

Orange budget seeks pay raises

BY: ROBIN KNEPPER (Reprinted with permission)

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Orange County school system employees will see an average 5 percent pay raise in the next school year if Superintendent Bob Grimesey's proposed budget is adopted.

In his budget proposal to the School Board on Tuesday, Grimesey said implementation of a five-year plan "to reverse the critical erosion of employee salaries and benefits" is the school system's "most urgent need."

The proposed pay plan for teachers would "reduce salary steps, equalize differences among steps, and ensure reasonable competitive posture with Culpeper" and similar localities, the superintendent said. The cost of implementing the first year of the plan would be \$973,109.

All other school employees would also see an average 5 percent salary increase, at a cost of \$651,985.

Grimesey's proposed operating budget of \$4.3 million represents a 10 percent overall increase over this fiscal year, with a nearly 16 percent increase in needed county funds.

The expected \$1.6 million increase in contributions to the Virginia Retirement System, group life insurance and retiree health care credit rates, exclusive of salary increases, is the greatest fixed cost. Other funding increases include money for four more elementary school teachers and three instructional technology resource teachers needed to meet state requirements.

Capital expenses—a phone-system upgrade, teacher computer replacements, building maintenance and four new buses—make up the balance of the \$3.3 million in fixed costs for basic operations.

Grimesey said the highest-priority unmet basic needs are: salary increases; an 8 percent increase in health and dental insurance premiums; restoration of seven instructional-assistant positions; expansion of the Virginian Preschool Initiative to Locust Grove; after-school-detention programs at the high school and two middle schools; a ninth-grade football team; and a full-time athletic trainer, science teacher, and economic and personal finance teacher at Orange County High School.

The School Board is expected to consider Grimesey's proposed budget at its Feb. 6 meeting at Prospect Heights Middle School. The public is invited to comment. The Board of Supervisors has final say over local funding for the school budget, which goes into effect July 1.