

SSISD amends current budget by \$1.9 million for rising expenses

Written by By FAITH HUFFMAN, News-Telegram News Editor
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As trustees got ready to approve the 2014-15 tax rate and budget for Sulphur Springs Independent School District this week, they were asked to amend the current budget by \$1,894,343 due to expenses over the original 2013-14 projected budget.

At least two of the expenses were due to unanticipated costs in completing two summer projects, which were otherwise funded with money remaining in some funds at the end of the class year, and others due to uncontrollable expenses such as higher than expected fuel costs.

The SSISD Board of Trustees Monday night approved amending the \$30,917,656 general fund budget for fiscal year 2013-14 by \$1,751,319 to reflect additional expenses. It should be noted, however, that the general fund also generated \$164,162 more in revenues than the \$31,081,140 expected in the FY 2013-14 budget.

At meetings earlier this summer, the school board agreed to spend money left over in some functions for HVAC repairs, purchasing of iPads for some students, graphing calculators to prepare eighth graders for testing requirements and other repair costs. Trustees approved amending the 2013-14 budget to reflect those expenses.

Two projects approved for this summer required additional funding and equipment above the approved rates, including one which displaced Bowie Primary School staff for a few days as they reported earlier this month.

Asbestos abatement and tile installation at Bowie were more extensive than the \$163,000 trustees approved for the project in late June, requiring additional money which required an amendment to the 2013-14 budget.

As one of two campuses still needing carpet replacement — Lamar Primary is the other — Bowie was scheduled to have carpet removed and about 32,000 square feet of new vinyl clad tiles installed after asbestos was removed from the older flooring.

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The project was abated but a problem was discovered when the company arrived to put down the new tile — lack of a moisture barrier.

SSISD Maintenance and Grounds Director Dan Froneberger explained that Bowie, like most schools constructed in the 1950s and 1960s or earlier, didn't have moisture barriers. When the installation crew discovered this, they alerted school officials, who in turn made an emergency call to someone skilled in that area to perform the necessary work.

That, of course, put the project a few days off schedule. In fact, some Bowie staff who reported for duty were displaced for a few days recently while crews worked overtime to finish up the project before classes started Aug. 26.

"Some Bowie teachers were a little grumbly. They were displaced a few days. We got them in. I can't thank Dan and his crew enough for getting this done so quickly," Superintendent Michael Lamb said, noting the maintenance and operation crew worked over the weekend to complete the project.

The other project required more funding for an additional part to complete a software program upgrade and was also approved by trustees earlier this summer.

Trustees gave approval in June for spending of \$21,539 for READ 180 software upgrades and \$20,901 on System 44 licensing. According to McGraw and Lamb, as READ 180 was being installed, staff learned there was one more part that was needed to make it work. In order to get it up and going for use by the start of classes this week, an additional \$125,000 was spent to complete the process.

The food service budget also exceeded the original \$2.3 million approved in the 2013-14 budget by \$137,974 during fiscal year 2013-14, which ends Aug. 31, requiring a budget amendment.

The food service budget was estimated to bring in \$2,226,500, but actually raked in an additional \$21,083, raising the food service revenue from 2013-14 to \$2,247,583. SSISD has a healthy food service program, operating in the black while many schools lose money on the

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program. During regular financial evaluations, auditors have recommended spending more of the food service funds so that the overall fund balance (combination of this year's total balance and the previous year's) isn't quite so big. An additional \$137,974 was allocated and spent from the food service budget for facilities and equipment repair in campus cafeterias.