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Pitt schools using formulas to cut positions

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Pitt County School administrators are using complex formulas to eliminate instructional positions in an effort to balance the budget for the coming year.

The school system is not expecting to receive the full amount it requested from the Pitt County Board of Commis-

sioners for the 2008-09 budget. Eliminating about 40 positions will help to make up the deficit in the budget shortfall, Superintendent Beverly Reep said Tuesday. “The message I am receiv-
ing from the county commissioners is that we are too dependent on local positions,” Reep said.

“What hurts this time is that in order to balance the budget, we have to hit the instructional positions.”

After the education compact between the school board and the county commissioners ended several years ago, the school board has not received

full budget requests from the county.

During the years of the compact, the district increased locally funded positions to 87 instructional teachers above and beyond what the state allocates for Pitt County based on the number of students in the district.

Those locally funded positions are mostly those associated with exceptional children, talented and gifted programs, vocational, physical education, music and art programs. These are the positions that will be affected.

Reep said school officials need to know where teachers are going to be and what positions they will have so that they can prepare for the school year even though the budget

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from the commissioners will not be completed until July.

Budget shortfall

The Pitt County Board of Education's proposed operating budget presented to the commissioners included a $3.5 million increase.

The proposed local budget from the school system asks the county to increase the amount of local funds spent on each student by $133. Last year, commissioners approved a $49 per student increase.

Pitt County Manager Scott Elliot’s proposed budget, presented to the board Monday, would only increase the schools' budget by $1,386,000, leaving a $1,962,000 shortfall.

The proposed budget includes a property tax rate of 67.5 cents per $100 valuation. The revenue-neutral rate would be 63.821 cents per $100 valuation in light of property value increases based on this year's county property revaluation. The revenue-neutral rate would produce about $3,981,000 less in revenue than the budget proposed by Elliot.

The county commissioners are holding budget workshops all week. Reep was not encouraged by Elliot's proposal and fears that the commissioners will want to go with the revenue-neutral rate, which would mean even less money for Pitt County Schools, perhaps not enough to cover the cost of opening Ridgewood Elementary School next year on Thomas Langston Road.

The school district would have to find other ways to pay for opening the school. It will cost $735,000 to open the school, according to the school board’s budget proposal.

Talented and Gifted

Three positions were eliminated Monday when the Pitt County Board of Education approved a new plan for the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program. The positions will be reduced from 32 to 28.5.

The new TAG plan will actually mean more teacher positions at several schools, while eliminating positions at H.B. Sugg and Wintergreen Primary, both K-2 schools.

Reep said that students are not officially tested and identified as gifted until fourth grade.

Previously, each school in the county was assigned one TAG teacher position. The new plan will increase efficiency within the program and allow schools with larger populations to use more positions to deliver services to students, the superintendent said.

Under the approved proposal, the lowest TAG populated schools would receive 2½ days of service. This includes schools with fewer than 11 identified students.

The next population group, which includes 15 schools with identified populations between 12 and 30 students, will continue to have one full-time position.

The remaining five schools, with populations between 38 and 87 students, will receive two full-time positions.

The biggest change, the one that has drawn the most controversy, comes in the STRIDE program, a TAG program for fourth- and fifth-graders.

Students will no longer be bused to STRIDE centers, but will take STRIDE classes at their school with the TAG teacher. Reep said STRIDE students will still receive a full six-hour day each week in the program.

Encore positions

This year district administrators asked each school to look at their programs and identify where positions could be cut, Reep said.

The state uses a formula for a teacher-to-student ratio to assign teacher positions to each school district in North Carolina.

Grades K-3 get one teacher for every 18 students in a class. Grades 4-6 get one teacher for every 22 students. Grades 7-8 get one teacher position for every 22 students and ninth grade gets one teacher for every 24.5 students.

Grades 10-12 get one teacher for every 26.64 students, according to the formula.

District officials used a formula that increases the number of teachers in Pitt County by 5 percent for every grade.

For example, Reep said, the state allows one position for every 18 first-graders. Pitt picks up the tab so that there is one position for every 17.10 students in a first-grade class.

Most of the teachers that are paid for locally teach classes referred to as Encore classes, which include band and art.

Pitt County currently has 87 positions above and beyond what the state pays for. This number will decrease to 55.9 positions next year.

"We tried to make the cuts equitable across the district," Reep said. "We had each school make recommendations of programs that they can continue to offer with fewer teacher positions."

Several parents opposed cutting the band teacher's position at Farmville Middle School at Monday's school board meeting.

The position will be cut at Farmville, but the teacher will continue to work full time. He will split his time with Farmville Middle and another school. This kind of redirection is how the district is cutting positions without laying teachers off.

Some positions will be left open as teachers retire, and others will be left open as retired teachers are not offered their jobs again next year.

As of now, Reep said, there are three teachers who may not have a position next year, including one drama posi-
Philanthropist Davis dies

Tar Heel made fortune in oil, and N.C. benefited

BY BRUCE SICLOFF, JANE STANCILL
AND ROB CHRISTENSEN
STAFF WRITERS

CHAPEL HILL — Walter Royal Davis, a Pasquotank County farmer's son who became a Texas oil tycoon before returning to North Carolina as a force in politics and higher education, died Monday night at his Chapel Hill home.

