

## **Press Clippings 6/19/2018**

---Daily Herald--- 6/19/18

### **U-46 board reviews tentative budget for next school year**

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY

The Elgin Area School District U-46 school board Monday night reviewed a first draft of a \$534.6 million spending plan for the 2018-19 school year.

The tentative budget includes nearly \$17 million in increased spending from the previous year largely due to salary increases.

It is based on the previous education funding formula and does not take into account the state's new evidence-based funding formula, which consolidates and replaces five grant programs: general state aid; special education personnel, services and summer school; and English learner education.

"We still have a number of unknown factors," said Dale Burnidge, director of financial operations. "We are still waiting for the state to give us our calculation for what our portion for revenue will be."

The fiscal year 2019 budget anticipates receiving four quarterly payments in state categorical funding, which includes money for transportation. However, the district hasn't yet received the third quarter payment for this school year, he added.

Other unknowns that could affect the district's budget include potential property tax freeze legislation and a pension cost shift making school districts pay the current state share of teacher pensions, which could cost U-46 up to \$24 million yearly, Burnidge said.

Officials are estimating a \$6.5 million increase in property taxes for next school year and a proposed property tax levy increase of 2.1 percent for tax year 2018, payable in 2019. Tax year 2017 revenue, payable in 2018, was levied at 2.1 percent. They also propose abating the same amount of taxes for tax year 2018 as the previous year -- \$3.9 million.

Revenue estimates for the 2019 fiscal year include \$309.2 million in taxes -- an increase of \$5.8 million from the previous year -- and \$156.5 million in evidence-based funding, which amounts to \$35.8 million more than was received through the previous funding formula because the new formula includes some categorical funding. Subsequently funding for categoricals is expected to go down to \$24.6 million, a \$4.4 million drop.

"Evidence-based funding increased our revenue by \$22.3 million in fiscal year 2018," Burnidge said.

Under expenses, officials expect annual salary increases based on contractual agreements, adding 14 full-time employees -- guidance counselors and assistant principals for middle schools, and assistant principals in larger enrollment elementary schools.

Health insurance costs also are projected to increase 7 percent, as well as increases in pension, Medicare and Social Security equal to salary increases. Officials also anticipate spending \$5.7 million to purchase new buses next year.

"All of our funds, we currently show a \$12 million surplus for the year," Burnidge said. "Operating funds ... we have a \$10.2 million surplus."

School board member Jeanette Ward said she doesn't agree with increasing the tax levy for next year and would rather see additional state education funding be used to pay down the district's debt.

"I would like to see us keep it flat or decrease it, which was supposed to be the point of increased state funding," she said.

Board member Melissa Owens said evidence-based funding really is meant to be invested into improving educational services.

"The evidence-based funding was specifically designed to bring underfunded districts up to adequacy," she said. "It allows us to get more money into the classrooms. It allows us to get more services to the students."

A final budget will be presented for approval at the Aug. 20 school board meeting.

## OPINION

---Daily Herald--- 6/19/18

### **Thinking outside the classroom**

Broad support welcome for initiative in Elgin that takes language to the learners

There is no one-size-fits-all way to learn.

Some people learn by listening, some by reading or watching. Others prefer to roll up their sleeves and learn on their own.

The same can be said about learning locations. Learning is not limited to a desk in a classroom.

And, that's the idea behind "Language in the Laundromat," a new community initiative launched this spring that aims to create mini libraries in laundromats across Elgin. The idea is to bring literacy to at-risk children up to 5 years old whose families may not be able to afford or have access to preschool.

It is a creative way to provide the kind of help students need to be better prepared for kindergarten and boost their ability to learn from the start of their education career.

What's also impressive and encouraging is the broad support behind the program -- Elgin Area School District U-46, Elgin Community College, United Way of Elgin and Gail Borden Public Library are among the 65 partnering agencies. That backing and more will be important for organizers to obtain the needed funding to expand to even more locations.

Already, the program's community partners have donated books, money and time, with volunteers coming in weekly to engage children in activities while their parents wash clothes. One Elgin laundry has been outfitted with books in English and Spanish, and signs and posters encourage families to turn wash time into talk time and read to their children.

"It's kind of a platform for other partners to come in and help serve families and meet them where they are," Elgin Partnership for Early Learning's Amber Peters told our Madhu Krishnamurthy. "Research shows families are in laundromats for about two and a half hours a week. It's a perfect opportunity to meet people in their environment ... and share resources."

The goal here is literacy, more specifically, increasing the number of words children are exposed to. Children from high-income families are exposed to 30 million more words than children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, according to one study. The Elgin Partnership hopes to close that gap by taking the initiative to places where low-income families frequent, starting with laundry facilities, with an eye to expanding to local and ethnic grocery stores, playgrounds and pediatrician offices.

Sixty percent of students entering U-46, the state's second largest school district, are not meeting kindergarten readiness bench marks, including key standards often learned in preschool.

Clearly, more needs to be done, so program organizers are not waiting for parents of at-risk children to ask for help -- they are creating learning opportunities in untraditional places.

That's a movement we can get behind.