

# School district studies alternatives after defeat

Continued from page 1A  
support and what coalitions can be formed in the meantime.

"We have to plan as if no funding is coming in the future," said Gorman. "There are (41) days left before the school year begins," he said. We are expecting 4,400 new students. There are [already] more than 26,000 students in the district depending on us. Our job is to make sure this doesn't have an impact on the 2006-2007 school year."

For the most part it won't. There are still funds from the 2002 bonds, but CMS Associate Superintendent Guy Chamberlain explained those are limited.

"The money is going to go down quickly," he said.

There are still some COPs available for use. Construction on Mallard Creek High School and Flat Bread Elementary will be completed, as they are already under contract. As things stand today, the four new elementary schools scheduled to open in 2008, will not. With no bond referendum scheduled for 2007, every project put forth in the SBC package will be delayed at least a year, after already being delayed in November. "We will stop building when the money runs out," said Chamberlain.

Along with new construction, renovations at schools like Idlewild Elementary and Harding High will be put on hold. In the meantime, 20,000 students will be moved to mobile classrooms.

"You should never want to build for maximum population," said Gorman. "Relocatable classrooms should always be part of a strategy ... not part of a per-

manent plan. Now (they) are part of a permanent plan."

In addition to delayed construction and renovations, CMS officials will consider layoffs at schools and construction projects.

"We will have to start looking at eliminating one project management team," said Chamberlain, who is responsible for CMS construction. "We don't want to retain them if they have no work to do."

Though the possible elimination of one team only entails five positions, should funding come through, they will have to find new people, causing a break in continuity with staffing, and possibly more delays in work completion.

"How far do we fall behind?" Gorman asked. "We're getting into a dangerous pit where we can't keep our heads above water."

Both Gorman and Chamberlain reiterated that half of the County's inventory of schools date back to the 1950s and '60s. The core systems in these schools, such as electric and plumbing, are beginning to fail. Almost 50 schools need upgrades.

The current strategy is to look at and consider every option available including year round schooling, a bond package in 2006 and public-private funding. Gorman did not commit to a specific plan of action, stating that all options were on the table.

"There is a whole myriad of things to consider. We don't want to inflame or frighten the community."

Public-private funding would require commissioners' approval, and could leave the system in the same situation again. Even with a referen-

dum, the alternate options are not for the 2006-2007 school year but will mostly affect 2008-2009.

"People hold the (school)

board accountable for their actions, but the board does not have the final word," he said. "This is a partnership ... part of this partnership did

not put the needs of kids first."

Without taxing authority, CMS will have to go back to the commissioners.

"We have to plan for the money to run out," Gorman said. "I hope it won't. I believe the community won't stand for that happening."

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## Easley praises N.C. lawmakers for budget

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — When Gov. Mike Easley signed the state's \$18.9 billion spending plan for this year last week, he praised the General Assembly for its commitment to fiscal discipline, education and the mentally ill.

"It's a great budget from top to bottom," Easley said before he signed the budget a week and a half into the fiscal year that began July 1.

The spending plan adjusts the second year of a two-year budget approved last summer, so a late start didn't cause any fiscal problems within state government. A record revenue surplus — about \$2 billion of additional money — also helped.

With average 8 percent raises for public school teachers and at least 6 percent for university and community college staff, the budget bill spends \$943 million on education compared to last year's budget, according to legislative staff.

The bill gave what Easley sought to help at-risk students and poor school districts. Legislators also agreed to hire 100 middle-school literacy coaches, as Easley requested.

"It says to every child in every corner of every county in this state that you will not get left behind in North Carolina," Easley said.

Mental health programs received an additional \$95 million to help redouble efforts to improve treatment in community settings. Lawmakers also agreed to issue more than \$328 million in debt to replace two mental hospitals and complete work on a third. The bonds are part of more than \$672 million in debt to be issued through mid-2010.

The budget partially cut two "temporary" taxes first approved in 2001, dropping the state sales tax by a quarter-penny and the individual income tax rate for the highest wage earners from 8.25 percent to 8 percent.

Most state workers also get a 5.5 percent raise, the highest in 16 years.

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