With a 300-pound body and a booming boardroom voice, Davis, 88, was legendary for making things happen. He gave millions of dollars to UNC-Chapel Hill and was a trustee for 16 years.

Davis entertained on a grand scale, and he was known to leave five-thousand-dollar tips for struggling clerks and waitresses. Through scholarship programs and in personal gifts to young people he met, Davis put more than 1,300 students through colleges and nursing schools in North Carolina and Texas.

UNC-CH named its central library for Davis in the 1980s. He had persuaded legislators to provide money for it.

A Manteo elementary school named a hallway for him in the 1990s. He had provided a monthly ice cream endowment for fifth-graders.

"Walter was, I believe, the most generous man I've ever met. He gave to people that nobody even knows about."

ANDY GRIFFITH
ACTOR

ARRANGEMENTS
Walter Davis is survived by his wife, JoAnn. A funeral is planned for 2 p.m. Friday at Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill, with a reception to follow in the church.

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From potatoes to oil

Davis never attended college. He was born Jan. 11, 1920, and grew up on a potato farm near Elizabeth City. After graduating from Hargrave Military Academy, he found work as a store clerk and a truck driver.

He drove textiles from southern factories to northern finishing plants, then moved into management with a California trucking firm.

Davis moved to Midland, Texas, in 1952. He started his petroleum empire with borrowed money to buy five tanker trucks that plowed through muddy fields to reach wells that produced oil for remote pipelines. After selling his Permian Corp. to Occidental Petroleum in 1986, he chafed in his new role as No. 2 man under CEO Armand Hammer.

Davis broke with Hammer and started a second oil transport company, bought refineries, and invested in oil and gas drilling ventures and other businesses. Back in his home state, he invested in real-estate projects, including Kildaire Farms in Cary, and Bald Head Island and Southern Shores on the coast.

Hammer wasn’t the first authority figure Davis clashed with, or the last.

As a boy, he butted heads with his father over pre-dawn chores that included milking the cow and feeding chickens, hogs and 22 mules. He walked three miles to school and was kicked out the first day, he recalled in 1982, for slugging the principal.

Later, North Carolina trucking executive Malcolm McLean fired Davis for giving his first wife a ride in a company truck. They had driven to Washington to see Franklin Roosevelt’s third inauguration.

scription to The Economist magazine and began his tutoring.

“It made me understand there was a wider world than the Outer Banks and even North Carolina,” Basnight said.

Davis enjoyed the good life and big gestures. He took UNC board members to parties at his beach house. He rented trains in Europe to take friends on vacation. His lawyer, Cecil Munn of Port Worth, Texas, recalled an outing with Davis that began as a fishing trip for five couples — to New Zealand, Tahiti and Hong Kong.

“He was a big guy, and the boat was small,” Munn said. “He put the boat away and said, ‘Let’s go to New Zealand, Tahiti and Hong Kong.’”

Davis went to Las Vegas to gamble and to Hong Kong to buy clothes for his huge frame.

“I just cannot find tailors here who can fit this body,” he said in 2001.

Outspoken at UNC

His gifts to UNC-CH included $1 million to help build the sports arena named for basketball coach Dean Smith. He gave $1.4 million for students who would teach in poor areas of northeastern North Carolina.

Davis held courtside tickets to all UNC home basketball games, and he frequently distributed them to medical students and friends.

Every spring for more than 20 years, he distributed ACC and NCAA basketball tournament tickets and political advice from his office suite in the Governors Inn at Research Triangle Park.

Davis served as a Duke University trustee and a member of the statewide UNC Board of Governors, and he endowed buildings and programs at N.C. State and Elizabeth City State universities.

Davis quit the UNC board in 1991 after charging that C.D. Spangler Jr., then the UNC president, was advancing his family fortune while neglecting the university’s problems. Later, Davis was a critic of Spangler’s successor, Molly Broad, and a key figure in contentious efforts to win greater autonomy for UNC-Chapel Hill.

“He was not bashful about letting his feelings be known,” former UNC-CH chancellor Paul Hardin said.

Living big

Davis was a big contributor to politicians in both major parties, sometimes giving to opponents in the same contest.

He took Lyndon Johnson fishing on his boat. He counted liberal Democrats William Fulbright and Hubert Humphrey as friends, and he supported conservative Republicans Richard Nixon and Jesse Helms. After he returned to North Carolina in the 1970s, Davis also backed Tar Heel Democrats Jim Hunt and Terry Sanford.

In the 1980s, he became mentor to Marc Basnight, a young Manteo builder running for a state Senate seat.

Basnight would become Senate leader and the most powerful figure in North Carolina politics. But he was intimidated the first time Davis picked him up in a big car, puffing a cigar.

Davis peppered him with questions on wide-ranging subjects and pronounced him “one of the dumbest people he ever met,” Basnight recalled. But Davis gave Basnight a sub-

A tough guy

In recent years Davis was weakened after a series of strokes, but he continued to receive visitors at his Chapel Hill home. A few hundred friends came from a half-dozen states for his 88th birthday party in January.

“He was a tough guy, by God, and he fought to his last breath,” said Bob Eubanks of Chapel Hill, his son-in-law and former business partner. “He was always looking for ways to help people. He used to tell me he wanted to give away the last dollar he had on the day he died.”

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