

WCASD School Board Approves Proposed, Preliminary Budget for 2021-22 School Year

The West Chester Area School District School Board of Directors passed a proposed preliminary, final budget for the 2021-22 school year of \$279,626,763, approximately \$9.8 million increase over the current budget (3.6 percent.) Included in this increase is \$3.1 million in staffing and benefits related to the opening of Greystone, the District's 11th elementary school. Other increases include more than \$3.7 million directly related to the following state and federal mandates:

\$2.3 million increase in state-mandated pension expenses, a 6.5 percent increase over the current year's budget.

\$724,000 increase in tuitions and services for special education students, a 4.7 percent increase over the current year.

\$656,000 increase in transportation expenses for both public and non-public students, 3.9 percent increase over the current year.

The proposed budget includes a 2.8 percent tax increase for Chester County property owners (about \$115 per average household) and a 1.4 percent increase for Delaware County property owners (about \$67 per average household). The property tax millage rates for West Chester remain one of the lowest in Chester County. The District utilized savings from the 2020-21 operations to help offset the millage increases needed for the 2021-22 budget. The District's undesignated fund balance is approximately \$17.1 million.

The largest component of the budget is the salaries and benefits for the District's 1,495 employees which rose \$6.6 million (5.0 percent increase). Included in that increase is \$3.1 million (2.3 percent increase) in additional staffing needed for Greystone Elementary. The 2021-22 budget includes the addition of:

Staffing for Greystone Elementary School including; Principal, Librarian, Nurse, Counselor, 2 Reading Specialists, Caseworker, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, 26 teachers, a Head Custodian and 2.5 office staff.

Staffing for the District in-house Achieve Progress Transition Program (APT) to be located in each of the three high schools, including 3 special education teachers, 3 counselors 1.2 regular education teachers, and 3 paraprofessionals.

.2 Psychologist to accommodate increased caseload at the middle school level

1 Nurse for the Multi Disabled Support (MDS) Program

2 Campus Security Officers

.5 Custodian due to increased square footage as a result of classroom additions at the elementary level.

"Our budget planning includes looking at future expenses due to enrollment growth, as well as future loss in revenues due to reassessments of commercial properties taking place." said superintendent, Dr. Jim Scanlon. "We have also budgeted for additional student services to help address mental health and counseling needs for our students as we all recover from pandemic learning."

The District is projecting a \$1.3 million increase in this year's budget which covers books, supplies, utilities, debt service, and other operating expenses offset by savings of \$1 million in contracted and professional services.

"The board and administration are still reviewing expenses for the 2021-22 school year before a final budget can be approved in May. We are working hard to maintain a balance between meeting the program needs of students and our taxpaying community," said school board president, Chris McCune.

2021-22 District Tax Rates

Based on the proposed final budget, if approved, the real estate tax rate for Chester County will increase by .62 mills to 22.27, an increase of 2.8 percent, and the rebalanced millage rate based on the county-wide reassessment for Delaware County will be 9.61, an increase of 1.4 percent over 2020-21. The average assessed home value in Chester County is now \$189,850, which is approximately one-half of the home's market value. The average assessed home value in the Delaware County portion of the District is \$502,336, which represents 100 percent of the market value. At the proposed rate increase, the average tax hike would be \$115 for Chester County residents and \$67 for Delaware County residents. The differences in county average assessments account for formula differences resulting in the differing tax rates.