 percent	0.5 percent	0.5 percent	0.0 percent	0.5 percent

JARON VON RUNNEN | The Sun

The corrected rates for real estate and personal property were 44.9 cents per \$100, and 45 cents per \$100, respectively.

resubmitted on Wednesday, Aug. 20, approved on Thursday, Aug. 21, and was "in the hands of taxing entities" by Friday, Aug. 22.

That correction allowed the Kentucky Department of Education to adjust its reports, providing the local board with the correct information to set the rates.

The original rate sparked considerable pushback from the community, leading to many attending Thursday's meeting. While the district does not generally include public comments in special-called meetings, board chair Darla Doss said after the new rates were presented, she would entertain questions from the community as a part of the discussion.

Superintendent Bill Thorpe began the meeting by explaining that the district tax rates are among the lowest in the state.

The 2024-2025 fiscal year real estate rate of 44.7 cents per \$100 of assessed value was the 16th lowest out of 171 school districts in the state. The motor vehicle tax rate of 44.6 cents per \$100 of

value was the 6th lowest in the state.

Thorpe then explained that the district spends over \$2.6 million each month for basic expenditures like utilities, debt service payments and payroll. Thorpe also claimed that the district is the primary employer in the county with approximately 660 employees.

Thorpe also explained that the district receives funding through a state level program called SEEK, which is intended to help equalize funding in districts across the state. However, when property values increase, leading to the district getting more money locally, the SEEK funding decreases.

Further, Thorpe said that, contrary to what others have claimed, the teachers have received minimal raises in recent years. In 2021 teachers received a 1% raise, in 2022 they received a 2% raise and a one-time payment of \$1,100, in 2023 they received a 3% raise and a one-time payment of \$1,000, they received nothing in 2024, and they received a 3% raise, and in 2026 they are set to receive no raise, but a one-time payment of \$1,200.

Thorpe then noted that in 2025 the average cost of building a new school was approximately \$450 per square foot. The Marshall County High School renovation project cost the district approximately \$13.093 million, whereas building a brand-new school would have cost \$100 million or more.

Gibbs then took over to present the new tax rates, and explained the process that goes into the determination of the rates. In her explanation of the rates, Gibbs shared a graph that showed the rates for the 2024-2025 fiscal year was the lowest the rate had been since 2014.

Gibbs then explained that, as previously reported, the error had been on the reports submitted by the PVA, but

has since been corrected. The corrected rates for real estate and personal property were 44.9 cents per \$100, and 45 cents per \$100, respectively.

The corrected rates allow the district to collect the allowed 4% increase in revenue and only increase the payments of the community by approximately one-tenth of a cent on real estate and two-tenths of a cent on personal property. Both rates include a 0.2 cent exoneration.

These increases will total a \$1 increase on a home valued at \$100,000.

Following Gibbs's report, Doss and board member Will Coursey praised Gibbs for noticing the drastic increase and contacting KDE.

Doss then opened the floor for questions. Several community members asked clarifying questions regarding the rates, other ways for the district to cut costs, and concerns over the district electric bill.

During this discussion, Thorpe and the board members explained various ways that the district has attempted to cut costs by eliminating positions and cutting back where possible.

The rates were approved unanimously, with board member Amy Waggoner attending and voting via Zoom.

The board also approved the fiscal year 2025-2026 federal district assurances for the release of federal funds. This was a standard procedure required for the disbursement of any federal funds in the district.

The board encouraged the attending community members to attend other board meetings in the future.

The board regularly meets on the third Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at the district's central office. The next scheduled meeting is set for 5 p.m. on Sept. 15. The next regular meeting will follow at 6 p.m. on Sept. 18.

BRIDGE

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"We can't work on the bridge without putting things down to one lane in each direction, and everybody knew that coming in," Wills said. "Then the accidents that do occur, they're more noticeable because then I-24 is closed. It could be a fender bender, and then we have to get a tow truck in there or, God forbid, emergency response. But then the interstate is closed, so the perception is that there's a lot more accidents, but the frequency of accidents has not increased since construction began. They're just more noticeable and more inconvenient."

Wills said road construction is inconvenient by nature, but reduced traffic capacity on the bridge is the only plausible option for the necessary improvements.

"We can't just close every road or every bridge to work on it," Wills said, "So, when we do that, we reduce the capacity. We knew we were going to have slowdowns in queuing because the traffic volume is so high, and it's increased over the last several years. But the plan is to get a new bridge that's got six lanes out there, and that that process has started. So, we have to get this one, all the maintenance issues and the structural issues fixed before we can make it to the end point on construction of a new bridge."

Wills said incident reports have indicated that many of the crashes on I-24 have been

the result of inattentive driving, and he encouraged drivers to reduce their speed, keep a safe distance from the car in front of them and pay attention to the prevalent signage and flashing lights surrounding the construction zone.

McCracken County Sheriff Ryan Norman also stressed how large a factor inattentive driving is in accidents, saying the number one priority for drivers should always be paying attention to the road and their surroundings.

"Things happen quickly when you're traveling at interstate speeds," Norman said. "So, if you're not keeping proper distance and you're not paying attention, not only to what you're doing but to what others are doing, it can be a recipe for disaster. I know a lot of parents tell their kids, 'It's not you I'm worried about, it's the others.' That's the way we should probably all view driving."

Another issue has been semitrailer drivers illegally detouring via the U.S. 45 Brookport Bridge that connects McCracken County to Brookport, Illinois, when traffic is backed up on the I-24 bridge. While the Brookport Bridge is a good alternative route for passenger vehicles, commercial vehicles are prohibited from using it. Wills said there are five signs in both directions leading up to the Brookport Bridge warning commercial vehicles, but it remains a problem law enforcement officers have to enforce.

"We cannot have commercial vehicles traveling over the Brookport bridge, so we are having

to strictly enforce that," Kentucky State Police Trooper Sarah Burgess said. "Trucks are being cited and turned around when they get there, so they're really delaying themselves by trying to divert that way, because they are having to turn around and go back. It could impact their safety score, and it's just a dangerous maneuver to try and go where the bridge is not designed for them. We are really encouraging all of our commercial vehicle operators to use commercial vehicle specific GPS, which will show them what roads they're allowed to be on."

Carrie Dillard, public information officer for Kentucky Transportation Cabinet District 1, encouraged making safe choices during the increased traffic expected during the upcoming Labor Day weekend, including designating a safe driver if your holiday plans involve alcohol.

"We just want to encourage everyone to be cautious and make smart choices behind the wheel," Dillard said. "I-24 will see increased traffic due to holiday travel, but safe driving practices are essential every day of the year. That means being patient, giving yourself more time to reach your destination and watching your speed, especially in work zone areas or areas that you're unfamiliar with. It means avoiding distractions, keeping that phone down and giving the road ahead your full attention and making sure everyone in that vehicle is buckled up every trip, every time."



BEN OVERBY | The Sun

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ETHAN PATTERSON | The Sun

Jystacy Pitts is next scheduled to appear in court on Sept. 4.

SHOOTING

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Pitts has been in law enforcement custody since his arrest on Aug. 10. According to the McCracken County Jail roster, his bond is set at \$25,000 cash.

Copeland and Adams are next scheduled to appear in court on Thursday, Sept. 18.

A 16-year-old boy is also charged in the shooting. Police announced on Aug. 14 that the juvenile is charged with complicity to commit first-degree murder and complicity to commit first-degree fetal homicide. It is not yet known if the teen will be tried as an adult.

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