By Jan Rahn
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A loss in state aid and potential facility improvements factored into the upcoming year's budget figures for Perkins County Schools.

According to Superintendent Tobin Buchanan, much discussion was had on maintaining the minimum general fund levy of .95 required by the state before significant loss in state aid occurs.

During their meeting on Monday, Sept. 14, the board approved a budget of $8,783,442 for the 2009-10 fiscal year, an increase over the 2008-09 budget of $7.6 million. Actual spending during the last fiscal year was $7.1 million.

A .98 cent tax levy (.9500 general fund levy and .0350 special building fund levy) was adopted along with the 2009-10 Total Budget of Disbursements and Transfers.

Although patrons of the district will have the levy one cent lower than the .99 cent tax levy adopted last year, the tax asking increases to $4,969,882 compared to last year's tax asking of $4,179,526.

"We understand we're asking for more tax dollars, but we want to maintain the levy to avoid significant reduction in state aid that could destabilize our levy and force us to play catch up," said Buchanan.

Buchanan said for each penny the levy is set below .95 cents, the school would lose $108,000 in revenue.

"We think that the stimulus money is gone after this year, and with our valuation, we're looking at probable minimal state aid," said Buchanan.

The county's taxable valuation is $504,000,000, which is an increase of $82,000,000 over last year's valuation of $422 million, reflecting a 16 percent increase in valuation across the Perkins County District. The pipeline, valued at $55 million, was a large part of this increase.

The largest increase within the 2009-10 budget for Perkins County Schools occurs in the depreciation fund portion which takes a $710,000 jump over last year. Building and site improvement increases $300,000.

The building/site improvement and depreciation budget are in place for potentially large facility upgrades, said Buchanan.

The school is eventually going to be in need of upgrades to the heating system, lighting and windows, in addition to preserving the exterior of the brick buildings with tuckpointing.

The general fund portion of the new budget totals nearly $6.6 million which reflects an increase of $165,000 above the 08-09 figure in the same fund.

Increases in faculty and staff salaries and benefits contribute to the budget increase by $87,685.

Other comparisons in this year's budget over last year's include:

The lunch fund increases nearly $800 to $198,294 for 09-10.

The special building fund nearly doubled from $382,162 in 2008-09 to $601,246 in this year's budget.

Another significant jump as mentioned before is in the depreciation fund which is $1,003,555 in the new budget. Last year's depreciation fund was $291,854.

The employee benefit fund decreased for the new budget year. It went from $19,972 to $19,412.

The activity fund sees an increase totaling $362,247 which is a jump from last year's figure of $293,522.

Increases in fund budgets, such as the special building and activities funds reflect reserves from prior years.

"While the budgeted amounts allow access to the funds, this should not indicate an intent to spend," said Buchanan.

General Fund Expenditures

The general fund of the 2009-10 budget includes salaries and expenses totaling nearly $6.6 million.

Some of the expenditure include:

• Faculty and student instruction, $3,168,500. This includes salaries (plus retirement and insurance benefits) and supplies.
• Pupil support services, $309,750.
• Staff support services, $125,053.
• Board of Education, $114,000.
• Executive administrative services, $189,020
• Administration, $268,213.
• Building maintenance and operation, $795,460.
• Pupil transportation, $279,721.
• Special ed, $677,616.

District Goals

Buchanan said it's important to have money in place so the district will be in good shape several years down the road. This can hopefully be accomplished by keeping the levy the same.

Buchanan pointed out that over the past two years the buildings have experienced the beginning phases of upgrades and improvements.

He said utilizing the facility review that was conducted last fall as guidance, they have addressed some moisture control issues, gained efficiency, and improved the learning environment for students.

With a good start on the process, the next phase has been budgeted for that may include more efficiency upgrades and possible heating and air conditioning renovations.

"Our goal is to make sure our buildings are in great shape so that little or no state aid and tighter budgets will not have such an impact on the learning and teaching environment of staff and students," said Buchanan.