

# HCPS: Operating Two Schools Adds 4.6 Percent

## Division Estimates \$22.5M Annual Cost

By ELLIE POTTER Daily News-Record

HARRISONBURG — Operating two high schools in the city would cost about 4.6 percent more a year than a single high school, according to the division's latest estimates.

City Council has not decided whether it will fund a proposed \$76 million, 1,200-student high school, which the Harrisonburg School Board approved in December. The \$76 million price tag does not include the cost of land or operating expenses.

Proponents say the school is needed to reduce overcrowding in Harrisonburg High School, a structure built for 1,360 students that now holds about 1,800.

Opponents argue the second high school is too expensive and will place too large of a burden on taxpayers to finance.

### \$22.5M A Year For Two Schools

The School Board said Tuesday that council must decide on the issue next week, so planning and construction can begin in time for the school to open in fall 2021. Voting much later may delay the school's opening another year, school officials have said.

In 2021, using an estimated 2,100-student enrollment, the division estimates that operating a single high school would cost about \$21.5 million annually. The cost includes an estimated 2 percent inflation rate per year.

If those 2,100 students are split up between two high schools, school officials estimate, it will cost about \$22.5 million a year to operate.

This means building a second high school would cost about \$1 million in additional annual operating expenses for a 2,100-student enrollment.

That \$22.5 million includes about \$12 million to operate an 1,100-student Harrisonburg High School and about \$10.5 million to run a new 1,000-student high school.

For comparison, the division has about a \$17.3 million high school operating budget this academic year.

On Thursday, Superintendent Scott Kizner said the 2,100-student projection is an estimate, so the operating cost will vary depending on the actual enrollment in 2021. He would be shocked, Kizner said, if the division had more than 2,100 high school students by 2021.

The projected costs include operational expenses, such as insurance, maintenance and utilities, as well as staff costs and supply allocations for band, athletics and summer school.

## Staffing

Tracy Shaver, Harrisonburg City Public Schools' executive director of finance, said the division estimates it would need to hire only 15.5 new full-time equivalent positions for a second high school. The rest of the proposed school's staff would transfer from Harrisonburg High School, Shaver said.

If the division had 2,100 students in one building, he said, the school would need 215 staff members. If the division builds a second high school and keeps 1,100 students in the existing high school and moves 1,000 to the new high school, 122.5 staff positions would be needed in the old high school and 108 in the new one.

Personnel would cost about \$13.7 million a year for a 2,100-student high school, excluding inflation rates. Personnel for two schools would cost about \$14.8 million.

Division officials determined the number of staff needed for a 2,100-student enrollment based largely on student needs and the state's Standards of Quality, which are developed by the Virginia Board of Education and detail staffing and program requirements for public schools.

The division would pay the same amount for program supplies in both high school scenarios. If the second school is built, the expenses would just be split between the two.

The division would actually save nearly \$194,000 on operations, such as utilities, transportation and maintenance, if a second school were built. A 2,100-student high school would have about \$2.6 million in these expenses, while operating both schools would cost about \$2.4 million a year.

Most all the difference comes from overflow trailers installed at HHS due to overcrowding. A new high school would allow the division to get rid of the 11 trailers at Harrisonburg High School, saving nearly \$194,000.

## Budget Breakdown

Each year, the division puts together its operating budget for the next school year and submits it to council, which helps fund it.

About half the division's operating budget is funded by the state, Kizner said. The local government funds about 45 percent, and the rest comes from the federal government and grants.

Assuming two high schools will cost about \$1 million more to operate in 2021 than one school, the division would ask the city for about \$450,000 more for its operating budget. This amount is largely dependent on how much money the state contributes, Kizner said.

The city could also raise its real estate tax — 85 cents per \$100 of assessed value — to pay for the additional operations. Raising the rate by 1 cent would generate \$400,000 for the city, Harrisonburg Finance Director Larry Propst said Thursday.

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