

Josh Janney General News Writing W12

Frederick County School Board approves \$268.8M budget for upcoming fiscal year.

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The Frederick County School Board voted 6-1 Tuesday night to approve an amended version of Superintendent David Sovine’s \$268.8 million budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

The spending plan includes a \$217.6 million operating fund and a request for \$97.4 million from the Frederick County Board of Supervisors, an increase of \$4.6 million from the current fiscal year.

After extensive debate, Chairman Brandon Monk and board members Michael Lake, Ellen White, Linda Martin, Bradley Comstock and Brian Hester voted to approve the budget. Miles Adkins voted against it because it includes a 5% salary increase for Sovine.

The amended budget seeks funding for 58 new positions, a 3% salary increase for all administrative staff (except Sovine) and a 5% salary increase for all other staff (including Sovine). The amended budget also places speech-language pathologists on a new pay scale, with the same increase in base pay offered to special education teachers.

Sovine’s initial budget proposal included a 5% salary increase for staff and funding for 55 new positions. But Monk wanted to add three Career and Technical Education positions to the budget.

“Our current staff in the CTE department is doing a tremendous job,” Monk said. “But they’ve got a lot to do. And I believe that they could really do so much more if we provide some additional support.”

Monk suggested reducing salary increases for some administrative staff from 5% to 3% to help fund the three additional CTE positions — which would collectively cost about \$225,000. Monk, Comstock, Martin and Adkins voted in favor of this while Hester, White and Lake voted against it. Frederick County Public Schools has 112 administrative staff positions, excluding Sovine.

“I am opposed to dropping the 5% across the board,” Hester said. “Our administration has done tremendous things over the last two years, and every single person in this county deserves the 5% raise.”

Monk said his suggestion to reduce the proposed salary increase for administrators is not performance related. Rather, it’s because a 5% increase is substantially different for someone earning \$100,000 versus someone earning \$46,000.

Comstock said the 3% raise for administrators still shows them appreciation while allowing the school division to invest in CTE and provide additional opportunities for students.

Both the School Board and people in the audience spent a considerable portion of the meeting debating whether Sovine should get a 5% pay increase. Last year, Sovine received a four-year contract extension until 2025. As part of the contract, Sovine is earning an annual salary of \$246,318 — up from a 2018 base salary of \$193,798.

During the roughly two-hour citizen comments portion of the meeting, opinion was divided over Sovine's performance as superintendent and whether the School Board should support his budget. Many residents were critical of Sovine, holding him responsible for mask requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic and equity initiatives to which they strongly objected. Although the school division no longer requires students to wear masks, many parents remained bitter that their unmasked children were separated from masked children when the requirement was in effect.

Some also criticized Sovine for quickly leaving the school administration building on Feb. 1, after the School Board meeting ended. They accused him of evading a process server who wanted to serve him and other School Board members with a lawsuit filed by citizens related to the mask requirement.

A few people called for Sovine to resign or for the School Board to terminate him.

But many parents and teachers came to Sovine's defense as an advocate for students who empowers teachers.

Opequon District resident Tiffany Chapman said she was disappointed by repeated "senseless" attacks on Sovine. Rob Mullins, a teacher at the Dowell J. Howard Center, commended Sovine for "a job well done" in adapting to changes brought on by the pandemic.

Supporters of Sovine's budget cited concerns about school overcrowding and teachers not having the support they need. They criticized the Frederick County Board of Supervisors for removing a proposed fourth high school from the county's Capital Improvement Plan and threatening to reduce funding to Frederick County Public Schools. On Feb. 22, Back Creek District Supervisor Shawn Graber recommended cutting \$60 million from the School Board's fiscal year 2023 budget request. Some supervisors have suggested channeling money to public education alternatives.

Stonewall District resident and former School Board member John Lamanna said such a cut as drastic would force the school division to eliminate about 100 teachers.

"Why would anybody want to cripple or destroy a system with sound leadership?" Lamanna asked. "How can anyone say, how can anyone believe that it is in the county's interest to cut \$60

million from the school budget, frankly, to cut any funds at all at this time? Any such cuts would result in an end to interscholastic sports, school band, orchestra, and all other interscholastic activities and electives. A forced choice of teaching math or fielding a football team would be a harsh reality to face.”

Red Bud District resident Jodi Yeggy said public schools “are at the heart of the community” and that a strong public school division requires strong leadership and strong funding.

“There have been suggestions by some supervisors to drastically cut the budget,” Yeggy said. “Such significant cuts would impede the district’s ability to provide all of the extras, the supports, the CTE programs, drama and FFA. The list goes on and on. These are essential for students.”

Adkins said he couldn’t support giving Sovine a 5% pay increase because he recently received an approximately \$50,000 increase within the past year.

Adkins and Martin asked if it would be possible to reduce Sovine’s salary increase to 3%, like all other school administrators. But FCPS Finance Director Patty Camery said Sovine’s contract requires him to receive the same salary increases as teachers. Monk said he spoke with legal counsel on the matter and that contractual obligations necessitate Sovine getting a 5% increase if the teachers get a 5% increase.

The budget will soon be sent to the Board of Supervisors for review. It will be up to them whether to fully fund the \$97.4 million in county tax dollars being sought by the school division.

Frederick County advances budget proposal that slashes school funding by \$22M

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — A majority of the Frederick County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday night supported a fiscal 2023 budget scenario that would slash county funding of the school division’s operating fund by \$22 million, from the advertised \$97.5 million to \$75.5 million.

Supervisors Josh Ludwig, Shawn Graber, Blaine Dunn and Doug McCarthy voiced support for proceeding with a budget proposal that includes the drastic measure. Chairman Charles DeHaven and supervisors Judith McCann-Slaughter and Bob Wells did not. Graber maintained the \$22 million cut is not “deep enough.”

The supervisors will vote to adopt the county budget at its meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the County Administration Building.

Frederick County Treasurer William Orndoff cautioned the supervisors that the school division may have already worked on employment contracts for the upcoming fiscal year. He expressed concern that such a massive cut in funding could create hurdles for the school division in hiring new teachers.

“If they don’t have the funds, that’s just going to stagnate that entire process,” Orndoff said.

“To your point, Mr. Treasurer, I don’t really care,” Graber replied. “They had four months to get us the documents,” he continued, referring to a line-item school budget requested by some supervisors. “We have asked, I have asked. At this point, eventually, your patience has to run dry.”

FCPS Superintendent David Sovine told The Star in a Thursday statement that such a drastic cut would have “a devastating and long-lasting impact on our community’s children.” While it would be up to the School Board to determine what cuts would need to be made to address a \$22 million reduction, he said it would equate to eliminating 293 teaching positions or a 16% across-the-board salary reduction for all school division employees.

