

# **DEEP CUTS**

## **Superintendent presents levels of budget, personnel, program cuts**

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By Gracie Hart  
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The emotion in Orange County Public School Superintendent Dr. Bob Grimesey's voice as he neared the end of the presentation of his recommended budget to school board members Tuesday told it all; things are bad.

Last year, board members were forced to cut \$2.7 million from the schools' budget, taking it down to what they felt were the bare minimums; this year, they'll have to take it even further.

"I present this budget under protest," Grimesey added. "These are recommendations I must make, not ones I like to make and I expect they will be fully scrutinized by the public. It is with deep regret that I bring this formal phase of the budget process."

The school division is facing a proposed \$2.2 million reduction in state funding, plus a \$1.8 million increase in expenses for a total shortfall of \$4 million. Reductions could be greater if local funding decreases as well. However, that could change. And since the House of Delegates nixed a proposed 1 percent increase in the personal property tax, a further \$2.4 million reduction may come at the state level.

The first part of Grimesey's proposed budget, also referred to as group one, includes both non-personnel and personnel reductions to recover both the initial \$2.2 million anticipated reduction in state funding and \$1.8 million increase in expenses for a total of \$4 million in cuts. It does not cover any additional reductions in state funding and is based on level local funding.

There are numerous non-personnel reductions included in group one. These include a 15 percent reduction in non-personnel costs across all division levels (\$260,601) and a 15 percent reduction in non-personnel costs across all schools (\$265,618). These reductions affect things like classroom supplies, equipment repair and replacement, and staff training and development.

"I worry about these cuts because they will be felt even though they are non-personnel," Grimesey said.

Other non-personnel reductions included in group one are: shifting allowable Head Start local costs to federal funding (\$74,076); shifting regional special education programs to Orange County High School (\$87,466); eliminating the extended service plan for retirees (\$64,862); the loss of the state lottery capital improvement project funds which will try to be recaptured with energy savings (\$113,406); reducing operating fund transfer to food services enterprise fund (\$63,359); cut funding for annual school bus replacements (\$270,000); the governor's elimination of the state's technology bond funding (\$258,000); reducing the capacity of remedial summer school programs (\$52,760); reducing reimbursements for teacher graduate coursework (\$27,000); shift all field trip costs to students (\$27,000); shift off-campus career and technical

education course and apprenticeship costs to students (\$17,976) and eliminate the middle school tutoring program (\$123,798). Overall, non-personnel cuts amount to \$1,723,042.

"We are cutting hard in non-personnel areas to avoid [additional] cuts in personnel," Grimesey said. "[However] it is impossible to cut the amount we have to without negatively affecting employees."

Because more than 75 percent of the budget is related to personnel, there are also numerous personnel reductions included in group one, amounting to the elimination of 53 full-time positions and one part-time position.

They are: reducing six career and technical education contracts from 12 months to 10 months (\$16,058); eliminating the Orange County High School instructional coordinator position (\$63,981); eliminating two locally funded vacant literacy coach positions (\$105,604); the reduction of 15 instructional assistant positions (\$377,025); eliminating five secondary school secretary positions, two each from Prospect Heights Middle School and Orange County High School and one from Locust Grove Middle School (\$150,000); eliminating one elementary gifted education teacher position that is currently shared between Orange Elementary School and Gordon-Barbour Elementary School (\$52,802); eliminating one guidance counselor position and having one shared between Unionville Elementary School and Lightfoot Elementary School (\$56,345); eliminating four elementary computer teacher positions—one each from Locust Grove Elementary School, Orange Elementary School, Gordon-Barbour Elementary School and the one shared between Lightfoot Elementary School and Unionville Elementary School (\$211,208); eliminate one assistant principal position (\$88,585); eliminate the Orange County High School athletic trainer position (\$52,802); eliminate two instrumental strings teaching positions (\$105,604); eliminate two elementary secretary positions, one each at Orange Elementary School and Locust Grove Elementary School (\$60,000); eliminate one school safety officer position at Orange County High School (\$55,717); eliminate three special education teaching positions, one each at Prospect Heights Middle School, Locust Grove Middle School and Orange County High School (\$158,406); eliminate three full-time and one part-time reading specialist positions (\$184,807); eliminate one agriculture teaching position at Orange County High School (\$52,802); eliminate one guidance counselor position at Prospect Heights Middle School (\$56,345); eliminate one health and physical education teaching position at Orange County High School (\$52,802); eliminate four elementary connect teaching positions, two from health and physical education and one each from art and music (\$211,208); eliminate one math teaching position from Prospect Heights Middle School (\$52,802); eliminate two reading specialist positions, one each from Unionville Elementary School and Gordon-Barbour Elementary School (\$105,604); and eliminating one Hornet Tech teaching position, currently vacant (\$52,802).

