

MacRo Report Blog

School Employees Looking at Lower Raises

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The Board of Education approved a budget to send to the Board of County Commissioners on Wednesday that includes raises for all school employees, but those raises will not be as large as first anticipated.

Superintendent Terry Alban originally proposed a \$10.8 million salary resource pool that would fund raises for all school employees, but after cuts from the board that pool is now down to \$5.1 million.

The board unanimously decided to eliminate a proposal to increase class-size formulas at the middle and high school level by one student, which would have saved about \$2.5 million.

The board instructed Leslie Pellegrino, executive director of fiscal services for Frederick County Public Schools, to pull those funds out of the salary resource pool to balance the budget.

The board also decided not to include a request of an additional \$3.2 million of funding for the budget from the county commissioners.

With no indication that county commissioners will provide the \$3.2 million, school board member Brad Young said it shouldn't be included.

"To build a budget expecting it is not realistic, in my opinion," he said.

Board of Education President Angie Fish was the lone board member voting against the budget.

"We have depleted our salary resource pool and the most important thing you can have in front of the classroom is a quality teacher, and we are not going to retain our quality staff if we continue to forgo any kind of reasonable salary adjustments," Fish said.

Katie Groth participated in Wednesday's meeting by telephone from Indonesia.

The budget approved by the board sends a clear message to county teachers that they are not valued, Frederick County Teachers Association President Gary Brennan said after the meeting.

"(Board of Education) priorities are not in keeping Frederick County competitive," he said.

Including furlough days dependent upon upcoming negotiations and a 1.5 percent reversal of negotiated fiscal 2012 salaries included in the fiscal 2013 budget, teachers could be looking at a pay cut, Brennan said.

Instead of including the \$3.2 million in the budget submitted to the commissioners, the school board decided to include a letter to the commissioners explaining the need for additional funding separate from the county's maintenance of effort.

The commissioners' maintenance of effort commitment for fiscal 2013 is \$221,654,363, an increase of \$863,993 from fiscal 2012.

School board Vice President Donna Crook proposed a motion that would have eliminated the cuts to the media assistant position in the budget by deferring the transition of nonbenefited temporary employees to benefit status, but only she and Fish supported the motion.

The school board is required to submit a balanced budget to the commissioners by March 1.

Charter school

Founders of the Frederick Classical Charter School are back in the market for a new building.

The board voted 4-3 to deny founders' waiver request for an eight-year charter.

Board members Jimmy Reeder, April Miller and Young voted in favor of approving the waiver request.

Board policy states "A charter may be granted for no longer than four years."

Board members who voted against the waiver said they were worried about setting a precedent.

"If we allow (a waiver) this time, anybody else will feel they can use this case as a reason they should have an eight-year charter," Groth said.

Frederick Classical President Tom Neumark said founders will continue to look for properties that fit in a four-year time frame and meet an April 1 deadline to submit a

building permit to the board.

"At this point it's rather unrealistic," he said.

Despite the result Wednesday, Neumark said founders are committed to opening the school.

"We'll continue to look, but at this point it's very, very difficult to find a property that's within our budget and able to function as a school."

Young made the motion to approve the waiver request for an eight-year charter and was immediately seconded by Miller and supported by Reeder.

He said he supported the waiver because he believes Frederick Classical to be a long-term proposition.

"I'm never going to support any charter unless I think it's a long-term proposition," he said.

Despite the support, Young said the vote went the way he expected and now Frederick Classical is in a tough spot.

Conferences

Despite soliciting feedback from parents and teachers on dates for parent-teacher conferences, the board threw out a flawed survey and decided to schedule conferences for the 2012-13 school year as they have in years past.

Parent-teacher conferences next year will take place on Sept. 21 and Oct. 18 in the fall semester.

Sept. 21, Fair Day, will serve as a full day for conferences and professional development with schools opening four hours late Oct. 18 to accommodate evening conferences.

March 14 and 15 are scheduled half-day conference days in the spring.

Schools will open four hours late on March 14 for evening conferences and close 3½ hours early on March 15 for afternoon conferences.

Alban had asked staff to produce a school calendar that would eliminate a "choppy" schedule around conference days, which included delays and early dismissals to school days.

Ann Bonitatibus, associate superintendent for secondary schools, presented a plan that would create conference days throughout the school year and eliminate those de-