

WCASD School Board Passes 2017-18 Proposed Final Budget

The West Chester Area School District's School Board passed a proposed final budget for the 2017-18 school year of \$244,385,000, a 2.9 percent increase over the current budget. The district is facing a \$6.9 million increase in expenses, and more than \$4 million of that increase is directly related to the following state and federal mandates:

- \$2.7 million increase in state-mandated pension expenses, a 10 percent increase over the current year budget.
- \$1.3 million increase in services for special education students, a 9.4 percent increase over the current year.

The current budget includes a 3.4 percent tax increase for Chester County (about \$127 per average household) and a 3.9 percent increase for Delaware County (about \$163 per average household). The property tax millage rate for West Chester remains one of the lowest in Chester County. The budget uses \$5.4 million from the district's fund balance, leaving approximately \$15.1 million in an undesignated fund balance.

"Unfortunately the increase in mandated special education and pension makes it nearly impossible to avoid a tax increase without making cuts to our programs," said Superintendent Dr. Jim Scanlon. "We have worked very hard to keep our non-mandated operating expenses as low as possible."

The largest part of the school district's budget is salary and benefits. The budget includes a 1.7 percent increase in these areas for 1,400 employees, including the additional staff needed to implement a full-day kindergarten program. The total increase in salary and benefits is about \$2.1 million.

The remaining \$600,000 increase in this year's budget covers books, supplies, utilities, transportation, and other operating expenses.

"The board and administration are working hard to identify some additional savings, and revenue prior to passing the final budget in May," said School Board President Mr. Chris McCune. "We are always trying to balance the student needs, and the tax paying community needs as we find ways to fund the state and federal mandates while funding our own local priorities."

The state imposed Act 1 limit would have allowed the board to increase taxes up to 5.8 percent with the utilization of exceptions in the amount of \$4.6 million for increased special education costs over the past two years, and \$800,000 for increased pension mandates for next year.

However, the board has been looking for ways to absorb these mandated increases to lessen the impact on taxpayers.

The budget will be available for public review for 30 days on the district's website. The school board will vote on the final budget on Wednesday, May 24 at 7:30 p.m. at the Spellman Administration Building.

2017-18 District Tax Rates

Based on the proposed final budget, the real estate tax rate for Chester County will increase by .69 mils over the previous year's budget to 20.784 mils, up 3.4 percent, and the rate for Delaware County will increase by .57 mils to 15.282 mils, an increase of 3.9 percent over 2016-17. The average assessed home value in Chester County is now \$184,410, and the average assessed home value in the Delaware County portion of the district is \$285,700. Assessed value is approximately one-half of a home's actual market value. At a 3.4 percent rate increase, the average tax hike would be \$127 for Chester County residents and \$163 for Delaware County residents. The differences in county average assessments account for formula differences resulting in the differing tax rates.

Ways in which the district has worked to control expenses by \$2.1 million:

- \$1.5 million – Changes made to employee health care including adjustments to Prescription and Medical plans, a new high deductible benefits option, and higher co-pays for all employees.
- \$560,000 – Reduction of seven staff positions through attrition.
- \$100,000 – Budget freeze on non-mandated expenditures.

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