

## Mill levy override ballot question nears final stage

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

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Proposals for ballot wording in Holyoke School District Re-1J's quest for a mill levy override will be prepared for board consideration at its Aug. 17 meeting.

Supt. Bret Miles gave a mill levy override report at the Aug. 3 meeting, and was given the directive to work with bond counsel to draft two sets of ballot questions for the board's review.

In general, the ballot question will ask voters to approve 7.5 mills for 10 years, which will generate about \$400,000 each year in local property tax.

The board directed Miles to obtain two sets of ballot questions, and they will decide at next week's meeting whether the ballot issue will take the form of one question or two.

In a one-question format, the district will seek 7.5 mills for technology, capital projects and operations.

In a two-question format, one ballot question would seek a 3.0 mill levy override for operating expenses. The second question would ask for 4.5 mills for capital projects and technology.

The sunset provision of 10 years, on each of the questions, provides the first level of accountability. Voters will again be able to determine in 10 years if the school district is still in need of the revenue and if the money was used wisely enough to be renewed.

Board members agreed a five-year sunset is not long enough to complete projects, and tentatively set 10 years as the sunset target for ballot questions.

Much can change in 10 years in the way of school finance, Miles pointed out. The sunset provision allows the public to take another look at the extended funding.

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Supt. Miles recommended going forward with one question, as all three areas of need are great (technology, capital improvements and operating expenses).

He said this format will translate well for the citizen committee who carries the campaign.

While a couple of board members said they had leaned toward two questions, they see the logic in a one-question ballot issue being easier for voters to understand and for the district representatives to campaign on.

Board president Dan Kafka noted one question will not only be easier for the district to communicate to the public, but also for the public to communicate its desires to the board.

With the present assessed valuation in the school district, 7.5 mills would equate to \$418,000. Miles told the board this would represent a property tax increase of \$4.98 per month for a home valued at \$100,000.

For the first time, the State of Colorado will fund Holyoke School District less per pupil than the year before. The reduction from 2009-10 is \$438 per pupil.

This past spring, the district budget and facilities committee which includes staff, parent, business and community perspectives, worked with the district throughout the budget process and recommended pursuing another revenue stream.

Through the committee recommendation, the board has moved to its current stage of taking the funding question in the form of a mill levy override to a vote of the people.