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U46 projects \$580M budget

Spending plan for school year shows surplus over \$1.3M

By: Rafael Guerrero

School District U46's tentative 2019-20 budget calls for a record \$579.9 million in spending, due in part to teacher pay and benefit increases, Chromebook purchases and school building improvements, officials said.

The U46 school board reviewed the first draft of the spending plan Monday, and a public hearing will be held before it's adopted in August.

According to the budget estimates, the expenditures would be an increase of nearly \$22 million from 2018-19.

However, revenue for the upcoming school year will exceed expenses, according to the tentative budget. District officials estimate \$581 million in revenue, up almost \$20 million from 2018-19's \$561 million. The surplus is projected to be more than \$1.3 million.

U46 Director of Financial Operations Dale Burnidge said expenses grew due to a number of reasons. Teacher salaries and benefit costs will go up as authorized under the new contract for U46 teachers ratified in the spring. Salaries and benefits make up approximately \$406 million of next year's budget, an increase of nearly \$17 million from the prior budget year.

The district is expected to hire 54 new teachers for middle and high school special education and English language learners positions, Burnidge said. Officials also budgeted \$7 million toward facility improvements to prepare its schools for its educational pathways programs scheduled to happen within a few years. Furthermore, the purchase of thousands of new Chromebook computers for students in grades 5-8 is included in this budget. Additional technology purchases also are under the tentative budget, Burnidge said.

The increase in revenue comes from multiple sources, such as an \$8.5 million increase in funding from the state. Property tax revenue is expected to grow by just over \$3 million from 2018-19 to 2019-20, according to the tentative budget. The nearly \$307 million in local property tax revenue makes up 53% of all revenue coming into U46 in 2019-20, Burnidge said.

Officials will wait on final calculations from the state regarding funding, categorical payments, and pensions before presenting a final draft of the budget at the Aug. 12 school board meeting, Burnidge said. A school board vote on the 2019-20 budget would come later in the summer.