

## **VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS PRESS CONFERENCE**

### **Remarks by Philip Worrell Superintendent of Greenville/Emporia County Schools**

Good morning. My name is Phil Worrell. I am superintendent of Greenville County Schools which also serves the students in the City of Emporia. I have been asked to talk about the effects of the Governors' proposed elimination of state support for school construction and operating costs.

Beginning ten years ago, the General Assembly, for the first time, provided taxpayers with some relief to the cost of providing school buildings for students in their localities. Local school divisions have been able to use this money to pay for current improvements, transfer the money to an escrow school construction fund for later use, or use the money to pay debt service on a project completed within the last ten years.

VASS recently surveyed schools divisions to see how many have borrowed money for construction and are using the state money to help make debt payments. Of the fifty-seven schools divisions that have responded, two-thirds are using the money for debt service, with payments of \$28,000,000. Losing the state money to help with construction and operating costs forces localities to either raise taxes or cut the school budget.

Greenville County is one of the school divisions that has used the construction money to pay a portion of the debt service for schools already built or under construction. We currently receive approximate \$640,000 in state money to help with a debt service of over \$1,400,000. To make up for the loss of state funds for construction and operating funds, Greenville County would have to increase its tax rate by 8 cents to cover its share of lost construction money. Due to a reduction in revenue by our local governing bodies, I do not expect to see an increase in local tax revenue.

Debt service is not an area of the school budget that can be reduced. The money to make up this \$640,000 must come from other areas of our operating budget. The governor's budget amendments already reduce funding for support staff positions. There are limited other areas of the budget that can be cut without affecting classroom instruction, either in class size or in resources needed to teach the Standards of Learning.

Having the state help with debt service has allowed our locality to provide money to hire additional staff to reduce class sizes. Losing \$640,000 in construction money has the potential of costing Greenville County 14 teachers, more than one teacher for every grade. This represents 7% of our non-grant funded teaching staff. These are teachers we have hired above those required in the Standards of Quality. Greenville County has a large number of at risk students. Without these additional staff, we would not have made the gains in student achievement over the last several years that have led to all of our schools being fully accredited. This loss of state construction money will put at risk our ability to maintain these gains and make it difficult to continue to make the progress required to meet the increasing standards of No Child Left Behind.