"If we assume the county gives us level local funding, there will be no more decreases and this will be a balanced budget," Grimesey said. "Unfortunately, even if we get level local funding, we can't assume we'll be okay because there may be a further reduction in state funding. If we suffer the additional potential \$2.4 million reduction in funding, we will be looking at a \$6.4 million budget shortfall [and more cuts] in addition to group one.

If reduced \$803,970 beyond the initial \$4 million reduction, a second round of budget cuts has been prepared, referred to as group two.

It consists of: eliminating four fourth or fifth-grade teaching positions, one each from Locust Grove Middle School, Orange Elementary School, Lightfoot Elementary School and Gordon-

Barbour Elementary School (\$211,208); eliminating two science teacher positions from Orange County High School (\$105,604); eliminating one prevention specialist position from Orange County High School (\$48,494); eliminating one kindergarten through third grade teaching position from Unionville Elementary School (\$52,802); eliminating three secondary secretary positions, two from Orange County High School and one from Locust Grove Middle School (\$90,000); eliminating one elementary secretary position at either Unionville Elementary School or Lightfoot Elementary School, having them then share one (\$30,000); eliminating one school safety officer position at Orange County High School (\$55,717); eliminating two health and physical education teaching positions, one shared by Locust Grove Elementary School and Locust Grove Middle School and one at Prospect Heights Middle School (\$105,604); eliminate one math teaching position at Orange County High School (\$52,802) and eliminating one reading specialist position from Locust Grove Middle School (\$52,239).

If reduced \$1.6 million beyond the initial \$4 million reduction, group two would be implemented as well as an additional group three.

Group three includes: eliminating one reading specialist position at Prospect Heights Middle School (\$52,802); eliminating three fourth or fifth grade teaching positions, one each at Orange Elementary School, Lightfoot Elementary School and Gordon-Barbour Elementary School (\$158,406); eliminate four elementary secretary positions, one each at Gordon-Barbour Elementary School, Orange Elementary School, Locust Grove Elementary School and one shared by Unionville Elementary School and Lightfoot Elementary School (\$120,000); eliminate one assistant principal position at Locust Grove Middle School (\$88,585); eliminate one secondary secretary position at Prospect Heights Middle School (\$30,000); eliminate the Orange County High School athletic director position, shifting those duties to the assistant principal (\$111,574) and eliminating after-school tutoring and activity bus routes (\$29,965).

Group three also includes identifying alternative funding sources for middle school sports (\$117,646), junior varsity sports (\$56,131) and a portion of varsity sports (\$38,861).

"As a former coach, I see the value of sports," Grimesey said. "I can't bring myself to say cut sports because that's a policy decision. We would look at alternative funding sources including pay-for-play, fewer free passes to games, etc, anything to eliminate the school board's contribution."

Should the school divisions see the full \$2.4 million additional potential reduction in either state or local funding in addition to the initial \$4 million reduction, groups one through three will be implemented with the addition of group four. Group four includes finding an alternative funding source for the remainder of varsity sports (\$275,791) and an across-the-board 2 percent salary reduction (\$528,179).

"The across-the-board salary reduction will be in addition to the previous cuts unless [the school board] wishes to move it up," an emotional Grimesey said. "Come next fall I have to work with a group of people who have to pay their kid's college bills, their mortgage, put food on the table and keep their cars running to come to work. I can't reduce their take home pay when I'm asking them pay for their own supplies and [to take other cuts]."

Grimesey said should all of the possible reductions in funding at the state and local level become a reality, making cuts next year will be nearly impossible.

"The reductions at [group four] will [bring the division] to a minimum [level]," he said. "We won't be able to reduce further next year."

District 4 school board member Jerry Bledsoe agreed.

"This is a terrible situation," he said. "This is just tearing Orange County apart. It is hard to look at this and know [many members] of our wonderful staff will be looking at unemployment. The students will be affected. This is all one big mess. Last year, we took [the division] to a minimum. This year, we are picking bones."

Dr. Grimesey will formally present the budget for the school board's adoption at next week's board meeting Feb. 2 at 7 p.m. The meeting has been moved from the Taylor Education and Administration Complex to the Orange County High School in anticipation of a large public turnout. Members of the public will be able to speak on the budget during the public comment portion of the meeting.

According to Grimesey, it is important to note that even if the board adopts the budget, nothing will be finalized and the budget will remain a work in progress for many months. The school board will present its budget to the Orange County Board of Supervisors in mid-February.