

Holyoke included in Race to the Top Fund application

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

While Holyoke School District hasn't exactly signed on, it isn't missing out on the opportunity to potentially be included in Race to the Top federal funds for education.

Supt. Bret Miles explained the Race to the Top program at the Feb. 2 local school board meeting.

Race to the Top was put together by the U.S. Dept. of Education to direct \$4 billion to a few selected states. Funds will be awarded in a national competition, and Colorado has submitted a grant application for the funding.

Miles said he anticipates around 10 states to receive funding, depending on which states and their amount of funding need.

States receiving the funds will have demonstrated they're ready to implement significant education reforms, said Miles.

Four areas addressed in the Race to the Top application are standards and assessments, state assistance, great teachers and leaders and support for struggling schools.

Holyoke is included in the Colorado grant application through a letter of interest by Northeast BOCES.

Should Colorado be one of the selected states to receive Race to the Top funds, a big chunk of money would come to the state, with half to go to local districts involved. Miles said right now, if Colorado is selected, Holyoke School Dist. could receive between \$25,000-\$77,000.

Miles reiterated N.E. BOCES is on the Colorado application at this point. If Colorado is selected, there will still be the opportunity to review the details to evaluate whether the district wants to accept the funds.

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Miles said the funds probably wouldn't be available unless something is done with educator effectiveness and monitoring student achievement performances. A few requirements will need to be reviewed.

Board members expressed support for being on board if Race to the Top funds could be available, yet having the chance to evaluate details before committing.

School finance litigation reported

School finance litigation in the Lobato vs. State of Colorado case was reviewed by Supt. Miles at last week's meeting.

This is an adequacy lawsuit, claiming schools are not adequately funded. Miles said this type of suit is happening all over the nation, and they're winning.

He said this is very exciting in the State of Colorado, as it could potentially change conversation around school finance. If the court says K-12 education is inadequately funded, the legislature would have to change the Constitution.

School districts are being asked to consider contributing a dollar per pupil for legal costs to support this. Miles said he believes a \$580.50 contribution by Holyoke School District is worth consideration.

He sees this legislation as "one of the biggest steps we can take to fix it for the future."

Holyoke's school board hasn't typically taken a stand on this type of thing, but board members

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expressed support for its worthiness. Contributing to the legal costs will be an action item on the Feb. 16 board agenda.

Supt. Miles also reviewed legislative bills on the horizon, many of which deal with school finance. He cited reasons for support or opposition on the bills, and noted ones which need to be watched for potential changes in wording.

Draft reviewed for long-term capital projects

Preparing for an upcoming work session on long-term capital projects, Supt. Miles reviewed the latest draft with the board.

The transportation long-term plan is fairly complete, while the maintenance/grounds plan is in ongoing updates. Miles said they're putting together a history of roof expenditures. A review is also underway for schedules for custodial equipment replacement and different equipment for better efficiency of staff.

Technology is getting the most attention, certainly among staff, said Miles. The plan is to keep up, not to expand. They're looking at a six-year replacement cycle.

Miles said they feel teacher machines are the current technology priority, with the lab moving into the long-term plan. Any new technology has to be in the replacement schedule. This first draft technology plan will go through the technology committee.

Miles said they've been budgeting around \$30,000 a year in technology, but nothing in the last couple of years.

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Ways in which the education foundation can assist through matching funds in grant applications were also highlighted.

Looking at long-term capital projects in food services, Miles said it would be the goal to see a self-sustaining food service budget to take care of small-piece equipment needs. However, he said this doesn't happen in very many places.

The draft of long-term capital project goals were shared to show the direction headed, in preparation for the upcoming work session.

Revised policies approved on first reading

Five policy revisions were approved on first reading at last week's board meeting.

Topics included: student withdrawal from school/dropout, parental consent, habitually disruptive students, weapons in school and physical examinations.

Supt. Miles emphasized all revisions are due to statutory changes. None were created by the board. He explained if a board-driven policy revision is being considered, there will be much more discussion and public approach to the proposed change.

Other business

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In other business Feb. 2, the Re-1J board:

—approved non-resident student applications and transportation request for elementary students Jasmine and Sebastian Cazares.

—granted use of the new gym for a peewee wrestling tournament March 13 and for Post Prom activities April 24.

—agreed to apply for Type V substitute authorization for Dylon Daniel.

—approved the second reading of the principal evaluation instrument, noting appreciation for the work completed to put it together.

—noted key deliverables for the board’s self reflection on the superintendent’s evaluation will be drafted by two board members for the full board’s review and approval.

—held a two-hour executive session with Supt. Miles at the close of the meeting to review principals’ evaluations and their future employment, as well as the superintendent’s contract.