

School budget gets preliminary OK

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Modest drop in school taxes projected with Northern Ozaukee spending plan; hearing is Monday

The Northern Ozaukee School Board gave its preliminary approval last week to the district's 2012-13 budget which calls for a reduction of more than \$500,000 in school taxes.

Supt. Blake Peuse, going through his first budget cycle with the district, said the spending package recommended by the Finance Committee meets the challenge of a balanced budget.

Although officials were still working to finalize the tax rate, Peuse said the average district taxpayer should see a slight decrease in their school taxes.

Using preliminary equalized tax rates, the district is projecting the owner of a home valued at \$200,000 will see a \$59 decrease in school taxes, Peuse said. Last year, the owner of a home valued at \$200,000 paid \$2,094 in school taxes.

Peuse said the district will see its general aids from the state increase by \$282,000 from last year, and another \$20,000 in carry over money.

The budget picture was brightened considerably by enrollment numbers that turned out to be more positive than anticipated.

Peuse said the district shows a continuing trend of declining enrollment, but the migration of local students to programs elsewhere turned out to be not as dramatic as projected.

The brick-and-mortar enrollment currently stands at 710, down from 752 last year. That decline, however, is partially explained by smaller incoming classes at the elementary school level.

The district took another hit through the open-enrollment process, with 178 local students enrolling elsewhere and 52 outside students coming into the district.

Based on initial applications from families at the end of the last school year, the district had budgeted for up to 221 students to leave. That will result in a substantial savings in state aids the district doesn't have to pay to other districts.

"This would show that our work to engage our families has paid off in small increments, and as we continue on this trend we will continue to bring our students back into our district and further stabilize our enrollment," Peuse said.

He said the enrollment is almost exactly where officials had projected.

Enrollment in Wisconsin Virtual Learning, the district's virtual charter school, also showed a rebound that will result in an indirect increase in aid payments to the district.

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The current enrollment in the program is 724 students, up from 615 last year. That total includes 14 students from Northern Ozaukee, meaning the program will receive aid for 710 students who open-enrolled into the program.

WVL retains those incoming aids, but makes payments to the district for services based on the number of students enrolled.

The virtual program is operated as a revenue neutral venture, with the \$4.2 million received in aids used to cover expenses.

“The WVL financial situation has definitely brightened from last year,” said School Board President Paul Krause, who also serves on the WVL Board of Control.

Peuse said the district’s 2012-13 budget contains few major changes, but some funding is included for technology upgrades and performance-based wage increases for staff members.

A public hearing on the budget will be held at 7 p.m. Monday, Oct. 22, at Ozaukee High School.