

## Schools want less of an impact hike

By [Jeffrey S. Solochek](#), Times Staff Writer

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LAND O'LAKES — For the second time in 14 months, the Pasco County School District has cut the level of its requested impact fee increase.

Slipping property costs have led a district consultant to revise the fee recommendation downward by \$377, to \$8,606 per new single-family home. The district also dropped its request amount in December 2007, from \$10,477 to \$8,983, also because of a decrease in land prices.

The current fee is \$4,828 per home.

District officials had expected to have the increase in place by now. The county and school district reached an agreement on school capacity issues nearly a year ago and had proposed the added impact fee at the same time.

An advisory committee sanctioned by both governments signed off on the fee hike in early 2008.

But the County Commission, whose approval is required to have any fee take effect, has yet to take up the matter.

The school district made its recommendation "at the time the market was losing air. We had concerns about raising the fee too much," said Michele Baker, chief assistant county administrator.

A community group has been taking a closer look at other ways to raise money in support of the impacts that new development would have on schools, she noted.

"We've held off because the development community just believes they can't stand the increase, from a market perspective," Baker said. "We've been trying to cooperate and work together with the development community, the school district and the county."

Assistant superintendent Ray Gadd expressed frustration at the county's delay. While it's important to work with the community to find acceptable solutions to financial issues, he said, at some point government leaders must make a decision.

And he noted that Pasco County school enrollment continues to grow modestly despite the decline in the economy, meaning that the need for new schools has not gone away — even with the district's addition of several new schools over the past five years. The money an impact fee generates would help keep up with the growth.

"We're still catching up to years prior to me," said superintendent Heather Fiorentino, now in her fifth year. "And when the economy does turn around — and we all know this is going to happen, we just don't know when ... I'm going to need to be prepared."

The School Board is set to consider the revised impact fee request on Tuesday. Fiorentino said she plans to meet with county administrator John Gallagher on the issue later in the week.

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