

Press Release

For Release on Monday, March 17, 2008

Worcester County Board of Education To Adopt Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget

[Newark] The Worcester County Board of Education will adopt the school system's Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget at the March 18 Board of Education Meeting.

“Our proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget is reasonable and fiscally responsible,” explained Board of Education President Garry Mumford. “Existing federal and state aid has not been sufficient to meet federal and state mandates. Consequently, we must rely on funding from our county government. We understand the challenges faced by our County Commissioners who must balance the county budget while meeting the needs of all county agencies and services. At the same time, it is our mission to continue to meet the needs of our children. As needs and mandates change and expand, our budget must do the same in order to ensure the ongoing success of all students.”

Recruiting, hiring, and retaining highly qualified teachers and support staff continue to be a priority of Worcester County parents and the Board of Education. The Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes a 3.5 percent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase, as well as a step adjustment. “Teachers make the greatest difference in the educational lives of our students,” said Superintendent Dr. Jon Andes, “and we simply must continue to retain and attract the very best teachers and staff.”

In the fall of 2008, the new Worcester Technical High School (WTHS) will open its doors to students and staff. To adequately staff the new school, the Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes five (5) new WTHS positions. Requests include one residential wiring instructor in order to implement a residential wiring program at the new school; two custodians; one school nurse; and one school secretary.

Also included in the Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget are funding requests for three (3) existing educational assistants at Worcester Technical High School. The educational

assistants, who serve students with special needs, are currently funded through a federal Perkins grant. However, regulations on the Perkins grant have changed and the three educational assistant positions will no longer qualify for Perkins funding. Consequently, these positions must be reallocated to other funding sources. The Perkins grant will be used to fund an early childhood education program at Worcester Technical High School for students pursuing careers in early childhood education and daycare.

“With new, improved, and expanded programs and services, our new school will be able to better serve our students,” said Dr. Jane Pruitt, Principal of Worcester Technical High School and Supervisor of Career and Technology Education. “The Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes positions that we believe are essential to preparing our students.”

The Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes funding for 18 new positions. Five of these new positions are being requested for the new Worcester Technical High School. Of the remaining 13 positions, eight are teaching positions and five are support positions. Half of the new positions were requested in last year’s proposed budget, and the needs continue to exist.

Our award-winning after-school programs continue to make a significant difference for our students. Our after-school programs were initially funded through state and federal grants. The federal and state grants have been reduced. In order for successful programs to continue, local or state funding must be allocated. The Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes requests for funding to account for the reduction or elimination of grants. The budget seeks to use increased state funding to offset grant reductions for the 4th and 5th grade after-school academies at Buckingham Elementary, Berlin Intermediate, Pocomoke Middle, and Snow Hill Middle Schools. Also, increased state aid would be used to fund the after-school academy at Ocean City Elementary School. In addition, because of grant reductions, local funding is being requested to continue the high school academies at Pocomoke and Snow Hill High Schools.

The Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes requests associated with instructional programs. For example, beginning with the class of 2009 and thereafter, in order to graduate, all students must pass the High School Assessments or complete a challenging program of academic projects called the Bridge Plan. Funding is sought to implement the Bridge Plan, thus providing a viable option for students who are not passing the required High School Assessments. In addition, the budget includes requests to provide an evening alternative program at Pocomoke High School to address the needs of students who, due to varying circumstances, are not able to

attend school during regular school hours. Funding is also requested to implement a pilot mentoring program at one of our schools.

In total, the Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget includes a requested increase of approximately \$6.6 million from local funding. In addition, the budget includes a state funding (Thornton) increase of approximately \$200,000. “Because our school system receives the second lowest amount of state aid per pupil, we must look to our County Commissioners to fund over 75 percent of our budget,” explained Chief Financial Officer Vince Tolbert.

In addition to the operating budget, the Worcester County Board of Education has included one-time funding requests in the areas of technology, capital outlay, and school construction. The goal of technology is to improve access to instructional technology for students, teachers, and staff. The one-time technology request for FY 2009 totals \$998,975 and includes requested expenditures for installing wireless Internet access, increasing wireless mobile labs in our schools, supporting data and software systems, and purchasing classroom technology such as whiteboards and projectors. Last year, only half of the school system’s technology requests were funded. These technology needs continue to exist.

To provide and maintain modern, safe, and well-maintained school facilities, grounds, and other services, one-time expenditures are being requested in the areas of capital outlay and school construction. The one-time capital outlay requests, totaling \$509,515, include repairs to walkways, curbing, and parking lots, as well as maintenance to playgrounds and the replacement of carpet with tile. Requests associated with school construction, totaling \$250,000, include the replacement of HVAC units and an architectural feasibility study of Showell Elementary School.

“We believe that our Proposed FY 2009 Operating Budget reflects the needs of our students and staff, as well as the goals and initiatives identified by our parents,” said Superintendent Dr. Jon Andes. “We recognize that we would not be a top-performing school system without the support of our county government. We thank our County Commissioners for their support and partnership in providing our children with the very best education. Every generation of students to follow deserves the same quality education.”