

# Budget proposal continues pay freeze

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When Prince George School Division Superintendent Dr. Bobby Browder unveiled his proposed budget for the year on Monday night, the news was both disappointing and uncertain.

Disappointing because the division's teachers have not had a pay raise in four years and won't be seeing one this year. Uncertain because the General Assembly had not passed a budget by the time the school board met to discuss this year's proposal.

The news that no pay increase or bonus is planned for staff this year was unwelcome news for many in the audience, including Bill Barnes, who spoke on behalf of the salary committee at the beginning of the meeting.

"Morale is at an

all-time low," he said. "Teachers and staff are having to take second and third jobs to make ends meet."

He said that half of the teachers leave at the end of the day at one county school to go to second jobs, many giving up family time on evenings and weekends to earn additional money. While grocery prices have increased 62 percent in the last four years, he said, using a presentation compiled from examining receipts kept by one teacher over the last four years, pay has not.

Despite low morale, performance has not declined, he said, showing the increasing number of awards teachers and their students have received over the last three years.

"How long can teach-

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ers continue this pace?" he asked the board.

"We know you have a magic pot of gold. We also know it is not running over," he said, urging the board to ask for more money from the county and pledging to support the school board in that endeavor.

"If you can't give us the raise, give us a bonus. If you can't give us a bonus, absorb the increase in health insurance and retirement," he asked.

The proposed budget does absorb the 49 percent increase in the Virginia Retirement System rate to the tune of \$1.8 million and

increases in group life and health insurance, which, combined, will cost the division \$1.2 million.

Prince George is one of only 20 divisions out of the state's 132 that has managed to avoid layoffs over the last few years, a trend that will continue this year. However, the 19 positions that are being eliminated through attrition will not be filled.

Browder will present his proposed budget to the Board of Supervisors at their March 27 meeting. A joint work session will follow on April 4, but nothing can be settled permanently

until the General Assembly adopts a budget.

Speaking after President Barack Obama's speech at Rolls-Royce last Friday, Governor Bob McDonnell expressed concern that the General Assembly had not agreed on a budget and said he was worried about how it might affect schools and local governments.

"This is a very bad situation. It's unprecedented since we adopted a biennial budget process in 1920. We've never had a time when the legislature's left with no budget," he said. "I'm very concerned about where they are."