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If you build them, you'll need more schools

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Growth in Manatee County may require building more schools like this one, Braden River High School.

Overcrowded schools and the skyrocketing cost of building new ones in Manatee County has sparked an environmental group to call for a ban on more new homes until schools are built.

The group ManaSota-88 wants the county to build more schools before it allows more homes to be built. Manatee County Superintendent Roger Dearing agrees. He wants to raise money for the new schools by tacking on a new real estate transaction fee.

"Say someone without children sells a home in west Bradenton to someone with two or three kids," Dearing said. "They should have to pay a sales transfer fee in the same level as what impact fees are now."

Sales transfer fees, which are regulated by the state, are roughly \$97, Dearing said. Impact fees are \$3,400 and will rise to \$3,950 in July.

Dearing agreed with the group that Manatee County is on the verge of a crisis.

"It's a three-headed pincher," Dearing said. "First, we have to deal with growth, second, there is a need and a commitment to renovate older schools, and third, the state is still asking us to reduce our class sizes by 2007."

The growth and cost figures Dearing presented to ManaSota-88 were staggering. Manatee County is one of 19 counties in Florida experiencing greater than 3 percent student growth annually.

In August, Manatee County will add roughly 1,300 new students, bringing its total to 42,200.

Meanwhile, the price of building a school has zoomed. For example, McNeal Elementary cost \$12.5 million in 2003 and seats 929 students. In a recent bid, Dearing said the school district was quoted \$22.2 million for an elementary school seating 750.

Information from **Bay News 9's** partner, *The Herald*, was used in this report.



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