Fayette teachers' union says district is balancing budget on 'backs' of workers

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS
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Courtesy of Erika Pennington

Erika Pennington is the president of Fayette County Education Association.

Fayette County Education Association officials on Tuesday criticized a proposed cut to benefits for Fayette County Public Schools employees, accusing the district of "balancing the budget on the backs of employees."

The school board, which has acknowledged budget troubles for about the last 18 months, is expected this month to approve a working budget for fiscal year 2027 that began July 1.

FCEA President Erika Pennington told the Herald-Leader Tuesday that the budget could feature a $30,000 cut for employees' add-on life insurance policy.

"We have been told it will be saving the district around $350,000," Pennington said.

The $30,000 benefit is to be discontinued, but other coverage options will exist, district spokesperson Miranda Scully said.

"The state sponsored life insurance is $20,000 and will continue. All active district employees will continue to be provided with $20,000 in state life insurance at no additional cost," Scully said about 6 p.m. Tuesday. "Fayette County Public Schools currently provides a separate $30,000 policy which will be discontinued December 31, 2026."

"These cuts and discussions are unacceptable. We must protect educators' jobs and benefits and are opposed to cuts of either of these. Therefore, it is clear to us that Fayette County Public Schools must increase revenue instead of balancing the budget on the backs of employees," FCEA said earlier Tuesday in a Facebook post.

FCEA said in the post that Pennington met with district leaders about the poor communication concerning the possible cut.

"We are displeased that this consideration is even on the table," the post said.

The post said interim Superintendent Bill Bradford assured FCEA officials that he will add clarifying information about the changes to life insurance.

"I met with the superintendent this morning, and as I understand it, active district employees are provided with $20,000 in state life insurance at no additional cost. Employees can take this policy with them if they leave the district without the group rate (higher rate)," Pennington told the Herald-Leader Tuesday,

The "add-on" policy is a $30,000 life insurance policy that is not transferable — it cannot be taken with them if they leave the district, Pennington said.

"Regardless, FCEA is opposed to cuts to employee benefits at any time, but especially during a time in which there is already so much concern and uncertainty. If the district can find no other way to balance the budget than by doing so on the back on employees, then they must find a way to raise revenue instead," Pennington said.

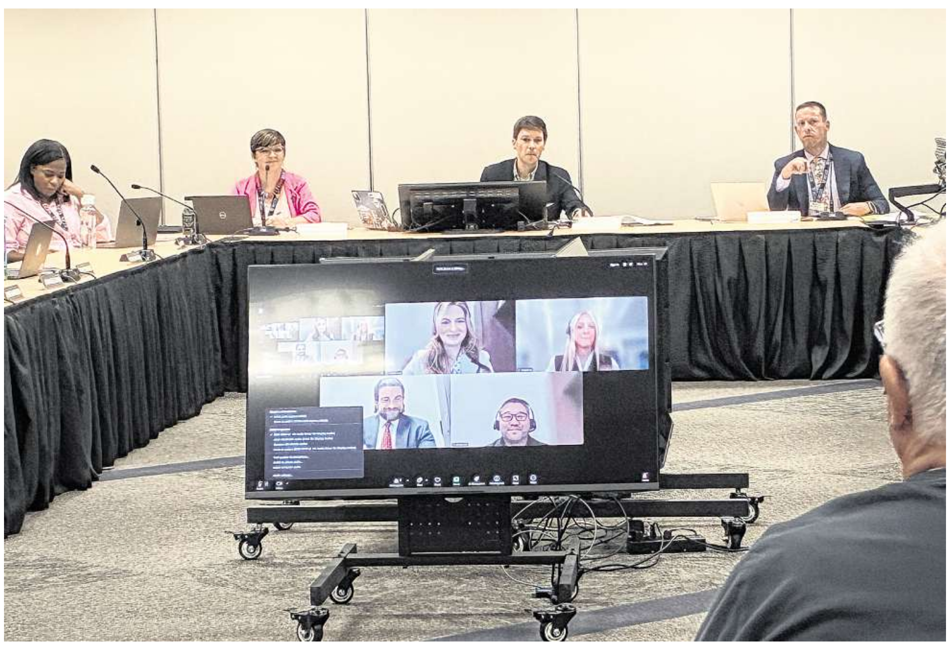
Fayette County school officials told the Fayette County Board of Education in August that it recently discovered that it built the current-year budget on faulty property tax collections.

