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## **Locals need more information on proposed funding plan**

### **Locals mum on school plan**

By Vicki Grooms

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Local school officials and residents are largely withholding judgment on a new funding plan for the state's public schools because they just don't have enough information to form an opinion.

The S.C. School Boards Association has come up with a new funding system that would establish a statewide tax rate of 100 mills on all existing tax-eligible property as an equal funding base for all school districts in the state.

Only three districts in the state have millage rates below 100 mills, which should result in lower taxes for most people, although counties still would have the ability to levy additional school taxes if approved by local voters.

John Gardner, Horry County Schools' executive director for accounting services, said he has heard about the plan, but the district hasn't received any concrete information. Without some hard numbers, he said it would be hard to say if the new plan would help or hurt the district.

Gardner said the plan is a positive for districts like those around Richland County, which have millage more than 200 mills. In Horry County, total millage for 2011 and 2012 is 130.2 mills – 120.2 mills in operations millage, or non-owner-occupied property, and 10 mills for debt service, which applies to all property and affects the majority of residents.

In Georgetown County, total school millage for 2011 was 133.4. Georgetown County school officials could not be reached for comment.

"The bottom line is to have a plan to bring some equity to all districts," Gardner said. "This is a good start, but I'm not sure it's the formula."

Horry County school board Chairman Will Garland said he also is not very familiar with the new proposal, but he does have some concerns with having money reallocated from Columbia and how it would affect the district's ability to implement special programs.

"It seems every time Horry County sends money to Columbia, we get less back," he said.

Horry County residents Terry Sanders and Vickie Karnes said they had not heard about the plan, but they aren't going to be immediately in favor of a program just because it promises lower taxes.

Karnes is the mother of two, with one child at Carolina Forest High School and another who has already graduated, while Sanders' adult child attended the Myrtle Beach schools. Both said they prefer more local control of funding, and they are concerned about the disparity between schools across the district.

"Somehow, this area never sees the benefits of these programs," Sanders said. "The question is, 'How does it help children and teachers?' "

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