“It is very disappointing to hear some members of the Board of Supervisors continue to feel they do not receive adequate information regarding the school budget and are in support of a historic reduction in funding for the school division,” Sovine said. “A \$22 million cut is two times the budget reduction that was required as a result of the Great Recession and would come at a time when the county is projecting increased local tax revenues in excess of \$22 million for FY23.”

A perceived lack of budget transparency from the school division has been a source of contention between supervisors and school officials.

At Wednesday’s work session it was Ludwig who suggested a \$22 million reduction in school funding due to a “whole lot of questions and uncertainty.” He said if the School Board provides a detailed budget and the supervisors find the school division’s funding requests justified, some or all of the \$22 million could be invested in school needs later in the year. If the supervisors do not find the requests justified, the \$22 million would likely be reallocated to other county needs, such as transportation.

Graber said he has not received a line-item budget from the school division that shows “where every dollar is going.” He has numerous times expressed concerns about the school division potentially using taxpayer dollars on critical race theory or other similar programs. On Wednesday he reiterated his support for cutting \$60 million from the schools.

Wells said that while he understands the “disdain” and “mistrust” some have for the school administration, “also know it’s about the children. I just hope we’re not punishing the kids.”

At a March 30 work session, Dunn questioned why the school division was requesting about \$100 million more than it did a decade ago, despite the overall student population increasing only by about 1,000. McCarthy said he would speak with School Board member Brian Hester about the matter.

On Wednesday night, McCarthy said he and Hester had met earlier this week and had a good meeting that “was very frank and candid” and “a step in the right direction.”

McCarthy said Hester told him many of the increases were due to inflation, state mandates, costs associated with building and staffing the new Jordan Springs Elementary School and additional employees. McCarthy said he and Hester would likely continue to meet over the next several weeks to discuss the budget.

Dunn also expressed concern when McCarthy said Hester told him it cost \$6.1 million for the school division to operate five preschool classrooms. Both Dunn and Ludwig believe the schools could use that money to fund needed replacement school buses. In 2017, Dunn said he didn’t think funding pre-kindergarten was a “good use of public money.”

“There are parents who have an obligation to take care of their children,” Dunn said at the time. “There are private daycare, private school facilities that are available as options.”

Five years ago Dunn opposed appropriating \$502,499 to expand the county’s preschool program, even though the funds were from a Virginia Preschool Initiative-Plus Preschool Grant. He opposed the expansion because he believed the school division would continue the program even after grant money expired.

FCPS spokesman Steve Edwards said in an email that the total cost of the pre-K program in the school division’s FY23 budget proposal is \$613,152, which includes four classrooms and a part-time coordinator. Of that, \$359,246 is funded by the state, and \$253,906 is the required local match.

Explaining the discrepancy between \$6.1 million and \$613,152, Hester and McCarthy said in separate phone interviews on Thursday that there was a miscommunication during their meeting — the \$6.1 million figure also included money for kindergarten and other expenditures.

In his statement, Sovine said it is difficult to determine the impact a \$22 million cut would have on federal and state funding because he does not know what programs the School Board may choose to eliminate.

“However, we do know we would lose \$3 million in state funding earmarked for teacher salary increases in FY23,” Sovine said. “That funding is only made available to localities who provide the state-supported pay increase, which requires local funds in addition to those provided by the state based upon its funding formula.”

The School Board's FY23 budget calls for an average 5% pay increase for all staff except administrators, who would receive less than 5%. There's also a \$6,000 base pay differential for special education teachers and behavior specialists, as well as a \$3,000 base pay differential for special education instructional assistants, behavior instructional assistants and speech-language pathologists.

"Not being able to provide staff with a well-deserved salary increase at a time when inflation is so prevalent, and they have worked so hard throughout the pandemic, would be very disappointing," Sovine said. "Over the years, the school division and county government have tried to remain together with regard to salary increases for staff, but that would not be possible under this scenario."

Sovine continued: "Currently, the county's proposed budget includes \$4.5 million to provide salary increases to their approximately 700 employees on top of the \$3,000 bonuses they received last fall. If we are not able to provide a meaningful salary increase, it will negatively impact recruitment and retention efforts, particularly when neighboring divisions like Winchester (7%) and Clarke County (10%) are considering salary increases already in excess of those included in our School Board's proposed budget."

More than 4,200 have signed online petition against school budget cut

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — As of early Monday evening, more than 4,200 people had signed a Change.org [petition](#) urging the Frederick County Board of Supervisors not to cut Frederick County Public Schools' budget request.

Supervisors Josh Ludwig, Shawn Graber, Blaine Dunn and Doug McCarthy last week supported a funding scenario that would reduce county funding of the school division's operating fund by \$22 million, from the advertised \$97.5 million to \$75.5 million. The \$22 million would be placed in a reserve. The cut would represent a \$17.3 million reduction from the \$92.89 million that the county provided the schools this fiscal year.

Ludwig said last week that if the School Board provides a detailed budget and the supervisors find the school division's funding requests justified, some or all of the \$22 million in reserves could be allocated to school needs later in the year. However, if the supervisors do not find the requests justified, the \$22 million would likely be reallocated to other county needs, such as transportation.

The [petition](#), started by Millbrook High School senior Hal Grigsby, says a \$22 million budget cut "would lay off hundreds of teachers, or decrease their salaries to an unlivable wage. Our teachers

don't deserve this, our students don't deserve this. Please sign the petition to show the community objection to this proposed budget cut, and make our voices heard."

While it would be up to the School Board to determine what cuts would need to be made to address a \$22 million reduction, Frederick County Public Schools Superintendent David Sovine said it would equate to eliminating 293 teaching positions or a 16% across-the-board salary reduction for all school division employees.

Grigsby described himself in a phone interview as an "aspiring educator" and said his teachers have been role models to him, especially his Latin teacher. When he learned about the potential budget cut, he said he "needed to try and do something."

"So I created a petition and I sent it to a few of my friends and was like, 'OK, let's try to get this going,'" Grigsby said. "And I was expecting maybe 80 signatures by Wednesday. I was really not expecting anything close to what it's become. But once it did, once it really took off, I really went with it and started posting it everywhere and had my friends post it everywhere to get as many as we could. And it just keeps going. It's really awesome."

He said he wants the Board of Supervisors to know "what they're doing is not for the children and citizens of Frederick County, but it's rather for a political agenda that is completely different from what is best for citizens."

