

**CHARLESTON, W.Va.** — The state School Building Authority rejected a multi-year funding plan for school construction projects in Fayette County in a vote taken Monday.



Carrie Hodousek/MetroNews

Fayette County residents in orange to support the proposal during Monday's meeting.

Several parents from Fayette County began crying when the SBA made its move before a packed meeting room in Charleston.

“I cannot allow my daughter to go to a school where the buildings could possibly fall in on her,” said Kristine Gilkey, of Oak Hill, whose daughter attends Collins Middle School. “They (SBA) are personally liable and I hope they can sleep with that. I am fed up.”

Jean Evansmore, a Mount Hope resident without children, attended Monday's meeting and left shaking her head in dismay.

“I don't have any kids or grandkids. I'm from here,” she said. “The kids that are doubled up, the school that is falling down means absolutely nothing.”

Following the vote, several other Fayette residents tried to interrupt board members then stormed out of the room. One woman shouted “You're pathetic. All of you.” before exiting.

Fayette County was seeking a total of \$39 million over three years in hopes of combining four of the county's five high schools and making improvements to other schools.

Despite urging by the state Board of Education to approve the project, SBA members criticized Fayette County's failure to pass a bond issue since the 1970s. Members also cited many unanswered questions with the current plan. The SBA staff told the board the plan was hastily put together and the costs were underestimated.

Raleigh	10,000,000
Barbour	4,543,322
Calhoun	1,096,238
Doddridge	800,000
Pleasants	316,596
Pocahontas	100,000
Roane	970,110
Tucker	5,171,034
Webster	716,078
Wirt	2,234,107
Harrison	10,678,000
Monongalia	4,360,000
Jackson	10,212,177
Kanawha	1,955,612
Logan	6,500,000

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Here is a list of counties that did get funding from the SBA Monday.

“I think politics had a part to play in this just to be quite honest with you,” said Fayette County prosecuting attorney Larry Harrah. “I think you have two state bureaucracies who can’t get along, they can’t agree with each other and they’re fighting like children and they’re hurting children.”

SBA member Tom Lange told MetroNews the board is “as non-political as they get.”

“The state board has three members on this committee and a superintendent. They have four people on an 11-member board and they couldn’t even agree on it, so that’s a concern,” he said.

State School Superintendent Dr. Michael Martirano, a member of the SBA, made an impassioned plea for the funding but it was rejected.

“It’s a disappointment for me that we have young people being educated at facilities that I define as ‘less than desirable,’ facilities that I wouldn’t place my own children in as a parent,” Martirano said. “So why should young people, who may not have the means or live in poverty, be educated at facilities that are less than desirable?”

The plan would have consolidated Fayetteville High School, Oak Hill High School, Midland Trail, and Meadow Bridge High School into a single school in the Oak Hill area. Valley Fayette would remain open.

SBA Executive Director David Sneed urged Fayette County to work with the SBA during the next year on a plan that the authority could support.

“That’s why we’re asking our staff to get down there, vet it out, look and see all the different possibilities are, what it’s going to cost to convert those high schools,” Lange said.

“Whatever that project is I think the authority will feel comfortable that all these questions they’ve asked will be answered and we’ll move forward,” Sneed said. “I would imagine we’ll fund Fayette County next year.”

The SBA did approve 15 projects for the approximately \$56 million available in this year’s funding cycle.

The county projects include:

Barbour — \$4.5 million

Calhoun — \$1.09 million

Doddridge — \$800,000

Harrison — \$10.6 million

Jackson — \$10.2 million

Kanawha — \$1.7 million

Logan — \$6.5 million

Monongalia — \$4.3 million

Pleasants — \$316,000

Pocahontas — \$100,000

Raleigh — \$10 million

Roane — \$970,000

Tucker — \$5.1 million

Webster — \$716,000

Wirt — \$2.2 million