

Operating deficit questions arise prior to board approving budget

By **BOB VLACH**
WOODFORD SUN STAFF

Before approving a tentative budget for next school year on Monday, the Woodford County Board of Education discussed an operating deficit and why expenses are outpacing revenue. Recent pay raises for employees and an unanticipated \$1 million reduction in state SEEK funding because of higher property values have resulted in the deficit, Chief Operating Officer Shane Smith explained. Recent pay raises were approved because the board has been aggressive in its efforts to be competitive with other school districts in order to retain staff, board Chair Adam Brickler explained. “... We have to continue to be able to facilitate them living a life that they (teachers and other staff) don’t have to work two, three jobs in addition to working here in Woodford County,” said board member KT Gould. Next school year’s budget does not include pay raises, but employees will receive “step increases” (based on years of experience and attaining higher levels of education) at a cost of about \$643,286, Smith said. “Our overall payroll for the last three years,” he continued, “has gone up 21.57 percent, so that’s a pretty big number ... a lot of salary increases that we’ve given in the last several years.” The topic of spending discretionary dollars on celebrations and meals was again raised by board members Sarah



SUPERINTENDENT DANNY ADKINS was among the 21 retiring employees honored by the Board of Education for their service to Woodford County Public Schools on Monday night. Later in his monthly remarks, Adkins said he has been blessed to have been a part of WCPS, which he described as a successful school district. (Photo by Bob Vlach)

McCoun and Sherri Springate. However, Smith said cuts in discretionary spending will not cover a \$1.3 million operating deficit. That would require cutting personnel, which account for about 80 percent of general fund expenses, he said. During his financial report, Smith said cuts in discretionary funding in this fiscal year’s budget included not buying new Chromebooks and replacing three buses (a savings of about \$650,000). He also noted the beginning balance for next fiscal year will be about \$6.5 million – down from \$10.5 million. If the carryover dollars drop below \$6 million, the likelihood of the district needing to get a loan to cover expenses while waiting for its first local tax payments in November “increases significantly,” said Smith. “I am projecting next year (a year from now) we’re going to fall down below \$6 million and get to \$4 million. I can’t overstate the concern I have with that...” Springate voted no to approve the tentative budget for next year. Later, the board approved a capital funds request that will allow the district to move those funds to the general fund, with McCoun and Springate voting no. Smith described the \$93,468 as residual funds that remained after the district paid its debt service. Restricting those dollars for capital projects on the district facility plan (DFP) makes spending those dollars more difficult and does not allow the flexibility of spending the dollars on unforeseen emergencies that are not on the DFP, he said.

Adkins will miss meeting
The board voted unanimously to appoint administrative assistant Jessie Rayburn as acting secretary for its next regular meeting in June. The action was needed because schools Superintendent Danny Adkins, who is retiring after the school year, will not attend the meeting. Springate questioned why Adkins will not be present at next month’s meeting, and asked if he’ll be working every day in Woodford County until his contract ends. In a statement to the *Sun* in response to the questions raised at the meeting, which he left early so he could attend Senior Honors Night, Adkins said, “My yearly contract is for 240 days. I will have completed that contract in the first week of June. “Also, since my contract will be completed prior to the June meeting, my attorney has recommended I not attend the June meeting. He recommends this due to the slanderous nature of individual board members and their behaviors.”

Safe Harbor position
Before the board approved restructuring a position at Safe Harbor Academy from being an instructional assistant to a secretary, Springate said she was concerned about taking someone out of the classroom. It was explained to her that the person holding that instructional assistant position now was already doing secretarial work, and this change would make that change in duties official. It was also explained that the person retiring from the position being restructured next year was making connections with students and supporting them. The restructuring of the position was approved 4 to 0, with Springate voting no. **New high school update**
Construction manager Clay Ratliff recently left Trace Creek, the contractor overseeing the new high school project. In his absence, Smith presented the monthly update on the project, which is nearing completion.

Board members McCoun and Springate thanked Ratliff, Smith and others for the hours of work that they put into the project. “We feel like we had ... an exceptional outcome,” said Smith. The board also approved a change order for the installation of a sidewalk behind the outdoor athletic facility grandstands on the new high school’s campus. The sidewalk will provide easier access to equipment stored there, according to Smith, at a cost of \$30,480. **Retirees honored**
The board honored 21 employees who are retiring or who retired earlier in the school year. Combined, they served the district for 419 years as teachers, instructional assistants, and in other certified and classified positions. Retiring from Huntertown were Lori Emmons, Robyn Giles, Stephanie Lanter, Moni Smith and Lisa Mohrman; from Northside were Sherry Basore and Deneen Zimmerman; from Simmons were Michael Grigsby, Debbie Kessel and Clarita Murphy; from Southside were Jeremy Reynolds, Tom Sheldon and Debbie Spears; from Safe Harbor Academy was Laverne Carter; from WCMS were Karen Cooper and Ben Zimmerman; from the transportation department was Patty Wells, and from Central office were Superintendent Adkins, Teha Redeker, Rhonda Wade and Carmen Wade.

Public comment
Nora Hanley, who identified herself as a senior at WCHS, asked the board to consider changing a policy that does not allow a student to participate in any graduation activities unless all requirements have been met. She told the board that she has missed a lot of school because of severe health problems, treatments and doctor appointments, resulting in her being a few credits short of graduating. Her mom said Nora did not want to take the easy path and graduate with fewer credits than what is required by WCPS. Because of a health-related relapse, she was short of district credit requirements, but state requirements would not stop her from being able to graduate this year, her mom said. Nora, who thanked everyone in WCPS for doing a fantastic job of supporting her during her years in the school system, said, “I hope this policy can be reevaluated to help support students in the future.” Board attorney Don Morgan said this situation should be addressed separately from possible action by the board to change its policy. However, he said, “There is a mechanism for dealing with this that does not involve the board,” which involves the administration. **Student rep**
The board recognized WCHS senior Reid Sayre, who was unable to attend because he was playing in the state final four with the lacrosse team, for his service as its student representative.

Other recognitions
Students who participated in the Governor’s Scholars Program and winners in the state Student Technology Leadership Program were honored by the board. It was Senior Honors Night, so many were not present. **Moment of silence**
Prior to asking for a moment of silence for Chloe Brown, a 2023 WCHS graduate who died last week, McCoun reminded attendees that a lot of people are hurting, including families affected by last weekend’s devastating tornadoes. “Not every day is easy for everybody,” she said, “so I just would ask that we keep people that are hurting and people that are struggling in our thoughts and in our prayers.”



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