

LOCAL NEWS

cut TO THE core



PROPOSED SCHOOL BUDGET CUTS

I.B. program axed

▶ The national economic crisis and state budget cuts have led to the Aiken County Board of Education's decision to eliminate the International Baccalaureate program at Aiken High School and North Augusta High School.

▶ The program provides rigorous coursework for juniors and seniors. A small number participate in the full I.B. diploma program, while larger numbers take I.B. classes for certificates. Many of

the classes are taken in tandem with Advanced Placement classes, although they have different final exams for credit.

▶ The I.B. program has provided another opportunity for students who want advanced classes, said Everitt. But A.P. also provides college credit for successful students, and the I.B. program's cost (\$400,000) and limited number of diploma graduates were factors in eliminating it, Everitt said.

No funds for nurses

▶ In response to state budget cuts overall and to the school nurses' program, the Aiken County School Board will eliminate local funding to the program. However, school district officials are still assessing the program and the impact of a funding reduction.

▶ Currently, about 35 nurses are employed by the school district. Ironically, the S.C. General Assembly in 2007

increased funding that allowed the district to provide a high of 39 nurses last year. Just a few years ago, there were 21 nurses in the district's employ.

▶ Dr. Beth Everitt, the Aiken superintendent, said she would love to have a nurse at every school, if that were possible. She emphasized that the district will continue to follow all required laws and regulations related to health and nursing staff.

Preliminary budget recommendations

Preliminary budget options recommended approved by School Board:

- ▶ Increase pupil-teacher ratios by three in elementary, two in middle and high school (approximately 90 positions at \$55,000 per) – \$4,950,000
- ▶ Eliminate International Baccalaureate program (six positions) – \$400,000
- ▶ District level administrative reorganization (eliminating 21 positions) – \$1,447,568
- ▶ Eliminate driver's education (six positions) – \$385,000
- ▶ No salary increases except where required – to be determined
- ▶ No increase to supplements (extra pay for teachers involved in extracurricular activities such as band, yearbook, etc.) – to be determined
- ▶ In-house energy conservation program – \$250,000
- ▶ Eliminate signing bonuses paid to some new teachers – \$20,000
- ▶ Require direct deposit for payroll – \$15,000
- ▶ Rehiring of certified retirees will be based solely on

- district needs – \$700,000
- ▶ Further reduce overtime – \$30,000
- ▶ Eliminate sports playoff supplements – \$45,000
- ▶ Cut some supply budgets by 10 percent – \$118,515
- ▶ Reduce use of portable classrooms – \$25,000
- ▶ Cut travel budgets by 50 percent – \$130,500
- ▶ Reducing band matching funds – \$20,000
- ▶ No funding for nurses from local sources – amount to be determined
- ▶ No funding Education and Economic Development Act career specialists in excess of state allocation – \$15,000
- ▶ Reduce spending on alternative programs – \$254,000
- ▶ Change some 12-month staff to 11- or 10-month status – to be determined
- ▶ Reduce district funding of middle and/or high school athletics funding by 20 percent – \$150,000
- ▶ Insurance premium an risk reduction program – \$50,000
- TOTAL: \$9,000,583**

BOARD ELIMINATES LOCAL FUNDING FOR SCHOOL NURSES, I.



Staff photo by Rob Novit

Teresa Hayden, the school nurse at North Aiken Elementary School, comforts second-grader Chantrel Rafford, who bumped her head during recess.

Nurses responsible for daily health functions

By ROB NOVIT
Senior writer

In the last 20 minutes of the day at North Aiken Elementary School, nurse Teresa Hayden comforted a little boy and girl and gave them wrapped ice for their heads after bumping them during their recess periods.

Hayden kept a close watch on a child with a stomach ache and called her mom to come get her so the girl wouldn't have to ride the bus home.

Shortly after the final bell rang, another child stopped by the front office and gave Hayden a self-drawn Valentine's Day card. The girl got a warm hug in return.

Hayden has been at North Aiken for the past five years and previously spent several years as a school nurse in Edgefield County.

"I love what I do in working with children," she said. "Kids are my heart and I'm very grounded here. I know the children and the parents, and I'm able to care for them appropriately. It would be very sad if I have to leave these kids. I'm a big part of their overall care."

About 35 nurses currently work in the Aiken County schools. The S.C. General Assembly reduced funding for school nurses earlier in the school year. In reaction to a \$9 million revenue shortfall, Aiken County Board of Education members agreed to eliminate all funding for the nurses from local sources.

However, district officials are still assessing what that will mean to the school nurses program. But, there will be changes.

"I absolutely would love to have a nurse at every school," Aiken Superintendent Dr. Beth Everitt said. "We are going to meet the law that's required. Some nurses are required because of special needs students. We will follow any regulations about health and medications that are in place. But, we're going to stay within the funds that are allocated."

Ironically, the state authorized addi-

tional funds in 2007 that resulted in expanding the staff of nurses from about 21 to a high of 39.

"It's made a major difference in how health care has been provided, including in special education," said Germaine Purcell, a former school nurse who now coordinates the program. "Some schools describe their nurses as being part of a family."

In a typical day, Teresa Hayden gives out medications and works with and keeps track of children with medical complaints. It's her call to decide when to call parents. For kids with ongoing issues like seizures or diabetes, she carefully monitors them and makes sure they're visiting a doctor as scheduled or needed.

Like other school nurses, Hayden does wellness activities. Last week, she demonstrated proper hand-washing techniques to 100 kindergarten students. She promotes good nutrition and checks and monitors blood pressure for staff members.

"In my opinion, only the school nurse is uniquely qualified to make clinical judgments on illnesses or assessments," said Purcell.

People don't really understand, she said, what school nurses deal with on a regular basis. Special needs students may have complex health issues. Parents may provide the wrong medication on a given day that the nurse can spot. Secretaries or bookkeepers don't want to be responsible for medications or other functions, Purcell said.

"Any cuts in the program will be a step back," she said. Purcell has tried to keep nurses abreast of the ongoing financial issues. Following the earlier state reductions, at least three nurses chose to leave and have not been replaced.

"We've already had to move people around," Purcell said. "Some nurses are doing three schools again, as they were before. But we'll do what we have to do to make sure each school gets a fair amount of exposure in the safest way possible."