Frederick County Strong — a self-described non-partisan group of citizens formed on Facebook — has also voiced opposition to the proposed budget reduction. The group says it is focused on advocating for funding, championing and amplifying "the wonderful work that our public schools are doing in Frederick County." Member Christie Jett says the group represents about 100 families.

Group member Jodi Yeggy, who has two children attending Frederick County Public Schools, fears the supervisors' proposal will impact teacher salaries.

"We definitely see the cuts as being drastic and historic in measure, even more so than what happened following the Great Recession," Yeggy said.

One of the driving reasons behind the proposed reduction is that several supervisors feel the school division has not been transparent enough in providing a line-item budget so they can see in great detail how money is spent. Additionally, Graber has often expressed concerns about the school division using taxpayer dollars on critical race theory or similar programs.

Frederick County Strong member Sonia Marfatia-Goode said it's not the board's role to dictate what the schools teach and believes the supervisors are "punishing" the schools. She called the proposed cuts "shocking" and said parents are "just tired of this political grandstanding."

"I don't care, you know, where your political leaning is," Marfatia-Goode said. "Education should not be political. You know, they are punishing our kids by withholding funds."

She added that teachers deserve to be paid "as much, if not more for what they do. They are not glorified babysitters; there's so much planning that goes into taking care of each child's education and more than just their education, their mental wellness and social well-being."

Some supervisors have argued that even with a \$22 million reduction in county funding, the school's operating fund will be higher than last year. The operating fund for the current fiscal year is \$194.975 million, while the school division's proposed operating fund for FY23 is \$219.58 million — a \$24.6 million increase. If \$22 million is subtracted from \$219.58 million, the school's operating fund would be higher than last year's — about \$197.58 million. Last week, Ludwig said, "Even with that cut, because Richmond has provided so much more funds this year, the overall school budget would still increase slightly."

But school officials say this line of reasoning is flawed. Steve Edwards, FCPS director of policy and communications, said in an email that the School Board's advertised \$219.58 million operating budget included \$24.6 million in new revenues. That includes:

- \$8.4 million in federal ESSER III funds, which is restricted to COVID-related expenses such as HVAC improvements and closing the instructional learning gap created by school closures.
- \$11.5 million in state revenue due to re-benchmarking the actual prevailing costs of the Standards of Quality (SOQ) that occurs every two years, to improve staffing ratios under the SOQ and to provide the state's share of a 5% compensation increase for all SOQ instructional and support staff.
- \$4.6 million that was requested from the county to provide the county's share of the 5% salary compensation increase, two additional school bus replacements, and additional teachers and kindergarten instructional assistants.

Edwards noted much of that additional revenue is restricted to specific purposes. He added that Virginia's budget is not finalized, so the division may not receive the projected \$11.5 million in state funding.

School officials have said some of that \$11.5 million in state revenue is contingent upon a local match. For example, Sovine said if the supervisors cut the school budget by \$22 million, the schools will lose \$3 million in state funding earmarked for teacher salary increases in FY23. He said that funding is only available to localities that provide the state-supported pay increase, which requires local funds in addition to state funds.

Edwards said some state revenue is for preschool. If the School Board decides it cannot afford preschool, the division would lose matching dollars from the state. The preschool program's cost

in the FY23 budget proposal is \$613,152, which includes four classrooms and a part-time coordinator. Of that, \$359,246 is state-funded and \$253,906 is the required local match.

"The \$22 million reduction proposed by members of the Board of Supervisors would significantly impact operations," Edwards said in an email. "It would limit the ability to provide salary increases in FY23 which will further reduce state revenues, and possibly federal revenues."

School Finance Director Patty Camery said Ludwig's statement about Richmond providing "so much more funds" this year isn't necessarily accurate because the state budget hasn't been finalized.

"That's not a true statement," Camery said. "He doesn't know that because we haven't landed. So I think that in itself is kind of a little arrogant on his part to think that he can guess what the state's going to do."

If the schools receive the \$22 million, Camery and Edwards said withholding the funds now creates issues because the school division will start to issue contracts for the upcoming school year in May. "It's hard to do that if you don't know if you're gonna have \$22 million in funding to address it," Edwards said, and withholding money "doesn't allow for good fiscal planning or practice."

"And besides that, teachers won't sign the contract," Camery said. "They'll just look to go somewhere else where they are guaranteed a salary."

Frederick County supervisors split on school budget, but \$22M reduction appears to be off the table

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The Frederick County Board of Supervisors on Wednesday night deadlocked on the Frederick County Public Schools' operating budget for fiscal year 2023, with the panel split 3-3 on how much money to provide.

Supervisor Judith McCann-Slaughter made a motion to support budget scenario A, which would fully fund the school division's \$219.58 million operating budget request. Her motion was supported by Chairman Charles DeHaven Jr. and Supervisor Bob Wells. The plan would include \$97.5 million in county funding — a roughly \$4.6 million increase in local tax dollars from the current fiscal year.

When her motion ended in a 3-3 tie, Vice Chairman Doug McCarthy made a motion to support budget scenario C, which would provide about \$95.4 million in county funding — a roughly \$2.5 million increase in county tax dollars from the current fiscal year but about \$2.1 million less than the school division requested. Supervisors Josh Ludwig and Blaine Dunn supported McCarthy's motion.

Supervisor Shawn Graber did not attend the meeting.

With neither side willing to budge, the board delayed voting on the school operating fund until its April 27 meeting.

Neither scenario would result in a \$22 million reduction in the School Board's funding request, which was the plan supervisors advanced last week on a 4-3 vote. That proposal drew strong reaction from the public.

About 375 people attended Wednesday night's meeting in the County Administration Building, most of whom supported fully funding the school budget. Because capacity in the board room is capped at 260, more than 100 people waited outside in the hallway. About half of the attendees wore red to show solidarity with the school division.

The citizen comments portion of the meeting lasted nearly two-and-a-half hours, with about 50 people addressing the supervisors, including parents, students, teachers and school officials who urged the board not to withhold the \$22 million. Others urged the supervisors to demand more budget transparency from the school division.

At the supervisors' budget work session last week, Ludwig, Dunn, McCarthy and Graber supported a scenario that would have reduced requested county funding of the school division's operating budget from \$97.5 million to \$75.5 million, a difference of \$22 million, which the county would put in reserves. If the School Board provided a line-item budget and the supervisors deemed the funding requests justified, some or all of the \$22 million could be allocated to school needs later in the year. If not, the \$22 million would be allocated to other county needs. Withholding \$22 million would represent a \$17.3 million reduction in county funding from the \$92.89 million provided to schools this fiscal year.

The supervisors who wanted to withhold the \$22 million have maintained that school officials do not provide them with budget information that is detailed enough.

