

advertisement

HIGH SCHOOL
GAME OF THE WEEK
Is it your team?

CLICK HERE!
The Palm Beach Post
PalmBeachPost.com



PalmBeachPost.com | Local News

- [JOBS](#)
- [AUTOS](#)
- [REAL ESTATE](#)
- [CLASSIFIEDS](#)
- [SHOPPING](#)

- Home
- News
- Sports
- Business
- Opinion
- Accent
- Entertainment
- PostPix
- Your Town
- Archives
- Help

- [email page](#)
- [print page](#)
- [popular pages](#)

Search Site Yellow Pages

Martin debating costs of students



By [RACHEL SIMMONSEN](#)
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Monday, September 24, 2007

If only it were as simple as punching one number into a calculator.

But as officials in Martin County work on a formula to prevent crowding at public schools, all sorts of numbers have popped up in the equation.

Martin schools cost more

Martin's elementary school under construction west of Florida's Turnpike has a per-student cost of about \$34,000, compared with \$27,000 for an elementary school being built in Palm Beach County.

But when comparing costs per square foot, the 124,000-square-foot Martin elementary costs about \$187 a square foot, compared with \$206 a square foot for the 129,000-square-foot school in Palm Beach County.

Source: School district consultant

SCHOOL GUIDE

- [News, special features](#)
 - [2007 grades, scores](#)
 - [Guide to area colleges](#)
- Calendars: [PBC](#) | [TCoast](#)



- [Back-to-school photos](#)
- [Share your photos](#)

Blogs

[Why Do Obese Children Have Increased Iron Deficiency?](#)

From Diet Blog

[Back to School: Back to Trans Fat?](#)

From Healthy Recipe Doctor

[Best of the Back to School Guides](#)

From Mommy Poppins: Get more out of NYC for kids

And not everyone agrees on which numbers to use.

The state-mandated formula, called concurrency, aims to fill the gap when development fees and property taxes aren't enough to keep new classrooms on pace with new construction.

But the formula itself relies in part on how much developers pay in impact fees, or the one-time charges on new construction that help pay for new schools. Impact fees in turn depend partly on how much it costs the school district to educate a student, a number that considers things like land prices and school construction costs.

"You have to calibrate all the pieces of the puzzle to get to your end result," Julie Sessa, the school district's facilities director, said of concurrency.

The school board, along with county and Stuart commissioners, must agree on a formula by June 2008. The school board approved a draft in July but rescinded it this month after hearing concerns from county commissioners.

County Commissioner Lee Weberman questioned whether school construction costs need to be reevaluated, given the cool-down in the housing market.

"I think that's fair, given our change in the economy," Weberman said. "People who build schools, they're probably due for lower costs."

Those same concerns have been echoed by business leaders and residents, particularly those in Indiantown, where there have been plans for years to build thousands of new homes and businesses. Proposed new impact fees of about \$8,680 for a 2,000-square-foot house are too high, and with additional concurrency costs on top of that, developers won't be able to build affordable housing, Indiantown residents griped.

School board member Nancy Kline has asked for a board workshop to explore the district's construction costs per student, after finding that Martin's appear to be higher than other counties', according to data provided by a district consultant.

Kline's fellow board members and district staff point out that Martin's student costs appear high because the district includes things other counties don't.

"You have to be very careful that you're comparing apples to apples," board member Lorie Shekailo said. "It all depends on what's included. We in Martin, we include everything."

It also depends on which student station costs are being compared. The term is used to apply to the cost per student of a particular school building project, but in the case of impact fees, student station also refers to the total cost of a student as he moves from elementary to high school.

Looking at the student station costs used in impact fees, Martin's cost of about \$42,000 appears to be among the highest in the state. However, "each district has a somewhat different formula for coming up with their cost," according to James Nicholas, Martin County's impact fee consultant, who also has worked for St. Lucie and Palm Beach counties.

In Martin, "everything is included," Nicholas said in a Sept. 2 e-mail to Kline. The district counts the impact of a new student on schools, land, buses and facilities like district offices and the Environmental Studies Center. In contrast, Palm Beach County, with a student station cost of about \$38,000, doesn't include the cost of buses.

St. Lucie County's figure is being reviewed, said Marty Sanders, growth management director for the St. Lucie County School District. The district's 2005 figure was about \$21,000, according to Nicholas' data.

Back To School Musings

From Dr.Gwenn Is In

What's the best way to study for a test? [Cognitive Daily]

From ScienceBlogs : Combined Feed

Parents' guide

- [How to help your child](#)
- [Navigating school system](#)
- [Find a parenting group](#)
- [Chat with other parents](#)

More local news

[Latest breaking news](#), photos and all of today's *Post* stories.

