

A Message from Superintendent Dan Boyd

Below you'll find an article about the School Board's efforts to find new sources of funding to offset the deep budget cuts we're experiencing. As board vice-chairman Tina Pinkoson said at the last board meeting, we are now in 'survival mode' and must find new ways to ensure that we have enough money to operate our schools.

The board members and district staff have been meeting since January to review and reduce the budget. As part of that process, several administrative and district level positions have been eliminated and departmental budgets have been cut. The board is also looking at streamlining magnet busing, consolidating under-enrolled schools, reducing funding for new technology and other options to save money.

Throughout this process, we are doing everything we can to limit the impact of budget cuts on our classrooms. After all, what happens in the classroom is at the heart of our mission. In those situations in which decreased student enrollment or other circumstances lead to reductions in personnel, we are committed to working with affected employees to get them placed in other positions in the district if at all possible.

I know that there is a lot of anxiety among our employees about the current budget situation. These are very uncertain, very difficult times for Florida schools--and for families, businesses and other organizations affected by the economy. Please be assured that we are doing all we can to protect employees' jobs and maintain the high quality of education that Alachua County Public Schools provides to all our students.



Board looks for new revenue sources to shore up budget

In light of significant cuts by both the state and federal governments, the School Board is considering a proposal to ask voters to approve more local funding for public schools.

During its May 20 meeting, the board gave Superintendent Dan Boyd the go-ahead to begin the process to put a property tax increase on the November ballot. Depending on the amount of the increase the board decides to put before voters, the initiative could raise \$6.5 to \$13 million beginning in July of 2009, which is when the increase would take effect.

"Florida has a constitutional obligation to adequately fund public schools, but clearly that's not happening," said Boyd. "We're hoping Alachua County citizens will step up and help us maintain the programs that have made Alachua County such a successful district."

School nurses, art, music and other elective classes, classroom materials and technology and other programs are all facing cutbacks in the 2008-09 school year budget and beyond. The district lost nearly \$9 million in state funding this year and is anticipating at least another \$5 million in cuts this year due to state cuts.

The federal government has also informed school districts nationwide that Medicaid reimbursement funds, which are used locally to pay for 29 school nurses, are on the chopping block. That means a loss of nearly \$1 million for the district.

"We're looking at very difficult budget choices that are bound to have a negative impact on the programs we offer and the well-being of our students," said Boyd. "If we don't take steps to support our schools in Alachua County, we'll be feeling the effects for years to come."

At its meeting on June 3, the School Board will consider whether to ask voters for a ½ or 1 mill increase in school property taxes. (One mill is equal to \$1 for every \$1000 of the taxable value of a property.) For a home with an assessed value of \$150,000 and a \$25,000 homestead exemption, a 1 mill increase would cost a taxpayer \$125 a year, with a half mill costing half that amount, or about \$5.21 a month. Any increase would last just four years unless re-approved by voters.

If the Board decides to put a property tax referendum on the ballot, the district will work with the Alachua County Education Association, employees, parents and other interested citizens to educate voters about the need for a property tax increase.

"Because of the passage of Amendment 1 in January, property owners will be saving significantly more money than this increase would cost them," said Keith Birkett, the district's assistant superintendent for finance and budget. "It would be up to the voters to decide if they'd be willing to invest some of those savings in maintaining a quality educational system in our community."



Ideas and Incentives Program

Do you have an innovative idea you think would save the district money or time? Something that would boost efficiency or productivity at your school or workplace? Perhaps an idea that would improve the working environment or promote safety? If so, just fill out this form and send it in to the Public Information Office at Kirby Smith. You can send it through truck mail or fax it to 955-6700. The form is also available on the district's website (www.sbac.edu) on the Employee Information and Technical Support link and can be e-mailed to jackie.johnson@gm.sbac.edu.

If your idea is selected for implementation, you'll receive a \$50 award and may be recognized in the district's newsletter *Employee Express*. For more information, contact Jackie Johnson at 955-7253, ext. 228.

Name: _____

School/Worksite: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address (if appropriate): _____

What's your idea? (Remember, this should be a *new, innovative* idea with the potential to save money, increase efficiency and productivity, improve the working environment and/or promote safety. Feel free to add an extra page if needed.)



This publication is for employees of Alachua County Public Schools and is produced by the Public Information Office at a cost of less than 2.5 cents per copy. Please send story ideas and suggestions to johnsonj@sbac.edu.