Local School System Budgets
Local school systems are in the midst of preparing their 2010-1011 budgets and many are looking at even bigger cuts for the coming year. As partners with our local systems, we should be aware of both the multitude of causes for these shortfalls and of the many ways systems across the state are addressing them. Through conversations with educators and administrators around the state, I have gathered some information to share.

Rather then lumping the financial crisis of our schools into the generalized “downturn in the economy” category let’s look a little closer at the causes. Some of the most common include:

- Decreases in the local tax digest from which the schools get over 50% of their revenue
- Increases in utility bills
- Increases in employer retirement contributions
- Operating expenses for buildings and programs brought online during the growth period
- Reductions in state funding in certain areas
- SPLOST revenues coming in below projections

And what are some school boards doing to balance their diminishing budgets?

- Employee layoffs, and furloughs
- Reductions in local teacher supplements
- Increasing length of school day in order to reduce the length of the school week or year
- Eliminating programs not required by state educational standards
- Raising the millage rate
- Increasing class sizes to reduce the number of teachers on the payroll
- Deferring capital expenses
- Applying for stimulus money and other grants

It doesn’t take long to realize the ramifications of these measures. Many hope these are only temporary fixes to a temporary problem, whereas others are considering them permanent changes in the way of educating our children. Whichever forecast proves to be true, the fact remains that Cooperative Extension should
continue to provide our local schools with the best programming possible. Programming that fills the gaps that these budget cutbacks create. Yes, we too are experiencing some of the same budget concerns, but if we support our schools during these trying times, Cooperative Extension will remain part of the solution.

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