

School budget cut raises meal prices

Written by Steve Ostermann
Wednesday, 14 April 2010 16:47

Board OKs first increase for lunch fees since 2004, plans to discontinue some busing for middle-schoolers

Students and teachers will have to pay more for meals served in the Grafton School District next fall.

The School Board on Monday approved a plan for the 2010-11 academic year that calls for increases of 25 cents for meals in elementary, middle and high schools for students and adults as well as a 5-cent increase for milk.

Based on the new prices, meals will cost \$1.85 at elementary schools, \$2.10 at the middle and high schools and \$2.75 for adults. Milk will cost 35 cents.

Business manager Don Amundson said the increases will be the first in the district since the 2004-05 school year. At that time, student prices were raised 10 cents, adult prices 25 cents and milk prices 5 cents.

“Even with the increases, meals in Grafton schools will cost less than the average price charged by other districts in southeastern Wisconsin,” Amundson said.

Those averages for 2009-10 are \$1.93 for elementary schools, \$2.15 for middle schools, \$2.20 for high schools and \$3.06 for adults. The average milk price is 33 cents.

In a report to the board, Amundson included a chart listing 22 other area districts whose meal prices for the 2009-10 year ranged from \$1.60 to \$2.25 at elementary schools, \$1.75 to \$2.50 at middle schools, \$1.75 to \$2.75 at high schools and \$2.25 to \$3.65 for adults.

Franklin was at the low end of the chart, and Port Washington-Saukville topped the list. Meal prices in Port Washington-Saukville are \$2.25 at elementary schools, \$2.50 at the middle school, \$2.75 at the high school and \$3.65 for adults.

Among other Ozaukee County districts, Mequon-Thiensville charges \$1.70 at elementary schools, \$1.95 at middle and high schools and \$2.75 for adults. Cedarburg charges \$2.05 at elementary schools, \$2.20 at the middle school, \$2.30 at the high school and \$2.90 for adults.

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The new increases were proposed as part of a cost-saving plan that calls for transferring \$31,561 in estimated custodial costs for lunch set-up and clean-up work in all five Grafton schools to the food service fund. The move, Amundson said, would require increasing meal prices by 16 cents to offset the added cost.

Combined with an additional 9-cent increase to cover food costs and pay for kitchen staff, the total price hike recommended was 25 cents, Amundson said.

The changes were recommended by the district's Administrative Council as a way to "help reduce the 2010-11 budget without having a direct impact on student learning," he said.

School Board President Terry Ziegler said district officials explored various ways to offset food-service costs as part of an ongoing effort to pare next year's expenditures.

"We looked closely at this in light of other concerns," Ziegler said.

Among other cost-saving options, the board is considering eliminating busing for John Long Middle School students who live less than two miles from school. That service, known as "interim busing," has traditionally been offered to students in grades six through eight from Nov. 15 through April 15.

Amundson said discontinuing the service, a move recommended by the Finance/Negotiations Committee, would save \$20,000. During the current school year, more than 90 families requested the service for about 100 students, he said.

The district is legally required to provide busing for all students in kindergarten through fifth grade who live more than one mile from the schools they attend and all students in grades six through 12 who live two or more miles from their schools. However, the interim service is not required and has apparently been provided as an additional service at families' request, Amundson said.

Board members agreed that eliminating the service is worth considering but said they want feedback from affected families before approving the move, which will require changing the transportation policy.

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Board members agreed with Supt. Jeff Pechura's suggestion that letters be sent to all families that would be affected by the change to explain that the move is being considered due to budget cutbacks. Families who want to respond will be asked to contact the district office, Pechura said.