On Wednesday night, Shawnee District resident Jennifer Gaylor told the supervisors that such a cut or withholding would mean schools can't adequately plan for teacher contracts — making it hard to retain teachers and attract new ones.

“The schools would struggle to fill the vacancies we have now and the expected vacancies after this year,” Gaylor said. “My daughter is a junior at Sherando, and four of her six teachers are not coming back next year.”

Gaylor added that the student-to-teacher ratio would continue to grow without new teachers as the county’s population increases.

Last week, FCPS Superintendent David Sovine said a \$22 million reduction would be the equivalent of eliminating 293 teacher positions or a 16% across-the-board salary reduction for all school division employees.

Frederick County Middle School Principal Jerry Putt told the supervisors the county is in a “very, very favorable financial position” and questioned whether they were good stewards of taxpayer dollars by “attempting to hold the schools hostage” by withholding \$22 million.

“You will proceed to talk about how much you appreciate teachers and all they do while at the same time presenting ideas that are clearly not supportive of the work teachers are doing,” Putt said. “Please do not patronize public educators in this community. They see right through it. I want you to know that your actions hurt people.”

Millbrook High School student Hal Grigsby, who started an online petition opposing the \$22 million reduction that got more than 5,500 signatures, said he “has never been so disappointed in an elected group.” He told the supervisors the potential cuts were not intended to help children but rather advance an “unreasonable political agenda.” He accused them of being afraid of students who “speak and think for themselves, adding, “You as a white board want so badly to feel marginalized” and disputed that critical race theory is being taught in county schools.

Opequon District resident Addie Jones asked the board to fully fund the school budget and “stop the grandstanding.” Shawnee District resident Jason Tresidder told the crowd to remember the supervisors who threatened to withhold funds when they are up for re-election. He said he intended to run against Ludwig in 2025.

Opequon District resident Joel Cosner, who has taught in Frederick County Public Schools since 2015, said he thought there was “validity” in the budget information sought by the supervisors.

“However, when my personal vocational and family well-being are on the line in this situation, I am incredibly discouraged at the way some of you are going about accomplishing that,” Cosner said. “If this is the way that you are going to choose to lead our locality, I will have to say that I personally will no longer see a future or a long-term vision for myself for my future family and Frederick County.”

McCarthy disputed how he and some of the other supervisors had been characterized during the meeting.

“Each individual supervisor has the right and a duty to speak up and ask questions or challenge the status quo when they have a concern,” McCarthy told the crowd. “That is part of the representative process that underlies our form of government. It’s unfortunate that just because a representative raises a concern that challenges the status quo or critiques a process that that supervisor is deemed by many to be an enemy of the institution.”

McCarthy and Ludwig previously said that even with a \$22 million reduction in county funding, the school division's operating fund would increase.

The division's operating fund for the current fiscal year is \$194.975 million and \$219.58 million is being sought in fiscal 2023, a \$24.6 million increase. By subtracting \$22 million from \$219.58 million, the supervisors argued the schools' operating fund would still be higher than last year’s at approximately \$197.58 million.

But McCarthy, Dunn and Ludwig said Wednesday they had numerous conversations over the past week with School Board Chairman Brandon Monk, School Board member Bradley Comstock and other school officials, who pointed out that much of the additional \$24.6 million was restricted in how it could be spent.

McCarthy said he had been in “constant communication” with Monk and Comstock, who addressed many unanswered questions about the school budget.

“I can say without any hesitation that those two gentlemen accomplished more in the past seven days and provided more information — more accurate and complete information than we’ve gotten in five years that I’ve been on the board,” McCarthy said. “I’m extremely grateful to them for their willingness to work with me these past several days.”

McCarthy said Comstock and Monk acknowledged that the budget process could be improved. They have committed to meeting with the supervisors earlier and “more often” as the school budget is developed. He also said they would support a process that would get the School Board more involved in unbudgeted expenditures.

“And they discussed a proposal that would contain clear language forbidding the teaching of CRT in our school system,” McCarthy said. “And I’ll be clear, they both stated that they don’t believe it’s being taught. So they had no fear of saying they would forbid CRT, and I commend them for at least having that conversation.”

McCarthy further stated that Monk and Comstock clarified how much state and federal funding is contingent upon a local match or tied to mandates.

“It is because of the work done and the progress made over the past several days that I cannot justify holding \$22 million aside from the budget,” McCarthy said. “After my discussions with Mr. Monk, Mr. Comstock in our deep dive into the numbers, I am of the mind that I now must

consider, simply, the relative merits of the schools' requests versus the other competing needs of the county. And I am convinced, once again, that scenario C best balances the requests of schools and the needs of the other county departments.”

Scenario C would give the school division an additional \$2.5 million in county dollars, but it falls short of the additional \$4.6 million in scenario A.

Under scenario C, the \$2.1 million not going to the schools would go to transportation needs.

In recent years, the county has struggled to obtain funding for major road projects through Smart Scale — Virginia’s data-driven prioritization method to fund road improvements.

McCarthy told The Star after the meeting that the county would likely have more success in securing funding through Smart Scale if it already has some money set aside for road projects.

But McCann-Slaughter, Wells and DeHaven insisted it was crucial to fully fund the school’s requested operating budget, with Wells saying, “It’s the right thing to do.”

With the supervisors at an impasse on the school budget, they decided unanimously to approve everything else in the county's budget, passing a \$337.5 million spending plan that includes no real estate tax increase and a reduced personal property tax of \$4.23 per \$100 of assessed value. The board decided to reduce the personal property tax rate because the value of most vehicles up to 10 years old has risen due to the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain issues and increased consumer demand. If the tax rate had remained \$4.86, most county residents would have faced significantly higher personal property tax bills

After the meeting, Sovine said he was glad the \$22 million reduction seemed to be off the table. But he said he still believes the supervisors need to fully fund the school division's proposed operating budget. He said scenario C would not result in staff layoffs, but he said it would force the School Board to choose between filling 58 new positions or providing staff with a salary increase. He said scenario C does not allow for both.

FCPS officials: Lack of certainty over budget causing concerns

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — Uncertainty over Frederick County Public Schools' fiscal 2023 operating budget has left the division in "limbo," with some teachers hesitant to sign employment contracts, FCPS Finance Director Patty Camery said during a School Board Finance Committee meeting on Thursday.

Jennifer Rydholm, the division's executive director of human resources, noted that teachers who have accepted job offers with FCPS are having second thoughts.

“They’re worried,” she said. “They watched the meeting,” a reference to Wednesday night when the Board of Supervisors failed to come to an agreement on how much funding to provide FCPS. “I would estimate that they’re looking for other jobs.”

