

Reduced state funding will impact school negatively

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

“There is no mistaking this situation,” said Holyoke School Supt. Bret Miles when discussing the reduction of state funding’s impact on the budget.

“We will not be able to operate on more than six percent less per student without directly affecting the programming we offer in our district,” Miles said at the May 4 work session following the school board’s regular meeting.

He pointed out there is not enough “fluff” to eliminate spending without consequences.

In preparation for creating the 2010-11 budget, the district has sought the opinions and expertise of employees and other stakeholders. Miles noted throughout the process there has been a heightened awareness for transparency and involvement.

Working within the budget parameters which were adopted March 2, assumptions were compiled for meeting the reduced budget numbers. Supt. Miles emphasized nothing is set. This is not a preliminary budget, it’s just a study guide for discussion.

At the May 18 board meeting, a similar budget packet will be prepared using actual numbers.

Projected shortfall in revenue compared to last year is \$172,115. Based on a budget parameter, half of these cuts (\$86,058) would come from General Fund after half is taken from the fund balance.

However, at last week’s meeting, there was significant discussion on changing the percentage of the shortfall to be taken from reserves, since the reduction in revenue was not as great as was anticipated.

Four scenarios ranging in fund balance reduction of \$86,000-\$140,000 will be reviewed, said Miles.

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For initial discussion May 4, the board looked at \$86,058 cuts from general fund, as well as additional costs of \$32,278 for Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) increase, \$33,361 for salary step increase, \$52,920 for health insurance increase and \$4,000 for property liability and worker's comp insurance increase.

This puts the 2010-11 target for necessary reductions at \$208,617.

Included in budget reduction assumptions as discussed last week are:

—two percent reduction to all spending (\$30,000).

—eliminating one bus route (salary and benefits only) (\$11,456).

—eliminating food purchases for professional development (\$4,000). Board discussion, however, favored keeping this in the budget.

—reducing mileage reimbursement rate from 53 cents per mile to 40 cents per mile (\$1,000).

—no transfer to food service (\$5,000).

—not replace one elementary special ed. one-on-one aide (\$11,838).

—not replace one secondary social studies teacher (\$58,313).

—not replace elementary library aide (\$20,190).

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—eliminate stipend for athletic director (\$13,980).

—Marty Roth's transition contract (\$10,675).

—two staff members going half-time (\$46,772).

—eliminate third position at fifth grade (\$40,083).

—eliminate gifted and talented (GT) position (\$40,000).

The Northeast BOCES board voted May 3 to approve a one-time reduction of \$300,000 from the fund balance to help districts during this budget year. The amount to be credited to Holyoke School District is \$43,521.

With much support for reinstating a full-time elementary art teacher, it is considered as a budget assumption at a cost of \$40,083.

An additional sixth grade position will be needed, at an approximate cost of \$40,000.

The proposed target for these necessary budget reductions is \$256,745, which is \$48,129 balance to the good at this point.

An additional third grade teacher is a consideration, but at this point, Supt. Miles said he advocates keeping third grade in two sections and not adding a third teacher.

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In further explanation of the assumptions, Miles noted with resignations from all three JH/HS social studies teachers, he's confident they can build a schedule with only two teachers. This can be done now that sixth grade will be taught in a homeroom setting.

Miles said this may affect the number of social studies classes available for college credit and offered through distance learning.

It is a consideration at this time to look for an athletic director who can have time during the contract day, rather than needing an additional stipend for the work.

Miles pointed out they may not find a taker for this situation, but it certainly should be considered as a factor in the search.

JH science teacher Marty Roth has been approved to work for one additional year under a supplemental contract. He is able to start drawing his PERA retirement and work an additional year for the district at a lesser rate.

Two other employees wish to work after retirement on a part-time basis, said Miles. This could be continued year after year, and details are currently being looked at for this new program with Nancy Kennedy and Cathy Sullivan.

The administration recommends the current full-time equivalent (FTE) required to offer a pull-out GT program at the elementary school can be better served by using it towards the extra sixth grade teacher.

Eliminating this half-time position helps use that money toward a classroom teacher.

Supt. Miles noted he's appreciative of staff for being patient for budget assumption development. He said it was in the district's best interest to wait, as the final word coming from the state was better than anticipated.

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