

Yantis schools improving security; trustees finalizing budgets

Written by By TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
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With the countdown to the start of school ticking ever closer, Yantis Independent School District has been working toward security and facilities improvements and course structuring to meet House Bill 5 requirements and finances.

The board met this week in a special budget workshop to firm up the budget for approval for the 2014-15 school year.

Superintendent Penny White said there won't be many changes to this year's budget as far as programs and expenses go. It is expected to closely parallel the 2013-14 budget which ends this month.

The 2013-14 budget adopted Aug. 26, 2013, showed projected revenues at \$3,860,632 — \$2,955,464 from local sources and \$905,168 from the state. Expenses in the 2013-14 adopted budget, were anticipated at \$4,025,844 — roughly \$165,212 more than revenues, according to information posted on the district website.

Also, White said, the tax rate is expected to remain the same, although tax bills may go up a little depending on appraisals, which increased 4 percent overall.

The tax rate for at least the last three years has been \$1.13, with \$1.04 designated to maintenance and operations and 9-cents to interest and sinking funds, which are generally referred to as the debt portion of the budget.

Of course, some figures are adjusted as the year progresses, with the budget amended accordingly. If some funds end up finishing ahead of others, for instance, some of those funds can be allocated to a different function in the overall operating budget to help offset other expenses. And, in the case of unexpected expenses — any major unanticipated repair or funds utilized to meet new state or federal requirements, for example — the funds would have to be moved to that account from somewhere else.

The 2014-15 budget will include a 3 percent salary increase for all classroom teachers, wage increases for hourly employees, and a 3 percent increase for instructional aides, all approved last month by trustees.

Also during their July 21 meeting, trustees approved purchase of attendance credits through Texas Education Agency to satisfy requirements of the district's Chapter 41 status. According to White, YISD has been participating in the "Equalize the Wealth" program, often referred to as the Robin Hood plan, purchasing attendance credits from noe school district so that the other gets state credit for the "attendance" or students, which would mean additional funding to YISD. The measure approved by the board this summer simply renews that agreement, according to White.

YISD has also been working this summer to upgrade security. The technology director recently reported that the new security system is "just about completed." Several more cameras are being installed on campus for security monitoring purposes and an "access control" is also being put in. The "access control" will help control flow of visitors onto campuses, making them ring the office to gain entry to the campus.

"Nothing is foolproof, but this is another level to protect our kids," White said. "The board is good to look down the road and try to take into account kids' safety and educational needs. If those needs are not met, students' minds will not be on class and they won't be as successful."

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Trustees, also at their July 21 meeting, approved a flex year waiver to submit to Texas Education Agency and amended board policy EIE local to reflect changes in school testing schedules for grades five and eight. The change suspended portions of the policy “that require students in grades 5 to 8 to meet the passing standards on the mathematics state mandated assessment instruments for those grade levels to be promoted to the next grade.”

District staff have been busy restructuring curriculum and scheduling so that the district meets requirements in House Bill 5. Those changes will be reflected in the new handbooks just as the Code of Conduct will reflect any changes to Chapter 37 of the Education Code.

“The new House Bill 5 affects mostly incoming freshmen. There’s information we’ll have in the [hand]book. It’s still the same for sophomores to seniors. There’ll be extra charts, which will take up a little more space in the book, but we’re working to make it easy to access,” White said.

Essentially HB 5 requires the 2014-15 ninth graders to declare a major and course plan with classes selected toward that focus throughout their high school years.

The district in upcoming board meetings later this month are expected to discuss and consider approving insurance proposals and a finalized handbook.

School staff are also busy performing general maintenance on buildings and grounds to get the district facilities ready for the 2014-15 school year, which begins Monday morning, Aug. 25 for Yantis students. New teachers will report for duty Aug. 12 and all other staff will report beginning Aug. 13.