

Increased student count leads to balanced budget

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

An increase in students in Holyoke School District Re-1J as of the Oct. 1 count, led to adoption of a balanced budget for 2009-2010 at the Nov. 17 meeting of the Re-1J Board of Education.

“It’s really clear that having more kids makes a difference,” said Supt. Bret Miles. Funded pupil count for the final budget was 580.5, up 16.5 students from the June estimates.

The final budget has \$8,507 less expenditures than the preliminary budget adopted June 16. That leaves revenue after transfers equal to total expenditures in the amount of \$5,073,120.

Board members authorized use of \$96,644 from the 2009-10 beginning fund balance from the general fund for student count audit repayment and an emergency fiscal reserve to the Colorado Dept. of Education (CDE).

Education was cut \$210 million, so a fiscal emergency reserve was set up so every school district would be hit with the same percentage, explained Miles. Holyoke’s hit is \$85,344.

The additional \$11,300 fund balance use is for the CDE pupil count audit. This expense occurs every three to five years and is an unknown amount. “We did really well here,” said Miles, noting out of four years’ student counts, the district has been off less than two students.

Without an increase in students, the district would have been pulling \$189,000 out of reserves, plus would be looking at a \$92,583 deficit, according to June budget figures.

Use of revenue from bond redemption fund and Medicaid reimbursements was a factor for the balanced budget, as were AARA funds, which are helping fund at least one of the district’s positions.

A fully-funded School Finance Act of 4.9 percent was a big plus, added Miles. “This budget gets us positioned very well for a tight budget cycle.”

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Miles highlighted drawbacks to the 2009-10 budget, in addition to the \$96,644 payback. They include a Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) increase of \$25,754, health insurance increase passed on to employees, art teacher trade-off for fifth grade teacher and very low supply budgets.

Positive budget points are: salary steps funded at \$45,694; \$180,000 went towards capital projects even though there was no capital reserve fund; and ending fund balance targeted at \$1.5 million in the preliminary budget is up to \$1.592 million.

Budget appropriations for 2009-10 were adopted, as follows:

General Fund — \$5,450,764

Bond Redemption — \$440,852

Food Service — \$187,024

Trust and Agency — \$268,000

Activity Fund — \$307,000

Total Appropriation — \$6,653,640

Student count up for second straight year

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Both the actual student count and the full-time equivalent count were up for the second straight year, changing a long-time trend of declining enrollment in the district.

Actual student count increased by 23 students from a year ago, to 631 on Oct. 1 this year.

Full-time equivalent students include kindergartners as half students and also allow some count for the preschool project slots and GED students.

This year's full-time equivalent count was up 19 from a year ago, to 580.5. This year, the district won't be averaging previous years' full-time equivalent counts, as the five-year average would be 575.2.

The 580.5 count was certified by the board for 2009-10 funding purposes.

From 2007-08 to 2008-09, the district saw a slight increase of 1.5 students in attendance, so this year's 23-student increase was of great significance.

Miles pointed out it's exciting to see the high student numbers in the elementary school. Additionally, next year's JR/SR High will be as large as it's been in a long time, with 55 incoming sixth graders and only 35 seniors graduating in 2010.

In addition to clear student count chart comparisons and budget information, the board also looked at district-wide demographics, ethnicity and free/reduced lunch eligibility charts.

Demographics note 63 percent of the district's students are white, 36 percent hispanic and one percent other.

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In grades K-5, the hispanic student population is 41 percent, in grades 6-8 it's 40 percent and in grades 9-12 it's 26 percent.

Board members commented on the new finance formats, and Supt. Miles praised director of budget and finance Sharon Thompson for her effort in preparing the new forms.

"They're highly informative and chalk full of information," said board member Jeff Tharp. "It was very easy to follow through it," added Laura Krogmeier.

Board reorganizes

Kris Camblin, Kim Killin and Jeff Tharp started four-year terms following the Nov. 3 election date and took their oaths of office at the Nov. 17 meeting from retiring board president Kendon Olofson.

Olofson was then acknowledged by the board for his eight years of service.

In board reorganization, officer elections for the next two years resulted in Dan Kafka being named president; Jeff Tharp, vice president; Kris Camblin, treasurer; and Linda Jelden, secretary.

Signature authorization on the district's various bank accounts was approved, as well.

Board member committee representatives were reviewed, with a couple of changes to be considered. Appointments to district committees will be completed at the Dec. 1 meeting.

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Jelden reports on Healthy School Summit

Jelden told the board about the Healthy School Summit she attended Nov. 6. Put on by the Colorado Legacy Foundation, the summit was well attended by 87 school districts.

Focusing on “Healthy Kids Learn Better,” the summit included some good seminars, according to Jelden.

She said they addressed five areas of healthy kids and how those tie into student achievement. The areas include nutrition, physical activity, school health services, health education and workplace wellness.

Jelden pointed out some grants are available. Only school districts which attended the summit are eligible to apply for the grants.

Supt. Miles said the information will be shared with P.E. teachers for a first look at some of the ideas. Jelden added there are little changes which can be promoted in this district—changes that don't cost a lot of money.

Other business

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In other business Nov. 17, the Re-1J Board:

—hired Maria Solis as assistant cook for the 2009-10 school year.

—accepted the resignation of elementary library aide Sara Drongesen.

—approved submission of Type V substitute teaching authorization in behalf of Amanda Houghtelling, Summer Struckmeyer and Alyssa Clark.

—approved second reading of revised policy exhibit pertaining to the superintendent evaluation instrument.

—heard board president Kafka's intent to have vice president Tharp involved with him and Supt. Miles in developing the board agenda to work towards better communication with the board and public.