

No tax increase

Increase in state aid is good news for taxpayers

By Tracy Ouellette
EDITOR

With all the numbers in on property values, state aid and student headcounts, East Troy School District Business Manager Kathy Zwirgzdas recommended a 0 percent tax levy increase for 2017 at Monday night's School Board meeting.

"We got a nice bump in state aid," she told the board during her presentation.

In fact, East Troy schools receive a little more than \$500,000 in increased state aid this year. Zwirgzdas said the reason for the bump in state aid was because there was more money in the pot for all the districts in the state.

"It's still not as much as we had 10 years ago, but it's something," she said.

It also doesn't mean the district has more money to spend.

"It's important to note that this doesn't go toward our budget any," Zwirgzdas said in an interview Monday morning. "School revenue is a combination of state aid and property taxes. When state aid goes up, we have a good tax year, when state aid goes down, we have a bad tax year.

"It doesn't give us any more money to use at the schools, but it does let us keep the levy down, which is good for the taxpayers."

Zwirgzdas said there was a 2.84 percent increase in property values in the district that also helped with the tax levy this year.

She told the board that because there are eight municipalities in the School District the 0 percent increase was an average and some of the municipalities were going to see a small increase on their tax bills while others a decrease, but in general, the levy was remaining flat for the coming year.

When Zwirgzdas presented her recommendation on the 0 percent tax levy increase to the board, she said there was about \$250,000 to \$300,000 of debt payoff worked into the budget.

She said she was recommending keeping the debt payoff in there because in the long run, it would save the district money with reduced interest payments and a shorten loan term. However, she said, it was also a way for the district to offset the blow to taxpayers should the biennial state budget take away state aid funds next February, which has happened in the past.

"It's really the only tool we have to keep the tax levy from spiking year to year," Zwirgzdas said Monday morning.

Counting the kids

With the third week in September headcounts in, Zwirgzdas reported to the board that the district gained five students this year over last year. The overall resident count has the district up 15 students, but because the state takes a three year average when figuring state aid, it means the district increased by five students.

The open enrollment numbers in the district didn't change much from last year there are 81 open enrolled in this year with 211 open enrolled out, last year the numbers were 87 and 211 respectively.

While the district is still losing kids to open enrollment at a 2:1 ratio, Zwirgzdas said she budgeted for slightly higher numbers out and as a result, there is about \$63,000 in the budget for next year that the district can use for other needs.

Student concerns

Student Representative Ben Zess gave a report to the board Monday night about how the student council was looking at improving lunch options at the school and discussing the

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issues with the four-minute pass time between classes.

"Anything you can do with that?" Zess asked with a smile.

Zess told the board the lack of variety in the lunch line and the dislike of many items on the menu were a problem with the student body and they were looking at ways to change it.

High School Co-Principal Kevin Kitslaar told the board the student council would be meeting with the food services director and sampling some new menu items and offering

suggestions.

Zess also told the board that the four-minute pass time between classes, which was reduced from five minutes last year, wasn't long enough for students to get from room to room.

He said with the addition to the school and the shortened length of time, students were having trouble doing anything other than get to class and things like a bathroom breaks now had to be taken during class time.