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Superintendent of Schools

Walton



COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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The Honorable Don Gaetz
State Senator, District 1
420 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

Dear Senator Gaetz:

I would like to take this opportunity to address information presented to the House Appropriations Committee regarding School District Fixed Capital Outlay Funding and the school projects that exceed student station costs as applicable to Walton County School District.

As a small and sparse district with a constant and increasing student enrollment, Walton County cannot base construction decisions on our current population because the distance between each geographical area requires the provision of full services at each individual school site. Therefore, we have to replicate services in every school, even though the student enrollment at a facility may be as low as 340 or as great as 1000. So, the utilization of an average cost per student station does not take into consideration the wide variety of special circumstances that impact the project costs. In two recent projects we “overbuilt” our core facilities purposefully to accommodate future growth to ensure the core facilities would adequately handle the impact of additional student stations. A primary example of “overbuilding” applies to Emerald Coast Middle School (ECMS) and to Mossy Head School (MHS). We constructed ECMS based on its population at that time, plus an estimated increase based on historical growth patterns. When the school opened in August, the student enrollment had increased so exponentially that by October we had to begin construction on eight additional classrooms to handle the growth. Had the core facilities not been “overbuilt”, the unexpected spike in student enrollment would have resulted in overcrowding in the cafeteria, library media and gymnasium – and we would not be able to meet the requirements of class size reduction. Although we did not have to immediately construct additional classrooms at Mossy Head School, the school is filled to capacity.

Walton County has four individual school projects that exceeded the student station cost when constructed. It is crucial to note all of the projects referenced in the presentation were funded by local tax dollars, and not state funds. The specific reasons for the increase in costs are addressed below:

- Emerald Coast Middle School
 - Extra fill had to be installed to offset the high water table
 - Extension of water, sewer, electrical and telecom lines
 - High acquisition cost for property in the south end of Walton County
 - More stringent wind load requirements for construction in south end of county
 - Construction of over-sized core facilities to handle future enrollment projections
- Mossy Head School
 - Extension of water, sewer, electrical and telecommunication lines
 - Construction of a waste water treatment plant and absorption field
 - Construction of a roadway, including a bridge
 - Construction as an emergency evacuation center
 - Construction of over-sized core facilities to handle future enrollment projections

“Making All Decisions in the Best Interest of Students”

Gail Smith
District 1

Kim Kirby
District 2

Bill Eddins, Jr.
District 3

Mark D. Davis
District 4

Jason Catalano
District 5

- Paxton School Gymnasium
Paxton serves PreK through 12th grade. The school does not have a football program, so the gymnasium serves in lieu of a stadium.
The facility was constructed as non-classroom space with student stations assigned to it
- Walton High School
Unforeseen site work requiring removal of daisy chain septic tanks
Constructed as an emergency evacuation shelter

We strive with each individual school project to keep our construction costs within the guidelines. We utilize the same architectural design, which results in a significant decrease in costs for future projects. We also utilize a construction management service, which ensures each project remains within the projected cost. Utilizing the construction management team often results in a reduction in costs due to their diligence in managing the entire construction process from the initial phase through completion.

Walton County School District is designated a district of choice. Students may attend any school in the district, public or charter; there is no residential zoning. For this reason, schools cannot be "evened-out" to accommodate the student stations at individual facilities. Were we to consider implementing residential zoning, students would have to be transported beyond their geographical region, requiring them to spend several hours daily getting to and from school. This would also place an undue burden on parents who live in one geographical area, but work in another.

Currently, Walton County is experiencing a significant and continued population growth in south Walton. Therefore, we are in the process of designing an additional elementary school to address the current overcrowding. If this bill passes as designed, we would be forced to ask the School Board to raise the local millage (currently set at 1.393), remove the choice option for the regular public schools and implement residential zoning in order to continue with the elementary construction project. If the project is delayed because of lack of funding, our south Walton elementary schools will not be able to meet class size reduction because the current facilities cannot handle the increased student load.

In closing, it is very crucial to note that Walton County School District has been a very good steward of our public tax dollars. We have consistently constructed new facilities without placing a tax burden on our citizens by increasing the local millage rate. Although our total project costs for the four mentioned facilities may have exceeded the cost/student station metric, the cost factor calculation does not include any consideration for specialized facilities with low student stations, the cost of land in south Walton, or the costs associated with building roads and bridges to access these facilities.

Respectfully,



Carlene H. Anderson
Superintendent of Schools

CHA/lw

cc: Mark Gardner
Director