Rydholm added: “We have people who are very scared to stay with us and very scared to come to us because the budget is not set. And they don’t want to find themselves without positions.”

With the possibility that the county won't fully fund the division's operating budget request, the committee on Thursday began discussing potential cuts.

“We do have some tough decisions to make,” said committee Chairman Brian Hester. “And this is the unfortunate thing that happens when we’re not fully funded.”

Hester said it’s essential that the School Board do what it can to support teachers as much as possible.

Last week, four county supervisors advanced a budget scenario that would withhold \$22 million in local dollars from the division’s operating budget until the board felt the funding requests were justified. If the supervisors determined the requests weren't justified, the funds would be funneled to other county needs.

A \$22 million reduction would represent \$17.3 million fewer county dollars than the \$92.89 million provided to the division this year.

The proposal sparked outrage among school division supporters.

On Wednesday night, the supervisors agreed that withholding or cutting the \$22 million wasn’t the answer, but they still couldn't come to an agreement.

Supervisors Judith McCann-Slaughter, Bob Wells and Charles DeHaven Jr. supported scenario A, which fully funds the division’s \$219.58 million operating budget request. The plan calls for \$97.5 million in county funding — a roughly \$4.6 million increase in local tax dollars from the current fiscal year. State and federal monies make up the difference.

Supervisors Doug McCarthy, Blaine Dunn and Josh Ludwig supported scenario C, which provides about \$95.4 million in county funding — a roughly \$2.5 million increase in county tax dollars from the current fiscal year but about \$2.1 million less than the division requested. Supervisor Shawn Graber did not attend the meeting.

With neither side willing to budge, the supervisors delayed voting on the school operating fund until its April 27 meeting.

Hester said on Thursday that even though the \$22 million reduction or withholding seemed to be off the table, “the damage has been done,” as teachers were upset that the supervisors would even consider such a measure.

“We are losing teachers, and we need to keep the ones that we’ve got,” Hester said.

FCPS Superintendent David Sovine told committee members that one candidate for a teaching position at Sherando High School said that while FCPS was her “first choice,” she had been following the supervisors’ budget process and had concerns. Sovine said she requested to wait until Thursday — the day after the supervisors were supposed to vote on the school operating budget — before deciding whether she wanted to accept a job with the division. He said he didn’t know if she took the job.

It also remains to be seen how much money the state government will provide the division, as the General Assembly has not passed its budget.

If the supervisors ultimately support scenario C, the division would have to address a \$2.1 million decrease in requested funds.

Committee members said they supported keeping a 5% pay increase for staff and a 7.5% pay increase for nurses, as well as filling most of the 58 requested positions, but new pay scales for several jobs might need to be eliminated.

In the event scenario C is approved, Hester recommended making the following cuts from the division's FY 23 operating budget:

- \$225,000 for three new Career and Technical Education teaching positions (\$75,000 each)
- \$1.17 million for a new pay scale for special education teachers (increase base pay by \$6,000)
- \$131,000 for a new pay scale for speech therapists (increase base pay by \$6,000).
- \$469,724 for a new pay scale for special education instructional assistants (increase base pay by \$3,000)
- \$37,577 for a new pay scale for behavior specialists (increase base pay by \$6,000)
- \$2,545 for a new pay scale for behavioral instructional assistants (increase base pay by \$1,000)
- \$82,500 to add supplement pay to instructional assistants with a degree
- \$25,000 to grow the FCPS graduate incentive

While committee members fear the elimination of the new pay scales might be demoralizing, they believe eliminating the 5% pay raise and not adding new positions to address growing class sizes would be more detrimental to the division.

School Board member Michael Lake lamented the possibility of not being able to provide new pay scales for speech therapists and special education instructional assistants.

School Board member Linda Martin questioned if cuts could be made in other areas. Lake told her the only other area would be existing positions and the board wants to avoid cutting those.

Also at the meeting, Hester asked School Board Chairman Brandon Monk why he allegedly requested members of the Board of Supervisors support scenario C, giving the division \$2.1 million less than what it had requested. Hester's questioning came about because he saw a screenshot of an email sent by Supervisor McCarthy to someone who supported the school budget.

McCarthy tells the person the only difference between scenario A and scenario C is that scenario C "puts \$2.1 million into the transportation fund to begin paying for major improvements to County roads." He described it as a "win-win" for the school division and other county needs.

"As a matter of fact, School Board Chairman Monk called both Supervisor Slaughter and Chairman DeHaven and asked them to join us in voting for Scenario C, but those Supervisors chose to vote for A instead," McCarthy's email states. "So, we are now unfortunately in a deadlock."

Hester said he thought Monk would have advocated for full funding for the schools.

Monk insisted he was just trying to find a way to talk the supervisors out of a potential \$22 million decrease. He said he knew the supervisors were split, but he thought scenario C had a better chance of passing. Monk said he was hopeful the budget would be approved Wednesday night so the division wouldn't be in the position it's currently in — with no approved operating budget and another two weeks of uncertainty.

School Board member Ellen White asked Monk and School Board member Bradley Comstock why they had allegedly told Supervisor Ludwig that a two-week delay on voting on the school operating budget would be OK.

Comstock responded that when he and Monk met with some of the supervisors earlier this week, the two were advocating against a \$22 million cut because it would be "devastating."

"And so when asked if two weeks would be a feasible time frame for us to still get what we need done, what was stated both by Mr. Monk and myself was that if the choices are a \$22 million withholding or cut, or two weeks, we'd rather see the two weeks," Comstock said. "Ideally, in a

perfect world, we'd love to see option A funded this week. We'd like to see a decision this week so we can move forward."

Lake and Hester requested that Monk and Comstock keep the School Board more in the loop on such discussions moving forward.

But Hester still expressed some skepticism toward Monk.

"Even though I'd like to believe you, Brandon, there was a lot of cahoots behind the scenes, and I just don't buy it," he said.

Monk told The Star after the meeting that while he wants the supervisors to fund scenario A, he would far prefer scenario C instead of a \$22 million cut.

The School Board will continue its discussion on possible budget cuts at its meeting on Thursday.

Attending the meeting at the Frederick County Public Schools Administration Building were School Board members Brian Hester, Brandon Monk, Linda Martin, Ellen White, Michael Lake and Bradley Comstock.

Frederick County School Board plans for less funding

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The Frederick County School Board on Thursday night approved potential cuts to the fiscal 2023 operating budget.

The cuts would be made if the school division doesn't receive all of its requested funding from the county government.

The Frederick County Board of Supervisors is expected to vote on how much funding to provide the school division's operating budget on Wednesday night after deadlocking 3-3 on the matter last week.

