The Daily Tar Heel

City schools look to up funds |Iraqi leader picks gain traction

Officials concerned about feasibility

BY BRIANNA BISHOP ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

A \$270 increase in per-pupil funding for city schools has district officials concerned about whether their budget requests for next fiscal year can be met.

The district is requesting about \$2.9 million in additional funds a 6.6 percent increase from last fiscal year.

The increase is normally considered to be a modest request, according to a memorandum from Superintendent Neil Pedersen in his budget report, which was released last week

But a need to increase perpupil funding by \$270 has raised concerns about whether that funding can be substantiated.

"It is a relatively large increase on a per-pupil basis," Pedersen said, adding that there are some concerns in the district about the Orange County Board of Commissioners' ability and willingness to fund this increase

The memo states that in previous years, the school board typically has approved a per-pupil

increase of about \$60. But a decline in the number of students from 2005-06 projections has caused next year's increase to be so large.

If the board were to provide only the \$60 increase this year, the district would have \$2 million less in local funds.

And that possibility has some school officials concerned, as there are several initiatives they would like to fund this coming year. 'There's some areas in which

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we've more or less made commitments for next year," Pedersen

These areas, he said, include funding for a middle college program at Durham Technical Community College, additional textbooks and planning for the implementation of districtwide high school reform, with components such as small learning academies.

He said the commissioners are now in the process of decid-ing how they can fund initiatives that each district sees as pressing needs.

City schools also have concerns about possible discretionary reductions of about \$570,000 at the state level.

Pedersen's memo provides several potential reductions in the district's budget to address the projected shortfall. "At this point in the year, it

would be irresponsible to ignore these possibilities," the memo

"We must identify areas in

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which significant reductions could be made to both the local and state budgets."

Those reductions include eliminating student resource officer positions at all three middle schools, field trip funding and after-school programs at middles schools.

"It will be a challenging year for us," said district spokeswoman Kim Hoke.

The challenge, she said, will be in trying to maintain what the district has now while continuing to improve.

The school board will review the budget report at its April 7 meet-ing, which will be held at 7 p.m. at Chapel Hill Town Hall.

Chapel Hill Jown Hall. A public hearing on the budget will be April 21 at Mary Scroggs Elementary School, and the school board is expected to pass its requested budget May 5. Commissioners will adopt next fiscal year's budget in June

fiscal year's budget in June.

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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq – Lawmakers broke days of rancorous stale-mate Sunday and reached out to Iraq's Sunni Muslim minority for their parliament speaker, cutting through ethnic and sectarian bar-riers that have held up selection of a new government for more than two months since the country's first free elections in 50 years.

Deputies still face, however, dif-ficult choices for Cabinet posts and failed again to name a new president — broadly expected to be Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani. That choice and those of two vice presidents were put off until a Wednesday session that could mark a major mile-stone as Iraq tries to build a demo-

cratic government and civil society.

Once the president and his deputies are selected, they have 14 days to choose a prime minister, the most powerful position in Iraq's envisioned government hierarchy. That job was widely believed reserved for Ibrahim al-Jaafari, of

the Shiite Muslim majority. Pressure is building on parliamentarians, with some growing frustrated with the slow pace of forming a government, because they have an Aug. 15 deadline to write a permanent constitution - a task that cannot be undertaken until a government is in place.

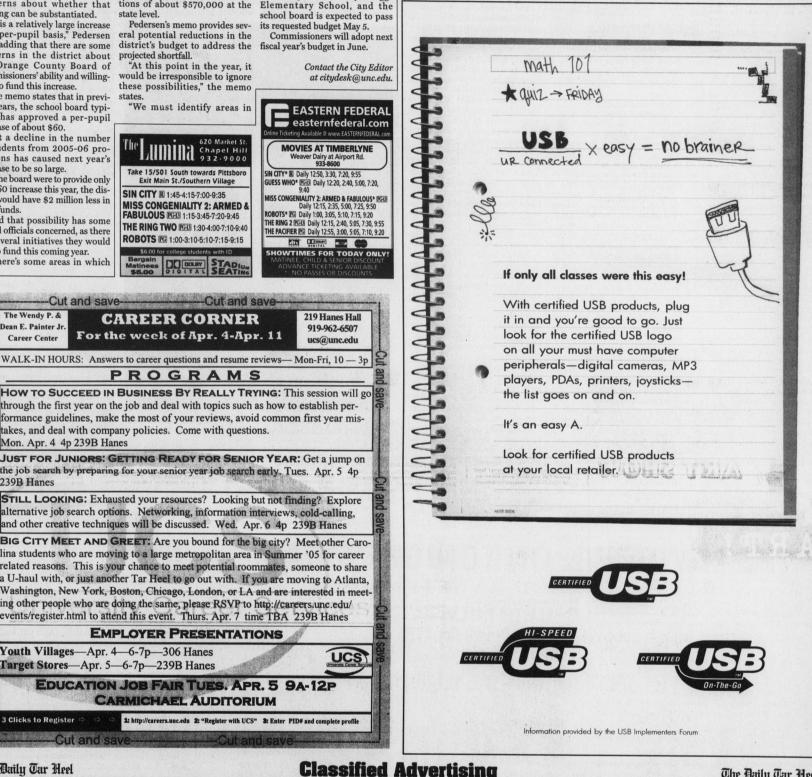
Sunday's selection as speaker Industry Minister Hajim al-Hassani, one of only 17 Sunni Arabs in parliament — could sig-nal progress in the political tussle

over selecting politicians for key Cabinet posts, a process that has been snarled by disagreement over how to reach out to the Sunnis. They are believed to make up the

backbone of the Iraqi insurgency, were dominant under ousted dictator Saddam Hussein and largely boycotted the Jan. 30 elections or stayed home for fear of being attacked at the polls. The choice of al-Hassani, how

ever, was not well received in all quarters.

Osama Abdulfatah, a 30-year-old architect and a Sunni, said the new speaker's support last year of the U.S. assault on the militant strong-hold of Fallujah showed he "does not have beliefs, and will never do anything against his benefit."



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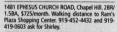
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