

Mill levy extension is recommended

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

Holyoke School District's Budget and Facilities Committee recommends that the school board seriously consider going to the voters for an extension of the 2010 mill levy override, which will sunset in 2015 without another vote of the people.

The recommendation was heard by the local school board at its April 8 meeting when 2014-15 budget priorities were submitted by the committee.

In making its recommendation, the committee noted that it recognizes that the mill levy override has played an important role in sustaining basic programming during the last four years where state money has dropped significantly due to the district negative factor.

There's a formula in the state statutes and Constitution that stipulates a certain dollar figure for funding for each school district. The past four years, the Legislature has said it doesn't have the money to fund this.

The difference between the funding a school district was supposed to receive, by statute, and what it actually received is called its negative factor.

The negative factor for 2013-14 for Holyoke Re-1J is \$738,782, with a cumulative loss over four years of \$1,902,642.

As a result, it is the view of the Budget and Facilities Committee that an extension of the current mill levy override is essential before considering any recurring costs.

That topic garnered the largest ongoing discussion from the Budget and Facilities Committee when reviewing 2014-15 budget priorities.

Superintendent Bret Miles told the board that the priorities are very consistent with years past

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but also include new statements specific to this year's school finance situation and long-term expectations.

Standing priorities remain much the same. The committee did note that if additional revenue above steps, PERA and health insurance become available, the top priority should be personnel costs.

Understanding that hiring additional staff and increasing compensation of existing staff are both beneficial, the committee encourages that both options be considered if additional funding is available.

While the committee said it supports flexibility with the capital projects budget, it was emphasized that when additional dollars become available, the annual investment in facilities needs to be re-established.

Additionally, the Budget and Facilities Committee supports a continued focus on being creative to generate revenue.

Attracting a larger market share of students in the region will be important as the district wishes to maintain enrollment and sustain programs. The committee encourages the district to allocate resources that promote the district and market the strategic advantages.

Maloney resigns, Powell hired for school counselor position

Citing her desire to stay home with her growing family, JR/SR High guidance counselor Summer Maloney resigned from her position, effective at the end of the current school year.

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Accepting her resignation at last week's board meeting, the board also approved the hiring of JR/SR High English teacher Angela Powell for the counselor position for the 2014-15 school year.

Powell has been working with the Response to Intervention students and Positive Behavior Intervention Support Team for some time and has served with Maloney as the gifted and talented specialist.

In recommending Powell, Principal Susan Ortner said these parts of her job have prepared her well for working with students, parents, teachers and data in the counseling position.

Having a counselor with prior knowledge of the students, school, programs, goals, etc. is in the district's best interest, said Ortner. She also noted that Powell has submitted her application to Lamar University in Texas for the school counseling program, which will begin next fall and will be complete in 18-24 months.

The district has historically filled the counseling position from within and allowed new counselors time to finish degrees in school counseling.

In other personnel action, the board accepted the extra-duty assignment resignation from Ashley Clayton, who is giving up her role as HHS girls' softball coach.

New class rank policy approved

The Class of 2015 will be the first class affected by the new policy for calculating class rank, which was adopted at last week's meeting.

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Emphasis in the new policy will be placed on students who have taken a minimum of five advanced courses/10 credits in core curriculum areas, including English, math (including trig/advanced math), science (including physics) and social science.

Those students will be ranked above the students who don't meet the 10-credit minimum in advanced core curriculum classes.

Students who meet the 10-credit requirement must also have a minimum unweighted GPA of 3.5. Students who meet the 10-credit requirement with a GPA between 3.25-3.49 will be ranked immediately below those with 10 credits and 3.5 or higher GPA.

All other students will fall in place in class rank after that, regardless of upper level credits.

Principals update unified improvement plans

Unified improvement plan updates for Holyoke Elementary School and Holyoke JR/SR High were presented by principals Kyle Stumpf and Susan Ortner, respectively.

Stumpf pointed out that for 2013-14, funds and teachers were reallocated to create three sections of kindergarten and first and second grades for lower teacher-to-student ratios.

Also, this year, the Reading Burst after-school intervention program was introduced for identified students.

A departmentalizing concept was introduced in grades 3-6 to allow teachers to become master educators in specific core content areas, Stumpf noted.

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He also reported that the district is participating in Collaborative Team Time with nine other school districts. He said the professional conversations and collaboration that is taking place has been powerful and very worthwhile.

At the JR/SR High, Ortner said the improvement plan for this year emphasizes they're balancing reading instruction with writing instruction.

New staff was trained in the updated Every Child a Writer program last August, and JR/SR High students are writing for a variety of genres and writing multi-paragraph/essays.

Four staff members are taking Literacy Design Collaborative training this year and have implemented modules into core content curriculum. These modules involve a great deal of critical thinking and problem-solving.

Ortner touted the extreme value of the 75-minute late-start staff time each Friday morning, where data-driven dialogue occurs on a regular basis.

Other business

In other business at the April 8 meeting, the Re-1J school board:

—acknowledged donations for a new scholarship, the Joe and Theresa Ortner Family Scholarship, through their daughter, Dorothy Horrell; and additions to the existing Gracey Memorial Scholarship.

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—added a sixth goal to the strategic plan, Destination 2016. Extra-curricular opportunities is the name of the goal, and it features three specific targets, including strategies and measurement.

—heard from board member Jon King on the upcoming Colorado High School Activities Association Legislative Council meeting.

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