Supervisors Judith McCann-Slaughter, Bob Wells and Charles DeHaven Jr. voted in favor of scenario A, which fully funds the division's \$219.58 million operating budget request. The plan seeks \$97.5 million in county funding — a roughly \$4.6 million increase in local tax dollars from the current fiscal year. State and federal monies make up the balance.

Supervisors Doug McCarthy, Blaine Dunn and Josh Ludwig supported scenario C, with the county providing about \$95.4 million — a roughly \$2.5 million increase in county tax dollars from the current fiscal year, but about \$2.1 million less than the division requested. Supervisor Shawn Graber did not attend last week's meeting.

On Thursday night, School Board member Brian Hester, who is chairman of the Finance Committee, recommended the following cuts if scenario C is approved by the supervisors:

- \$225,000 for three new Career and Technical Education (CTE) teaching positions (\$75,000 each)
- \$1.17 million for a new pay scale for special education teachers (increase base pay by \$6,000)
- \$131,000 for a new pay scale for speech therapists (increase base pay by \$6,000).
- \$469,724 for a new pay scale for special education instructional assistants (increase base pay by \$3,000)
- \$37,577 for a new pay scale for behavior specialists (increase base pay by \$6,000)
- \$2,545 for a new pay scale for behavioral instructional assistants (increase base pay by \$1,000)
- \$82,500 to add supplement pay to instructional assistants with a degree
- \$25,000 to grow the Frederick County Public Schools graduate incentive

The plan keeps a 5% pay increase for teachers and increases a pay raise for administrators from 3% to 5%. In March, the School Board voted 4-3 to make the administration salary increase 3% instead of 5% in order to fund three CTE positions.

Hester said the division's finance department needs to “get the ball rolling” on teacher contracts for the upcoming school year. He believes it's important that the board gives guidance on budget cuts now so the department can take action if scenario C is approved on Wednesday.

But Board Chairman Brandon Monk and board member Miles Adkins expressed concern about voting on potential budget cuts before the supervisors vote on school funding.

“Can we table this until after? That way, we know exactly what we’ve got to work with,” Adkins said.

FCPS Superintendent David Sovine and Finance Director Patty Camery said they want to know the direction the School Board wants the department to take, so they can work on contracts and post jobs. "We are behind right now in terms of preparing our contracts," Sovine said.

Monk made a motion to amend Hester’s proposal. In the event scenario C is approved, Monk would prefer to lower the administrative salary increases from 5% to 4.5% and instead use some money to fund at least one CTE liaison position.

While most board members said they support expanding the CTE program, several said they believe the administrative salary increases are more significant. FCPS has 112 administrative staff positions, excluding Sovine.

“I do fully support the expansion of the CTE program; I think it will be beneficial for our students,” board member Ellen White said. “However, our administrators, our principals, across the entire district have worked tirelessly, the last two years. The last few months, there has been an overwhelming amount of uncertainty for our teachers and our administrators. And it’s not fair. I’ve been into the schools. I visited with these principals, and they deserve every dime of that percentage increase, and I will not be able to support this.”

Hester, White and Adkins, along with board members Bradley Comstock and Michael Lake, opposed Monk’s motion. Linda Martin supported it.

Ultimately, Hester, White, Lake and Comstock voted in favor of Hester’s recommended budget cuts, while Monk, Adkins and Martin voted against them.

“This is a no-win type of situation, if we get option C, because the items in our budget, I feel, are all extremely necessary,” Comstock said.

Hester said it “kills” to have to make the decisions on what to cut and said, “We wouldn’t be put in this position if the supervisors would fully fund our needs-based budget.” White said she was “confident” that the school budget was “fair and fiscally responsible” and hoped the supervisors would “fully fund our schools.”

Martin said she doesn’t believe the Board of Supervisors wants to cut teachers or programs. However, she said, “They’ve asked for something” and encouraged the board to “just give it to them.” Martin was referring to several supervisors asking for a highly detailed line-item budget from the supervisors.

“They’ll give you all the money,” Martin said. “They’re not interested in trying to hurt people. Just give them what they want. Just find out exactly what they want, give it to them, and I’m sure they’ll be OK.”

Also at the meeting, the board unanimously requested that Sovine look at the FY 22 budget to see if there are any excess funds to give a bonus to all school employees for the current fiscal year. Hester came up with the idea of the bonus to boost teacher morale.

“I’m excited to see if we can find those extra funds to, you know, give that incentive to our teachers,” Adkins said. “You know, I think we do have a plethora of great teachers out here, and I’d like to keep those teachers around.”

Frederick supervisors adopt school operating budget on 4-3 vote

**By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star**

WINCHESTER — The Frederick County Board of Supervisors voted 4-3 on Wednesday night to approve a \$217.48 million operating budget for the school division.

The vote came three weeks after the supervisors were initially expected to vote on the matter, but they deadlocked at both their April 13 and April 27 meetings.

The approved scenario provides about \$95.4 million in county dollars to Frederick County Public Schools, a roughly \$2.5 million increase in local dollars from the current fiscal year but about \$2.1 million less than the \$4.6 million in additional funding requested by the division.

State and federal monies make up the difference between the \$95.4 million in local funds and the \$217.48 million total.

The supervisors also voted to remove about \$2.15 million from the school division's \$9.44 million capital projects budget, which had previously been approved by the supervisors on April 13. This reduces the school capital budget to \$7.29 million.

The \$2.15 million taken from the school capital budget and the \$2.1 million removed from the school operating budget request — a total of about \$4.25 million — will now be added to a county transportation reserve.

Supervisors Doug McCarthy, Josh Ludwig, Shawn Graber and Blaine Dunn supported the budget scenario, while board Chairman Charles DeHaven Jr. and supervisors Bob Wells and Judith McCann-Slaughter opposed it. DeHaven, Wells and McCann-Slaughter had all previously supported fully funding the school division's operating budget request.

While the supervisors have approved funding levels, they will appropriate the money at a later meeting. Graber's motion to approve the school budget indicated the money would be "appropriated by category with the exact categorical breakdown being determined in a subsequent vote."

FCPS Superintendent David Sovine, School Finance Director Patty Camery, School Board Chairman Brandon Monk and School Board Vice Chairman Bradley Comstock were seated at the table with the supervisors during the meeting. They did not get a chance to speak, with the exception of Monk who only spoke when answering questions from the supervisors.

