

Parameters considered for school budget

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Preparing for the 2010-11 school budget, Holyoke School Board members considered six parameter directives at a March 2 work session following the board's regular meeting.

Parameters focused on the areas of ending fund balance target, estimated pupil count, health insurance, staffing decisions, transfers/allocation and other board priorities.

Input also included budget priorities which were presented by Dennis Herman of the district's budget and facilities committee.

Herman reported the committee met six times and sincerely appreciated the effort of Supt. Bret Miles to help them understand school finance.

Understanding the committee's role is in an advisory capacity, Herman said they came to a consensus on two overarching concerns and several specific priorities.

Overall, Herman said the committee feels the district should take the time to carefully consider the impact of upcoming budget decisions on the employees and their overall morale.

It was also a committee consensus for the district to use some of the ending fund balance as revenue in the upcoming year to offset no more than half of the reduction in per pupil revenue.

They did recommend the ending fund balance not be reduced below three months of operating expenses at any time. The rest of the reduction in per pupil revenue should come from spending cuts, said Herman.

For increasing revenue, Herman said the committee feels the board should begin planning for an election to generate additional revenue, to consider fees to support individual programs and to intensify efforts to recruit and retain students in the district.

Looking at spending reductions, Herman reported the committee emphasized the district must

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make core academics a priority, K-3 should receive priority, class size is valued, technology replacement and expansion should be promoted and all departments should be analyzed to make adjustments proportionately.

Herman stressed the committee likes the openness and transparency of this process and the way it's going. He pointed out the communication piece is critical, and the district needs to articulate cuts which have already happened such as the sixth grade move and loss of an elementary art teacher/program.

Herman said the budget committee is an excellent step in that communication process. Committee member Michelle Van Overbeke added the committee has built confidence in the process and the information shared by the superintendent and school district.

Parameter consensus reached

Following work session discussion surrounding the budget parameters, a consensus was reached on several items. The parameters will be put in writing for a vote at the March 16 board meeting.

Board president Dan Kafka noted there will still be the opportunity for the board to change these parameters, but having them written down will give them a focus.

Investigation of a mill levy override and bond election was targeted by the board as a good suggestion from the budget committee. Additionally, a review of volunteer programs in the district to pick up what's being lost was suggested.

In specific budget parameter areas, the board considered the following:

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—use fund balance money to offset no more than half of the budget deficit caused by the reduction in state funding. An attempt will be made to not allow the ending fund balance to drop below three months of operating revenue.

—estimate the funded pupil count at 585 full-time equivalent students.

—consider health insurance costs as a top priority in terms of decisions around salaries and benefits.

—utilize natural attrition of staff as the first priority for reduction in staff, protect K-3 and core academic subject areas in terms of staffing decisions and do not consider salary reduction.

—budget \$180,000 for capital projects, and make no transfers to subsidize food services.

—research a mill levy override election and investigate expansion of the volunteer program.

Other business

In other business March 2, the Re-1J Board:

—approved two supplemental contracts for JH science teacher Martin Roth for the 2010-11 school year, allowing him to operate as a retired teacher next school year.

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—accepted the resignation of HS wrestling coach Duane Stroh.

—received homeschool notification from Brad and Chris Gerk for their daughter Katelyn for the remainder of the 2009-10 school year.

—acknowledged two gifts to the district. Heginbotham Trust committed \$6,280 towards upgrading equipment (pads and helmets) for the football team. Curt and Chandra Parker donated a Kawasaki Scout AWD vehicle (a \$10,000 value) to be used for grounds and maintenance.

—admitted foreign exchange student Emanuel Leonhard Rapp from Germany for the 2010-11 school year.

—noted the next board meeting, on Tuesday, March 16, will begin at 8 p.m. That meeting time will continue through Daylight Savings Time.