

State aid may be higher than expected

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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CG-B School Board, teachers start salary talks amid more favorable district financial outlook

Two weeks ago, the Cedar Grove-Belgium School Board was looking for ways to trim its budget by \$400,000 based on preliminary state aid figures, but that has changed.

When the School Board met July 11, it learned the district's state aid will be more than predicted a month ago.

"I just got the figures today," Business Manager Kris DeBruine said. "I've never seen a swing like this. We came out on the winning end of this. Some districts didn't."

DeBruine said the new state aid figures are still less than what the district received last year, but the deficit can probably be made up without taking drastic measures.

She advised the board to postpone financial decisions until she has final figures for the 2011-12 fiscal year.

With the black cloud lifted, salary talks, the only item public bargaining units can negotiate, between the teachers and School Board will be done amid a more favorable financial climate.

The two sides will exchange proposals Thursday, July 19.

The board decided not to pursue some fees and cuts it had been considering, including charging student fees for participation in athletics. That will not happen, the board decided.

The board discussed dropping the alternative benefit paid to teachers who choose to go with a spouse's health insurance plan rather than take the district's policy, but decided to continue putting \$3,465 into a tax-sheltered annuity for those teachers. Currently, 14 teachers are covered by their spouse's health plan.

Proposals to cut the payments to \$2,750 and \$3,000 failed.

If just one person opts to take the district's insurance at a cost of about \$17,000 annually, any savings would be negated, teacher Scott Tipple said.

"This was a possible saving when we were looking at a \$400,000 deficit," board member Dan Bruhn said.

However, the elimination of reimbursing teachers \$100 for classes they take remains on the list of possible changes.

The board proposed taking the \$15,000 budgeted for credit reimbursement, which varies from \$7,500 to \$25,000 annually, and put that into staff development instead.

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Principals will have the option to use that money to reimburse teachers for classes or pay for them to attend workshops and conferences that enhance learning in their field, Supt. Steve Shaw said.

The bulk of staff development money, however, will be used to prepare teachers for common core standards and aligning curriculum to meet the new standards, he said.

“I think the common core standards is just the tip of the iceberg,” Shaw said. “There will be a lot of changes coming down.”

DeBruine said Oostburg does not reimburse teachers. The Sheboygan School District reimburses \$40 per credit.

Shaw said he believes it is the teacher’s responsibility to maintain his or her license.

However, board member Aileen Dahlke said she doesn’t want to get rid of the reimbursement entirely. No action was taken.

The board decided to continue to pay coaches and assistant coaches up to \$125 to attend state tournaments even if Cedar Grove-Belgium athletes are not in the tournament.

“It’s a very small perk for a coach for the little bit of money they get paid,” Athletic Director Dan Coopman said.

The board took one action that will save the district an estimated \$64,000. It authorized the refinancing of \$3.6 million in general obligation bonds.