The decision by the supervisors to remove previously approved capital funds and not fully fund the school division's operating request was met with anger by dozens of school supporters at the

meeting, with some yelling “shame” at the supervisors. There also was frustration that the meeting — which lasted a little less than 12 minutes — didn’t involve a conversation between the supervisors and school officials. Instead, much of the 12-minute session involved McCarthy and Graber having Monk confirm information he had previously told them.

According to McCarthy, Monk confirmed last week that school officials had earmarked \$7.2 million of this year’s budget request to fund new HVAC units for the former Robert E. Aylor Middle School. The \$7.2 million comes from federal ESSER III [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief] funds.

The school division previously considered renovating the old middle school into a High School Academy to enhance Career and Technical Education opportunities and reduce overcrowding in its three high schools. However, the school division determined earlier this year that such renovations were not financially feasible, so the School Board plans to surplus the former school later this year.

Last week, McCarthy said the information he received from Monk means there is now at least \$7.2 million in the school’s budget that is no longer needed because the School Board voted to cancel the Aylor project.

During Wednesday’s meeting, McCarthy had Monk confirm that he told him that four of the nine projects in the school division’s capital budget could be paid for using the freed-up federal funds. McCarthy said those four projects total \$3,050,000. McCarthy made the case that if the school division used the approximately \$3 million in ESSER III funds to finance capital projects, the school division would have \$4 million in leftover federal funding.

“I also asked if ESSER funds could be used for things like giving bonus pay to teachers, administrators,” McCarthy said to Monk. “And again, you indicated that those funds could indeed be used for purposes such as giving COVID bonuses or bonuses to teachers and administrators, correct?”

Monk confirmed McCarthy’s statement.

McCarthy expressed frustration that the supervisors had not received documents stating that the school division had earmarked \$7.2 million for the old Aylor school.

Sovine last week disputed accusations that the schools were not transparent about using one-time ESSER III funds for Aylor renovations. On numerous occasions since July, he said staff had reported to the School Board about the possibility of using \$7.2 million in ESSER III funding for the renovations. In addition, he said that information was posted on the school division’s homepage for 30 days as part of the process of seeking public input.

However, on Wednesday night McCarthy said that while he believed the use of ESSER funds for Aylor had been discussed numerous times during school meetings, he said, “You all did not have those conversations directly with us.”

McCarthy also was critical of some school officials for saying that if the division’s requests were not fully funded, it would not have the money available to provide pay increases for special education teachers and instructional assistants. McCarthy believes the freed-up ESSER funds could help pay for some of that.

During last week’s School Board Buildings and Grounds Committee meeting, FCPS Assistant Superintendent for Administration Vernon Bock recommended reallocating \$7.2 million in ESSER III funds earmarked for the Aylor school project to replace the HVAC system at Armel Elementary School instead. Bock stated the HVAC replacement project and the current ESSER II dehumidification project at Armel would decrease the costs of the Armel renovation/addition project in the Capital Improvement Plan. McCarthy criticized school officials for planning to spend money on projects not part of the initial budget request.

“Now, I understand that the school administration may have other plans for that money,” McCarthy said. “But that’s not what was conveyed to the members of this board. That was the concern and the frustration that I raised at last week’s meeting. And the point was that had ESSER funds been used for those capital expenditures, that would have freed up \$2.1 million of local funds — local funds that would have allowed the school board to choose whether to fully fund teacher salary increases, hiring and pay bumps, or choose to fund the capital projects on the CIP which were not part of the original budget request.”

He continued: “My point was that the school board held a meeting in which it stated it did not have money to give special ed teachers a pay increase or hire staff that had been in their budget, and then they blamed the Board of Supervisors for not providing the funding. My point was that the schools chose to spend ESSER funds on other projects, not in the original budget, that could have offset local dollars. That could have fully funded the operating budget. Could have fully funded the pay increases, the extra dollars for special education, et cetera.”

It remains to be seen how the removal of \$4.25 million from the school division’s funding request (\$2.1 million from the operating budget and \$2.15 million from the capital budget) will impact its spending plan.

Steve Edwards, director of policy and communications for FCPS, told The Star after the meeting, “We won’t be in a position to offer a comment for a few days until we have a more clear understanding of the appropriation and the options our Board will have to consider regarding the budget. It’s likely we will have a finance committee meeting next week and a Board meeting as well.

Frederick supervisors delay full funding in 3 school budget categories

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The Frederick County Board of Supervisors voted 4-2 Wednesday night to appropriate 25% of the school division’s requested facilities, operation/maintenance and technology funds, but delayed voting on the remainder of the funding until a later date.

The vote took place during a special meeting at the County Administration Building.

Earlier this year the supervisors decided to appropriate school funding by category. Frederick County Public Schools’ total operating budget for fiscal 2023 is \$217.48 million.

On June 8, the supervisors voted 5-2 to appropriate \$155.7 million for instruction, \$9.55 million for administration, attendance and health, \$12.38 million for pupil transportation, \$8,000 for school food services and \$786,496 for fund transfers.

But they did not appropriate the division’s requested \$18.16 million for operation/maintenance, \$9.2 million for facilities or \$11.66 million for technology because supervisors J.Douglas McCarthy, Josh Ludwig, Blaine Dunn and Shawn Graber said the budget breakdown for these categories was substantially different from what school officials proposed earlier. In March, when the school division was seeking \$219.58 million, \$28.11 million was sought for operation/maintenance, \$1.53 million for facilities and \$10.61 million for technology.

So the supervisors delayed voting on appropriating funds for those categories until their questions were answered about the differences.

On Wednesday night, the supervisors revisited the matter.

Dunn said he heard from School Board Chairman Brandon Monk that several school salaries and positions would not be funded if the supervisors don’t appropriate funds for the three categories by July 1. Dunn said he was “empathetic” to the situation, but he still believes the supervisors have not received adequate information on why the categories changed so much since March.

Dunn suggested funding the “first quarter” of each of the categories and hold off on funding the rest until the supervisors feel they have received sufficient information. He contended that by providing a quarter of the funding, the school division could pay salaries and continue operations as needed.

Dunn insisted he’s “not micromanaging” but “just looking to see what the numbers are before we go forward.”

Graber expressed a similar sentiment and said Monk told him earlier that he hadn't seen the new budget numbers for the facilities, operation/maintenance and technology categories prior to them being sent to the supervisors earlier this month.

"I have also asked, as supervisor Dunn has, to see the numbers broken down so that we can see a line item of why there was such significant changes," Graber said. "And I, just like supervisor Dunn, am still waiting to see those numbers."

While Graber said he is "very sympathetic" to school employees and doesn't want them to not receive a paycheck, he added, "On the same note, it is not this board that has caused a delay in getting us the numbers to be able to see where those monies are going. That has been a systematic delay caused by David Sovine and the school administration."

