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School Board Supports Impact Fees, Recognizes P.E. Advocate

By BRETT LOWE, Staff Writer

The Polk County school board has voted to support the proposed new impact fees to raise money for the increased costs of building new schools.

The sole dissenting vote was that of Jack English, who disagrees that the taxes used to raise funds should only be applied to incoming residents and new homeowners.

Chairwoman Kay Fields was not in attendance.

Factoring into the school board's decision was the vast difference between the enrollment statistics for this year and last year. At this time last year, there were nearly 81,000 students enrolled. Right now, there are approximately 88,000 students enrolled, an increase of almost 7,000 students.

These statistics neglect the effects that Hurricane Charlie had on enrollment. At the end of last school year, there were about 83,000 students enrolled for a difference of about 5,000 students. The enrollment for this year is about 3,000 more students than the school board had projected last year.

Even though the board decided to support the new impact fees, they only have an advisory role with the county commission, with whom the decision ultimately lies.

The school board also approved a pay increase of about \$612,000 for the custodians as the result of a collective bargaining agreement. This funding will translate to a pay increase of \$1,794.78 per custodian.

The board also approved naming the new Haines City High School gym for Don Knitt, physical education advocate and former physical education instructor at Haines City High.

Knitt has been working for increased awareness and support for physical education in the school system for the last 10 years, even pre-dating the current national worries about childhood and obesity.

Usually, school buildings are named for big donors or community leaders, but the school board felt that Don Knitt deserved this honor for all of the hard work he has done.

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