More cuts could be coming, school officials have said.

Interim Chief Financial Officer Kyna Koch said in August the district learned through Kentucky state officials that its property tax collections would be approximately $12 million less than the tentative budget is built on.

Property taxes are one of the district's largest revenue sources. The board approved a $711.3 million tentative general fund budget in May for the fiscal year 2027 that began July 1. That budget, due to years of budget misstatements, was built on more than $20 million in operation cuts, slashing 120 positions and cuts to staff work days.

Koch has said the district's financial statements, including its revenue projections, have been misstated for years. Koch said they had adjusted that property tax revenue projection down for the current fiscal year but did not reduce that projection enough.



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Fayette County Board of Education hears from Weaver and Tidwell, which performed an audit of Fayette County Public School's finances, at a meeting on Aug. 3, 2026.

Fayette schools finish year with $5.5M deficit, much lower than originally forecast

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS AND BETH MUSGRAVE
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Fayette County Public Schools finished the 2026 fiscal year with a more than $5.5 million deficit, much lower than school officials had originally predicted.

At one point, FCPS finance officials had projected the deficit for the fiscal year that ended June 30 to be as high as $17.8 million. But better-than-expected tax collections have helped cut into the district's deficit, school officials have previously said.

The annual financial report in the Sept. 10 school board meeting agenda says the general fund unreserved balance for fiscal year 2026 is projected to be a deficit.

The document also says: "Given that the district is currently operating under a deficit, management believes it is critical to maintain proactive, transparent communication rather than waiting for the formal audit completion later this year."

School district spokesperson Miranda Scully confirmed the $5.5 million deficit Wednesday.

In addition to closing out its books for the prior fiscal year, the district is also developing its working budget, which is expected to be approved this month.

The school district has proposed a $933 million total working budget for the current fiscal year, which began July 1. That includes a $751 million general fund budget, the district's main checking account, according to budget documents. Other funds include those for food service, building and other funds.

Budget documents also show an $11.4 million contingency, or rainy day, fund which district officials said in May will meet the state requirements of 2% of most expenditures. The Fayette County Board of Education's policy has previously been a 6% contingency.

A proposed professional growth plan for Interim Superintendent Bill Bradford that the school board is set to discuss Sept. 10 requires, among other things, that he maintains the "regulatory 2 percent contingency budget."

The Fayette County Board of Education is also expected to discuss the new working budget at its Sept. 10 meeting.

In May the district approved a tentative budget of $880 million with a general fund budget of $711.3 million. The district has said it has already cut 120 positions, shaved $20 million from its operating costs and cut staff work days. It has also said it plans to market and possibly sell its former Main Street administration building and two other school campuses to balance its budget.

The documents in the Sept. 10 board packet do not include information on additional cuts. However, a member of the Fayette County Education Association, a teachers' union, said Tuesday part of new proposed cuts include a decrease in additional life insurance for teachers, which the union says would save the district $350,000.

The district does not plan to raise property taxes, according to board documents. School district property taxes will be slightly lower as increased assessments and new property added to tax rolls are expected to generate 4% more in revenue. Property taxes, including motor vehicle taxes, are expected to generate $301.5 million for the district this fiscal year, that's an increase of $12.7 million from the prior year, budget documents show.

The district's finances have been in turmoil for the last 18 months. In March the district discovered its books had been misstated for decades.

Multiple investigations have shown the board of education was not given accurate information on the amount of revenue collected and the amount spent.

August tied world's hottest month on record, scientists say

BY KATE ABNETT AND MARTA FIORIN
Reuters

BRUSSELS

The world just experienced its joint-hottest month since records began, with August pushing the planet's average global temperature to more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on Thursday.

Extreme weather and climate-related disasters raged around the world last month. Scientists have said climate change likely played a role in the landslides and flash floods that killed hundreds in Nepal and China's Tibet, although the specifics are still being studied. Wildfires surged from Indonesia to Greece and Belgium, while severe drought struck Hungary and Romania.

Temperatures of more than 1.5 C above pre-industrial times are significant because that temperature, when measured as a decades-long average, is the level of warming nearly 200 countries vowed to try to prevent under the 2015 Paris climate agreement, in order to avoid the worst consequences of climate change.

August was the first month since November 2025 in which the world's average temperature exceeded 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels.