

County compromises on school funding

Commissioners add one cent to the property tax rate, helping the county's two school districts close funding gaps for critical needs.

By CASEY FERRELL
Editor

The Orange County Board of Commissioners voted 3-2 in favor of adding one more cent to the county's ad valorem tax rate, bringing the property tax increase for next fiscal year's budget to 4.7 cents per \$100 assessed value.

Thursday work session picking through County Manager Laura Blackmon's proposed budget, looking for items that could be delayed or cut in an attempt to find more money for the county's two school districts. As a result, some \$830,000 was found for the school districts in addition to the one-cent property tax increase.

The move comes as a relief to both school boards, which were

considering cuts in programs and staff in the face of significant budget shortfalls.

Orange County Schools had asked for an additional \$3.7 million in additional funding, of which \$1.8 million was deemed critical. But under the originally proposed county budget, the district would get about \$464,000.

Under the new, tentatively-

approved budget, Orange County Schools will get about \$1.4 million, still leaving it about \$400,000 short of the total for critical needs such as state-mandated teacher raises and the addition of the eighth grade at the new Gravelly Hill Middle School.

Chapel Hill/Carboro City Schools asked for an additional \$7.4 million, of which \$4.1 million was for critical needs.

The originally proposed budget would have given the district \$1.2 million.

Chapel Hill/Carboro City Schools, which will also see a 1.5 cent hike in its special district tax, would get about \$3.1 million from the county under the new budget.

The school districts will likely have to dip into their fund balances — similar to savings accounts — to make up for any remaining funding differences, but those figures are now more manageable, Orange County Schools Board of Education chairman Dennis Whiting said.

The compromise came after the county commissioners heard from people on both sides of the issue.

Parents, teachers and staff from both districts gave them an earful at two public hearings last month, demanding that the schools be fully funded. Meanwhile, other county residents signed a petition urging the commissioners to hold tax rates where they are because rates have risen steadily for years.

Comments? Send them via e-mail: casey.ferrell@newsfororange.com

All together now...



Photo by Keri Sprenger

At Infinity Farm last week, art conference attendees learned to open themselves to the feelings involved with creating different shapes and how those shapes can work together while maintaining their individuality. Michael Howard, an art teacher from Amherst College in Massachusetts, gave the attendees the simple task of creating certain shapes using rice, paintbrushes and fluid motions. The conference, which was free for attendees, focused on all different types of art and the connection between the soul and the hand. Above, Elaine Epton (right) focuses on the task at hand.

Board OKs elementary merger

By CASEY FERRELL
Editor

The Orange County School's Board of Education approved a proposal offered by board chairman Dennis Whiting that would attempt to address socioeconomic disparities at two elementary schools by merging them into a school of choice.

The changes, if approved by parents next fall, would take place in 2008-2009.

The new arrangement, which was approved by a 4-1 vote with board member Al Hartkopf dissenting, would have the student populations at both Central Elementary and Hillsborough Elementary schools merge to form a new school on a modified year-round calendar with two-week intercessions. Pre-kindergarten through second-grade students would be taught at Central Elementary, while third-, fourth- and fifth-graders would go to Hillsborough Elementary.

Under Whiting's plan, the board would commit to providing robust enrichment and remediation opportunities during intercession. Bussing options would also be expanded.

The board will seek continued public input to shape further decisions about the plan, but parents of kids at both schools will ultimately have to decide for themselves whether to keep their little ones at the new school.

The plan hinges on parental buy-in, Whiting said, which is not a certainty. A vocal contingent of parents from Hillsborough Elementary besieged board meetings when the idea first arose last winter, some threat-



School board chairman
Dennis Whiting

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Two new school principals chosen

By CASEY FERRELL
Editor

At its regular meeting on Monday night, the Orange County Board of Education filled administrative vacancies at two schools, naming the new principals for Orange High School and Hillsborough Elementary School.

Roy G. Winslow will be the principal of Orange High School. Winslow has been principal at J.F. Webb High School in Oxford, N.C., for the past nine years and has 33 years of experience in education. Serving as a teacher, an associate principal and a dean of students, Winslow's experience spans middle

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Caldwell community cooks up support for one of its own

By KERI SPRENGER
Staff Writer

The Caldwell community came out to support one of its own this past Saturday.

Barbara McDonald, a mother of two and grandmother of three, was diagnosed with leukemia on Feb. 15.

The community has rallied around McDonald, offering their support in different ways. One was a spaghetti dinner at the Caldwell Community Center to help offset her medical needs.

"I have really good days and I have really bad days," McDonald said. The bad days are the approximately seven days after she has chemotherapy; the good days are the three weeks in between the bad days and the next treatment.

She had four CT scans two weeks ago, and now she needs bloodwork. She has insurance, but the 10 percent she is responsible for is more than she can afford.

"All these bills just keep coming

in," McDonald said.

The money raised from the event should help. Kymb Taylor, McDonald's daughter, organized it with a little help from her neighbors, family and friends.

Pepsi donated banners for the event; Costco and Wal-Mart donated gift cards. Handy Andy's, one of the central gathering places in Caldwell, helped out as well. Then there were the women who came to the spaghetti parties.

Groups of women gathered to cook spaghetti sauce, which was frozen and then thawed out for the event.

"It's been about a three-month planning process," Taylor said.

Barely halfway through the event, approximately 60 people had showed up in support of the fundraiser.

"It's just amazing to me the way the community comes together in your times of need," Taylor said. "A little help — it goes a long way."



Photo by Keri Sprenger

Barbara McDonald, second from right, with her daughter, Kymb Taylor, and her three grandchildren (from left) Griffin, Evan and Blake Taylor.

Mickie Gentry was one of those helping out. A former co-worker of McDonald's at Central Carolina Bank, Gentry has seen McDonald

off and on for the past few years when they were each picking up

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The News of Orange County will be closed Wednesday, July 4. The submission deadline for the July 4 issue will be Friday, June 27 by 12 p.m. for all classified and display ads, as well as any other editorial content. The staff wishes everyone a safe and happy Independence Day.

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