



MORTON
UNIT SCHOOL DISTRICT 709

Aug. 19, 2020

Morton School Board approves first draft of 2021 budget

The Morton School Board on Aug. 18 unanimously approved a tentative budget of \$42.5 million, which reflects additional spending on the district's COVID-19 response, construction projects and wages.

The board quickly adopted the budget during a meeting that lasted but 25 minutes.

The budget has been posted for public review at the district office and will come back for a final board vote on Sept. 22.

The \$42.5 million represents a 7.9 percent increase in spending, measured against \$39.2 million in anticipated revenues. Ample reserves will cover that \$3.3 million shortfall, which is due to the construction at Morton Junior High School.

Beyond the latter, the largest spending jumps were on wages, which are up \$1.2 million, or about 5.7 percent, primarily because of negotiated contract step-ups, the state-mandated increase in the minimum wage, remote learning pay and an anticipated need for more substitute teachers; and on COVID-expenses, which are expected to amount to about \$562,000.

The education fund, the largest of the funds that comprise the budget at \$29.2 million, is expected to come in about \$332,000 under anticipated revenues – “the COVID-related deficit,” in the words of Board Vice President Jeff Schmidgall. However, that could be wiped out by a federal reimbursement of up to 75 percent for pandemic-related costs. A decrease in health insurance costs of just over \$200,000 also should improve the bottom line.

Salaries and benefits take up about 80 percent of the education fund. Meanwhile, nearly 80 percent of the district’s funding comes from local taxpayers, through real estate taxes, with state and federal governments filling in the rest.

Healthy fund balances, a 2020 budget that outperformed projections almost across the board, higher-than-expected investment returns and significant health insurance savings have put District 709 in a position to absorb higher costs.

In other discussion, Superintendent Jeffrey Hill said he’s generally pleased with the rollout of the new school year and the district’s pandemic preparations.

“I’m just really proud of the adjustments we’ve made in the district to keep kids in school,” he said, while complimenting students for stepping up to deal with the new demands being placed upon them, teachers for going above and beyond in managing multiple issues besides educating students, and principals for their extensive preparation, patience and leadership in a trying time.

“You guys have knocked it out of the park,” said Board President Shad Beaty. “The pressure has been on you guys, the optics have been on you guys ... I couldn’t be prouder of our district.”

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