

Personnel costs are top priority in 2013-14 school budget planning

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Increases for health insurance, salary steps and PERA will continue to be top priority for the Holyoke School District budget planning for 2013-14.

A majority of the April 23 school board meeting was spent examining the past three years' budget parameters, new budget priorities and some known budget needs.

Budget priorities from the budget and facilities committee were reviewed. They are the same as were submitted last year and have been relatively consistent for four years.

Superintendent Bret Miles will gather information from the budget discussion and create a list of budget parameters to be discussed and approved at the May 7 board meeting.

Board members asked for scenarios on the use of the ending fund balance and how that use may impact instructional priorities. The priority remains to maintain an ending fund balance of no less than \$1.2 million.

Even though the school finance will grow this year, it is nowhere close to erasing the district's \$778,000 negative factor. Miles pointed out that the district is still far behind when looking at a four-year picture.

Asked about the impact of the anticipated increased assessed valuation in the school district, Miles said this will not increase program funding for the district. As the local assessed value goes up, the state reduces its share through equalization. Miles said the increased AV will have an impact on a mill levy override.

In addition to fully supporting step, health insurance and PERA increases for staff, the board also supported the staffing plan for the elementary school as submitted by Principal Kyle Stumpf.

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The plan is to add three positions: one each in kindergarten, first and second grades. If kindergarten enrollment is down, the third teacher may go to third grade for one year. This involves taking the 1.5 full-time equivalent positions in Title I and applying that toward the new K-2 positions.

The Title I program will change to a schoolwide program rather than the targeted assistance program that has been in use in the district. This program allows use of Title I funds to serve all students. It is typically used to reduce class sizes so that the classroom teacher has a better opportunity to meet the needs of the students in his/her class.

Miles said they feel the schoolwide approach lets the district use funds to impact more kids. It is also consistent with the new evaluation law where classroom teachers are responsible for the reading growth of their students. It gives the classroom teacher more time with the students instead of a pull-out program but also reduces the overall caseload so that quality time can be spent with struggling students.

Additionally at the elementary school, a second special education teacher will be brought back after trying to go with only one this past year. They will be able to do without one special ed paraprofessional.

Other top priorities for budget funds are for extended learning opportunities including summer school and extended-day primary reading support.

Capital project discussion concluded with the board expressing a desire to stay flexible about allocating money but trying to reinstate general fund money that has been cut the last two years.

Up until about six years ago, a mandated \$180,000 capital project transfer was part of the budget. For several years after the mandate was removed, Holyoke kept the capital expenditures budget from the general fund right around the \$180,000 figure.

In the last couple of years, that was decreased. This past year, \$104,000 was budgeted for

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capital projects, and \$108,000 has been spent. This coming year, there will be \$140,000 in capital expenses funded by phase two of the mill levy override projects.

With solid information from Robert Jacobs and Kim Young in the transportation department, the board reviewed the time and dollar savings regarding the addition of a sixth regular bus route. That will be a consideration in the budget, as well.

Other items that were addressed and will be part of the prioritization presented at the next board meeting included a teacher induction program, school improvement network software/PD 360 and an athletic trainer position.

The final priority from the budget and facilities committee addresses a continued focus on increasing revenue.

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