McCarthy shared similar frustrations, saying, "What we don't know is what was in the original category, because we've never seen that breakdown."

But he supported appropriating the rest of the school operating budget because said he thought school officials had addressed why the numbers had changed.

McCarthy said school officials had informed the supervisors that some funding in the original budget was incorrectly categorized.

"I understand that. I could forgive an accounting error on category issue," McCarthy said.

While McCarthy still wants to pursue getting more budget information from the school division, he believed the best course of action for FY23 was to appropriate the money.

"At this point, I don't know that delaying this appropriation later is going to behoove us at all because, at the last meeting, our request was an explanation of what the differences is in the two categories from March to May and I think we got that answer," McCarthy said. "So I share the sentiment that we deserve more information than what we've been given, but I don't know that we're ever going to get that with this particular school board or this particular school administration. So I don't know that it behooves us to continue to beat a dead horse at this point with regard to more detail."

Board of Supervisors Chairman Charles DeHaven Jr. said he agreed "completely."

"My biggest concern is that a lot of that ESSER [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief] money covers construction and we have some major construction projects in progress," DeHaven said. "Anything that delays orders of product or anything else, given the supply chain issues that are going on, just makes it that much worse."

Graber moved for approval of funding the operation/maintenance, facilities and technology categories at 25% of the amount of each category as proposed by the School Board. Ludwig and Dunn voted in favor of Graber's motion, while supervisors DeHaven, McCarthy and Judith McCann-Slaughter opposed it. Supervisor Bob Wells was absent from Wednesday's meeting.

To break the tie and at least provide the school division enough money to function, McCarthy made a motion to fund 25% of each of the requested categories. However, his motion stated the supervisors would revisit the matter no later than July 31 to address appropriating the rest of the money. The board's next scheduled regular meeting is July 13.

McCarthy, Dunn, Ludwig and Graber voted to appropriate 25% of the categories, while DeHaven and McCann-Slaughter opposed. The vote gives the school division approximately \$4.54 million for Operation/Maintenance, \$2.3 million for facilities and \$2.92 million for technology.

Steve Edwards, FCPS's director of policy and communications, issued the following statement to The Star on Thursday:

“We have been informed that the Board of Supervisors voted last night to appropriate 25% of the requested funds in each of the three categories — Operations and Maintenance, Facilities, and Technology. During the School Board's Joint Personnel and Finance Committee Meeting on Tuesday, Mrs. Camery reviewed the variances in question and the fact that they were tied only to federal coronavirus funds (ESSER and GEER), not any local funding. The school division will have to closely monitor all spending in those areas to ensure we do not exceed the 25% appropriation while funding open purchase orders and paying the 188 FCPS employees whose positions are funded through those categories. It is critical we do not spend anything beyond what has been appropriated because doing so would constitute malfeasance per the Code of Virginia.”

Supervisors appropriate rest of FCPS operating budget

By Josh Janney
The Winchester Star

WINCHESTER — The remainder of Frederick County Public Schools' operating budget was appropriated by the county's Board of Supervisors Wednesday night.

The vote was 4-2.

Earlier this year the supervisors decided to appropriate school funding by category. The school division's total operating budget for fiscal 2023 is \$217.48 million.

On June 8, the supervisors voted 5-2 to appropriate \$155.7 million for instruction, \$9.55 million for administration, attendance and health, \$12.38 million for pupil transportation, \$8,000 for school food services and \$786,496 for fund transfers. At the same time, the supervisors delayed appropriating the division's requested \$18.16 million for operation/maintenance, \$9.2 million for facilities or \$11.66 million for technology.

On June 15, the supervisors voted 4-2 to appropriate 25% of the school division's requested facilities, operation/maintenance and technology funds, but delayed voting on the remaining funding. This provided the schools about \$4.54 million for operation/maintenance, \$2.3 million for facilities and \$2.92 million for technology.

The board didn't fully fund the facilities, operations/maintenance and technology funds because several supervisors had concerns about the school division not providing detailed budget information.

But on Wednesday night, the school division's new interim Superintendent David Martin alleviated many of the concerns regarding budget transparency. Martin replaces former Superintendent David Sovine, who retired from Frederick County Public Schools on June 30.

Martin officially introduced himself to the supervisors at their Wednesday meeting.

"As you know, I was a superintendent for 20 years, I've always had a line-by-line budget," Martin said. "So I've worked with staff this week — remember I've only been here six days. And we are going to provide this community a line-by-line budget. My hope is more the beginning of September than the end of September. Because I think we already have it done. We just have to add a lot of specificity to line codes."

He also told the supervisors that they have his cellphone number, and he is happy to answer any of their questions going forward. He also said he would like to regularly provide the board updates and have a joint session with the supervisors.

"I will answer any questions that you have, at any point about the school system," Martin said. "There are no secrets in the school system. The only secrets that I can't tell you are personnel items. Everything else is open. All you have to do is ask."

Martin's words were reassuring to several supervisors who previously criticized Sovine and the school budget process.

Ultimately, Chairman Charles DeHaven Jr. and Supervisors Bob Wells, Blaine Dunn and Josh Ludwig voted to appropriate the remainder of the school operating fund. This provides the school division the remaining \$13.6 million for operation/maintenance, \$6.9 million for facilities and \$8.7 million for technology.

Supervisors Shawn Graber and Judith McCann-Slaughter voted against appropriating the funding — for completely different reasons. Graber still wanted more budget information from the schools, saying he couldn't support the motion without knowing where the money is going.

“For the last seven months, I've asked for a line-item budget to know where the money is coming from or where it's going and having some opportunity to look between last year and this proposed year to kind of know what the needs are versus where the money is going,” Graber. “To date I have yet to see that.”

Graber clarified that his stance is “not a smack in the face at all to Mr. Martin,” who he said reached out to him over the phone. Graber said he believes Martin is working “very hard” but noted “he's only been on the job six days.”

McCann-Slaughter voted against the appropriation because she believes the school division should receive more money. The school division had requested a \$219.58 million operating budget, but the supervisors voted 4-3 in May to approve a \$217.48 million operating budget. McCann-Slaughter believed the school division should have received the amount originally requested.

“During our original budget deliberations, I was in support of the request that the school originally made to us,” McCann-Slaughter said. “This has been drastically reduced. And, therefore, I am not a supporter of the budget as it is, and also the fact that it is in categories.”

While Ludwig still had some reservations about the budget, he said, “I'm trusting that the new superintendent will provide us with answers to all questions as he's indicated, and I'm very optimistic about our working relationship in the future.”

Gainesboro Supervisor Doug McCarthy was not at the meeting.