Share This Story

- [digg](#)
 - [del.icio.us](#)
 - [Fark](#)
 - [Newsvine](#)
 - [reddit](#)
 - [Technorati](#)
 - [Facebook](#)
 - [More](#)
- [What are these?](#)

Even looking at construction costs for actual buildings can be misleading, Martin school district staff said. For instance, Martin's elementary school under construction west of Florida's Turnpike has a per-student cost of about \$34,000, according to Nicholas' data. An elementary school under construction in Palm Beach County has a per-student cost of about \$27,000. However, the Palm Beach school will serve about 964 students, whereas Martin's elementary school capacity is capped at 750.

Some Martin County school board members have said a more accurate price comparison is to look at square-foot costs. The district's new 124,000-square-foot elementary school would cost about \$187 a square foot, according to Nicholas' data.

The Palm Beach County school mentioned earlier will have about 129,000 square feet, costing about \$206 a square foot, Nicholas' data show. That cost includes off-site turning lanes and elements in the school's construction to make the building environmentally friendly. Palm Beach County excludes the cost of technology, security and audio enhancement.

Nonetheless, Kline has said she wonders whether Martin County couldn't pay even less for its school projects. She has raised concerns about how much work on school construction projects draws only one or two bidders. If more companies were competing to do the work, the total price might fall, Kline said.

Officials in various school districts say certain fields of work, such as installing elevators and windows, for instance, simply don't draw as many bidders.

"In certain trades, there just aren't a lot of qualified contractors who can meet the specifications of the school districts," said Joe Sanches, facilities management chief for the Palm Beach County School District.

Even so, Sessa said her department has made efforts to increase the number of companies bidding on school construction work.

District staffers have joined the Treasure Coast Builders Association and hosted an "outreach and strategy meeting" with local builders and contractors. Though not required by law, her department also requires that construction managers solicit bids from subcontractors for each division of work on a project, Sessa said.

The facilities director said the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes reduced the number of bidders simply because contractors were stretched thin. The Jessica Lunsford Act also "caused a great deal of burden on contractors," because it was harder to get bidders qualified under the law to work on construction projects on existing school campuses.

The 2005 law required schools to fingerprint and conduct background checks on all subcontractors and their employees.

But the law since has been modified, streamlining checks to focus on workers who have more direct contact with students, something Sessa surmises will increase the number of companies bidding on school construction work.

Sponsored Links

Hot Stock Alert

Gulf Ethanol Corp (OTC: GFET). Ethanol, Biofuels, Green Energy. www.GulfEthanolCorp.com

Hot Stock Picks

Growth Stocks, Penny Stocks, Stock Tips, Investments, Trades. www.GorillaInvestor.com

AARP Auto Ins Quotes

Over 50? Save \$303 On Auto Ins With The Hartford. Free No Hassle Quote AARP.TheHartford.com

Mortgage Refinance -3.99%

\$170,000 loan for under \$560/month. Get 4 Free Refinance Quotes Fast www.4MortgageHelp.org

House Payments Fall Again

\$180,000 Mortgage for \$999/Mo. Paying too much? No credit check reqd. www.lowermybills.com

Buy a link here



the #1 local jobs site just got hotter
 PalmBeachPost.com has partnered with Yahoo! HotJobs. [Upload your resumé now.](#)

Place An Ad 24/7

Build your classified ad with color photos

Shopping

Search 20,000+ local goods & services

[Advertise With Us:](#) In print and online

LivingGreen
tips, news, games & community for palm beach

PalmBeachPost.com

▼ advertisement ▼

PUBLIX
GreenWise
 MARKET*

Doors open at 9am
 on Thursday, September 27
 at Legacy Place

[click here
to get wise](#)

Featured Jobs

LINE COOK
 Bartender/ Servers Exp. FT/PT. Lunch & dinner.
 Appl 3-6pm or fax:561-278-7...

DEBT COLLECTOR
 Debt Collector Come Join Our Team! Debt
 Collector position avail. in the P...

A/C DUCT MECHANIC
 A/C DUCT MECHANIC & Apprentice w/glass &
 medal exp. Salary w/exp. Full ben...

RNS/LPNS
 RNs _ LPNs Lake Park SNF Seeks Caring
 Nurses To Promote Quality

[View All Featured Jobs](#)



▼ advertisement ▼

Copyright 2007 The Palm Beach Post. All rights reserved.

By using PalmBeachPost.com, you accept the terms of our visitor agreement. [Please read it.](#)

[Contact PalmBeachPost.com](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Our Partners](#) | [Advertise with The Post](#)

