



WEST CHESTER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Educating and inspiring students to achieve their personal best

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WCASD School Board Passes 2018-19 Final Budget

West Chester, PA - The West Chester Area School District School Board passed a final budget for the 2018-19 school year of \$253,401,339, a 3.9 percent increase over the current budget. The district is facing an increase of \$9.6 million in expenses. \$2.1 million of that increase is directly related to growth in student enrollment, and nearly \$4.9 million is tied to the following state and federal mandates:

- \$1.9 million increase in state-mandated pension expenses, a 6.3 percent increase over the current year budget.
- \$2.4 million increase in student-related services for special education, a 13.7 percent increase over the current year.
- \$0.5 million increase in alternative education which includes the expansion of mental health programs at the middle school level, a 3.3 percent increase over the current year.

The budget includes approximately \$1.1 million in salary and benefits for new teaching positions including six teachers at the elementary level, four teachers at the secondary level, one Special Education teacher, and one English Language Learner teacher. The increase in teaching staff is in response to a rise in student enrollment. Since the 2016-17 school year, the District has seen an increase in enrollment of 505 students (1.7%) in grades kindergarten through 12. The budget also sets aside \$1 million in a designated fund balance to offset the anticipated increase in staffing for a new elementary school. The new school, which is slated to open for the 2021-22 school year, is needed due to 2,798 new housing units currently approved within the District.

"The state funding formula does not account for increased enrollment, and we have to plan for that. Our budget has to absorb this cost, as well as increased costs in special education and pension, all while working within the Act 1 limits on tax increases," said Superintendent Dr. Jim Scanlon. "We have to phase the increased enrollment expense in over the next three budget cycles."

The largest part of the school district's budget is salary and benefits. The budget includes a 3.2 percent increase in these areas for 1,400 employees, including the addition of twelve new teachers needed to accommodate student growth. The total increase in salary and benefits is about \$3.9 million.

The remaining \$900,000 increase in this year's budget covers books, supplies, utilities, transportation, debt service and other operating expenses.

The base Act 1 tax increase is 2.4 percent, before going to a referendum on any increases beyond that. However, the district qualified for two exceptions: \$3.1 million to cover excess special education mandates; and \$50,000 to cover pension mandates. Had the board used these exceptions to balance the budget, the tax increase would have been 4.2 percent.

"Our school board Property and Finance Committee and District administration worked very hard to reduce the budget gap while maintaining the integrity of programs, all while we are needing to allocate funds to plan for the unprecedented growth taking place in our district," said School Board President Chris McCune.

The budget calls for a 2.8 percent tax increase for Chester County (about \$109 per average household) and a 5.7 percent increase for Delaware County (about \$247 per average household). The property tax millage rate for West Chester remains the one of lowest in Chester County. The budget uses \$6.6 million from the district's designated fund balance, leaving approximately \$15.7 million in an undesignated fund balance.

"While budgets get more difficult each year, we have to establish our priorities," said board member Gary Bevilacqua. "The board has done an excellent job working with the administration to plan for areas such as school safety, special education costs, technology, and enrollment growth.

2018-19 District Tax Rates

The real estate tax rate for Chester County will increase by .59 mils over the previous year's budget to 21.2723 mils, up 2.8 percent. The rate for Delaware County will increase by .87 mils to 16.0761 mils. An 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 2.8 percent rate increase, the average tax hike would be \$109 for Chester County residents and \$247 for Delaware County residents. The differences in county average assessments account for formula differences resulting in the differing tax rates.

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