

## Press Clippings 09/14/2021

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**Federal relief money included in U-46's pending budget to pay for a lot but school district also plans a 1.85% tax hike**  
By Mike Danahey; Note – This story also ran at [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com).



School District U-46 is set to adopt a \$662.3 million budget later this month that includes an influx of federal dollars but also a property tax increase.

“The largest increase in revenue is from federal funds, so the majority of the budget increases are not coming from property taxes,” district spokeswoman Mary Fergus said. “We are showing a budget increase of \$60 million in revenue, about \$5 million is projected to be from property taxes.”

For someone who pays about \$5,000 in annual property taxes, the 1.85% hike will increase their bill by about \$92.50, Fergus said. It's expected to generate about \$5.4 million in new revenue.

No one from the public weighed in on the spending plan during a hearing at the school board's Monday meeting. It is scheduled to be approved by the board on Sept. 27.

The tentative budget technically covers the period from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022. Under state law, it must be approved by this fall.

U-46 Superintendent Tony Sanders, who outlined the plan in a written letter of transmittal to the board, said they plan to collect about \$662.3 million in revenue and will spend about \$660.8 million, leaving a surplus and keeping them in the black.

On paper, the revenue increase is \$59.9 million over the 2020-21 budget, with the bulk — \$31.2 million — coming from emergency support and the federal government’s Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. Among the support is about \$8 million more in grants for food and nutrition.

Salaries and benefits represent the largest part of their expenditures, with a \$25.6 million increase over last year, Sanders’ budget document said.

“The salary and benefit increase is partially attributed to contractual obligations and benefits such as Medicare, health insurance, dental insurance and teachers’ retirement, which are projected to increase an average of 4.8 percent over the prior year’s budget,” Sanders wrote.

A \$14.3 million increase in purchased services is partly due to summer and after-school programs being paid for with federal relief money, which is also helping to fund upgrades to classroom technology and has increased the district’s non-capitalized equipment budget by \$8 million.

A \$9 million expenditure will allow for the return of 34 elementary and 26 secondary teaching positions that had been cut because of declining enrollments and the addition of 12 teaching positions in elementary and 26.4 in secondary to reduce class sizes and provide for greater social distancing, Sanders’ document said.

About \$4.4 million goes toward the first year of a five-year pandemic-related learning recovery plan, with about \$1.5 million set aside for additional staffing at Creekside, Parkwood, Willard, Laurel Hill, and Channing elementary schools in a pilot learning program.

The pilot program is an effort to create a “student-led academic teaming environment,” which they hope to eventually use at all U-46 schools, officials said.

The district also is waiving instructional fees for all U-46 families, at a cost of about \$2.7 million, and will set aside \$2.6 million for summer enrichment programs and \$3 million for after-school programs, including tutoring and homework help.

The district will use about \$780,000 to cover salary, benefits and tuition for a new resident administrator program in which six U-46 teachers will learn how to be principals by working with sitting principals.