

# Budget Cuts Cast Shadow on New School Year

By MICHAEL DAVIS  
Assistant City Editor

As area public schools begin a new academic year, teachers and administrators are bracing themselves for a tighter budget than in the past.

State economic woes have forced legislators to cut funding from many sectors, including primary and secondary education.

Officials are still awaiting passage of the state budget in the N.C. General Assembly to determine just how hard they will be hit.

Kim Hoke, spokeswoman for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said that despite the uncertainty, administration already has started planning for cuts.

"The magnitude of the cuts is not yet

known," Hoke said.

She said the school system placed a freeze on all positions that are not directly teacher-principal related, and is holding two vacant teacher assistant positions per school.

Hoke added that the system has only allocated 80 to 85 percent of the supplies and materials budgeted to the individual schools.

Officials used capital outlay funds to balance the system budget, resulting in fewer building repairs over the summer, Hoke said.

She said that with enrollment growing next year, the system is not expecting large cuts compared to other districts statewide. Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools had an enrollment of 10,019 during 2001-02, but officials are

projecting 10,448 students for this academic year.

But Hoke said while there are clear signs of concern over impending budget cuts, she hopes the impact will not be too detrimental in the classroom.

"Hopefully the cuts will not affect students' education too directly," she said.

While most areas of public education are receiving funding reductions, the N.C. House recently proposed a pay raise that averaged 1.8 percent for teachers and principals.

Hoke said the proposal can be viewed as an incentive to draw teachers into the system and combat the current state teacher shortage.

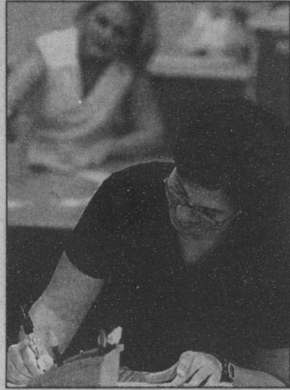
Susan Hoffman, a first grade teacher at Mary Scroggs Elementary School, said she hopes the concerns of teachers will be a top priority in the budget.

"We're still waiting to find out about our raise," Hoffman said. "I hope they're still going to keep teachers in mind."

She said that while her school has not been forced to reduce supplies for the new year, any cuts are unfortunate.

"It's too bad that cuts have to be made at all," she said.

Ann Hill, PTA president at Ephesus Road Elementary, said one of her chief



DTH/BRIAN CASSELLA

Teacher Susan Hoffman works at Mary Scroggs Elementary.

concerns is potential cutbacks in special areas, including programs for special education and academically-gifted students.

"People are concerned that any cutbacks will take (away) from any of these programs," Hill said.

But she said the PTA will work hard to support all faculty and students.

"We'll make every effort to meet their needs."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

# Schools Tackle Security, Educational Gap Issues

By MICHAEL DAVIS  
Assistant City Editor

Narrowing the educational gap and maintaining campus security are among the concerns of area public school teachers and administrators this academic year.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools have adopted the theme of "equity and excellence" to stress the importance of reaching out to minority students that often get left behind.

Kim Hoke, system spokeswoman, said the mission is to increase achievement and educational opportunities for these students. Hoke said the school board is trying to ensure that there are fewer barriers for minority students who want to attend field trips with a cost.

The school district faces another barrier in its need for qualified faculty. As students return to area schools this week, some positions remain open, Hoke said. She said that the system filled 145 vacancies over the summer but that 10 to 15 spots still remain to be filled.

She added that these open positions tend to deal with special needs students and English as a second language classes, and that bonuses are offered to attract teachers to these areas.

Hoke said that despite the challenges facing the district, the atmosphere surrounding the new school year is optimistic. "Every time we start a new year, it's usually a start for new opportunities,"

she said. "I think everybody's excited." Chapel Hill-Carrboro School Board member Maryanne Rosenman said overcrowding, while not a new concern, is still a major issue in the school system.

Rosenman said the enrollment increase is highest for high schools and no funds exist to build additional facilities for this age group. "We're a little concerned about high school capacity," she said.

Security issues have also caused some officials and parents added concern.

In April an attempted student snatching at Frank Porter Graham Elementary School heightened security concerns in the community.

But Rosenman said safety always has been a top priority. She said under the safe schools plans, school administrators are expected to report safety concerns.

Steve Scroggs, assistant superintendent for support services for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, said the Department of Public Instruction and Chapel Hill police are currently examining security procedures.

Scroggs said officials rewrite the safe schools plans every three years. But he said that while he is confident of the safety in area public schools, security will always be a major concern. "Schools are the safest places kids can be," he said. "Are we concerned? Absolutely."

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