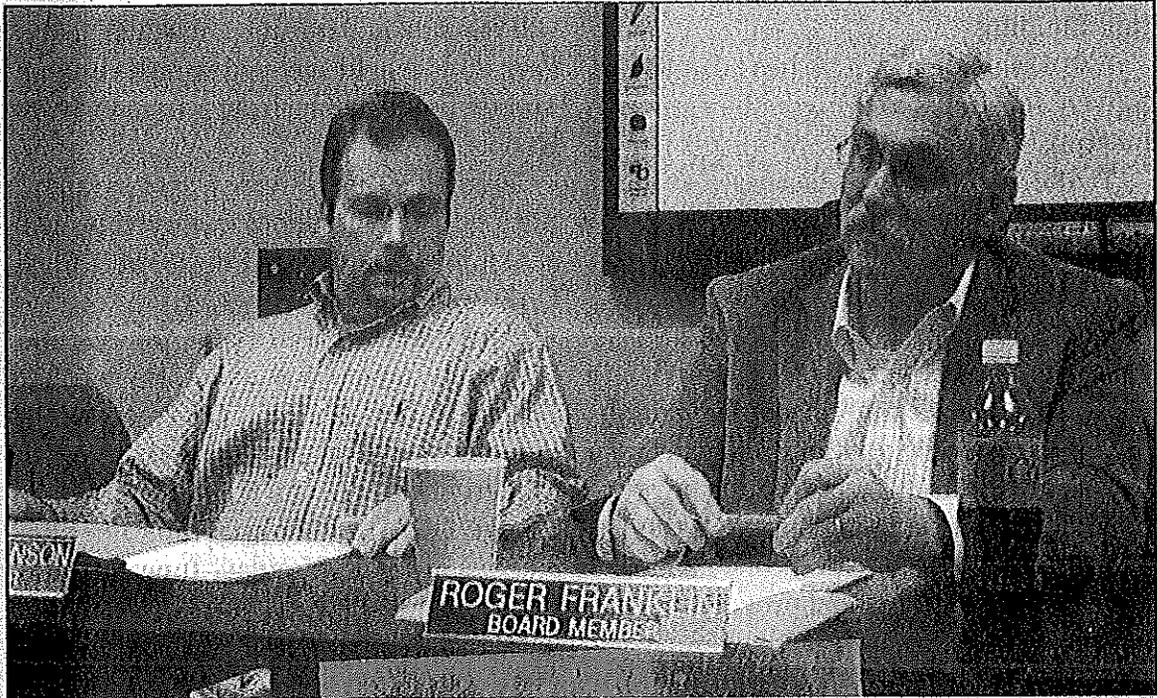


# Schools attorney says \$1.277M motion needs rewording



School officials discuss budget plans for fiscal year 2013.

By Adrienne Wallace  
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After two budget work sessions this past week, the School Board came to at least two decisions.

One is that the resolution approved by the Board of Supervisors authorizing an extra \$1.277 million must be reworded to meet legal issues, and funding for the pre-kindergarten program is a necessity.

"One thing holding us up, that must be resolved shortly, is some things need to be adjusted in the resolution and motion generated by the Board of Supervisors to provide the \$1.277 million," School Board Chairman Roger Franklin explained. The motion reads, "The school contingencies' account will be held until the County and School Board meet in April of 2013 to

discuss the first three quarters of the fiscal year. At that time, the Board of Supervisors may elect to allow for the transfer of the contingencies' to proven areas of need. The transfer of funds to the school operating account will continue on a quarterly basis, with the exception of \$1,277,000." The term "may elect" is the cause for concern, because school officials say it doesn't guarantee the funding.

He said it was not the intent of the supervisors to word the resolution in a way that doesn't guarantee the money.

But the wording of the resolution, according to the school's attorney, must be changed for the School Board to include it in its budget development.

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hol and/or drug abuse)

- Family history of difficulty in school or enrollment in special education

- Physical or developmental delays of the child not being addressed through special education services

"We feel this opportunity is important for the future of these individuals," Franklin said. "The \$11,200 is not insignificant, but it's not a lot of money in the big picture considering it may be the difference maker that gets these kids off on the right foot. It's so much easier to solve a problem in the beginning than it is four to five years from now."

Initially the school's budget was short by \$1.8 million, but officials went back through all the items to see where further cuts, in what they call an already tight budget, could be made.

"We've tighten up on everything," Franklin explained. That includes cutting several areas by a flat 5 to 8 percent. Also they looked at insurance cost.

"We have to think in terms of 100 percent of employees on it, but it is never 100 percent. It's typically in the 92 percent range so there are funds there where we'll have money to use for programs such as Before-K."

While there are significant cuts faced at the local district, Franklin admits there are worries for the future and as soon as this coming year.

"I know we're not going to fall apart, but I do think the effort our staff has taken to provide the same quality of education it's going to require even more work from the people on the front lines."

He says he's not optimistic about the future, either.

"I don't see the state providing increases in funding in the next years," Franklin concluded. "Of all the cuts that have been made in the legislature impacting education, I am not aware of one that has a clause that states when funds are available that money will be restored."

# School budget

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Franklin is hopeful supervisors will meet before the June 14 scheduled meeting to address the matter.

Until that time, either the school system would have to plan on laying off employees to meet the shortfall or wait until the matter is cleared, he said.

However, Supervisor Alan Carmichael questioned why the school division would be relying on \$1.277 million for employee contracts. But he said he and the other Board members are still committed to provide the funding but had planned to set the funding aside until April and determine if there still is a need.

Franklin believes the matter will be taken care of in time for the schools' next budget work session.

"We have communicated with supervisors that we need the motion clarified to make it where the school board can use the moneys in the budget development," he noted. "That is not to say it will all be spent. There hasn't been a time where we haven't sent money back to county. We have been good stewards of the tax dollars."

He reiterated that there was no intent on the supervisors' part. Franklin wanted the residents and school employees to know that the two boards are communicating and working to resolve the issue.

Until it is resolved all school staff members are in limbo without contracts signed.

That has been a cause of concern for many, Franklin admitted, with some employees expressing that they may need to look elsewhere for employment if they don't hear word soon.

"I believe if we get this worked out, we will be able to produce a budget where all the people intending to come back will come back," he said.

"A lot of folks have retired, and people are taking jobs in other systems, and individuals are leaving the area, but it's not a surprise that happens every

where," Franklin continued.

But with those positions not being filled, he frankly stated that classroom sizes will increase and therefore the efficiency of the classroom will suffer.

School Board members discussed rising fuel costs with concern about where the diesel price will be throughout the year.

However, they did not make any final budget decisions on the matter at the work session last week.

They did however, agree that the \$11,200 funding for the before-K program should remain in place.

That program serves at risk pre-kindergartener, and there are usually 30 to 40 children who enroll.

According to the Prince George Schools Web site, The Preschool Program for At-Risk Four-Year Old Children is provided by the Prince George County Public Schools in cooperation with county agencies. The program is designed for at-risk four-year-olds residing within Prince George County. The goal of the program is to provide a healthy learning environment that addresses the needs of preschool children whose social or economic conditions place them at risk of poor school performance.

Children are selected for this program based on family need. Enrollment priority is given to children with the greatest number of at-risk criteria impacting their environment. Criteria for consideration include:

- Family income
- Parent education level (GED or less than a high school diploma)
- Receipt of assistance (food stamps, Medicaid, AFDC, SSI, disability, etc.)
- Single parent home
- Child is living with someone other than their parent (grandparents, relative, foster care, etc.)
- Family stress factors (family history of incarceration, violence, alco-