

West will hear superintendent's game plan tonight

By [Tim Wagner](#)
STAFF WRITER

AURORA — Aside from the long arm he's cast across every cranny of the West Aurora School District — doing so through more than 100 interviews with community members, several audits and a recent 23,000-household survey — what else does Superintendent Jim Rydland have up his sleeve?

More answers will come tonight at the district's July School Board meeting, which features a meaty agenda. Rydland will unveil plans to restructure the district; board members will receive a demographic profile of the district when representatives from Northern Illinois University project West's growth; an official from School Perceptions will release the survey results; and dialogue will continue on Rydland's "Teaching and Learning" sessions introduced in May and June.

The meeting begins at 5 p.m. at the district's administration office, 80 S. River St.

"When I started as superintendent one year ago, my goal was to make sure we had a good handle on the fundamentals in our district," Rydland said. "Teaching and learning is our purpose and mission."

Some early discussion more than hinted that Rydland is interested in implementing a self-contained gifted program throughout the district, lengthening the school day, adding an extra learning period to make it seven per day at West Aurora High School and enhancing the vocational and special education programs, among others.

Rydland also has been eliminating debt in a district that is forecast to go almost \$3 million in the red by 2008. The district has saved future tax dollars by refinancing bonds to take advantage of low interest rates and save more than \$2.5 million; cutting six administrative positions (saving \$385,000 annually); and applying for and receiving a competitive state grant that will save the district \$50,000 per year in energy costs.

The district also is considering a referendum — seeking the first passage of one in 18 years — which might appear on the November ballot. The School Board likely will vote whether to go forward at the Aug. 21 meeting.

In an introductory letter sent to every West Side household encouraging residents to complete an on-line survey, Rydland wrote: "Despite these ongoing efforts to control costs, we are now projecting a \$1.9 million deficit for 2006-07. Without a voter-approved rate increase, that deficit will swell to approximately \$2.9 million by 2008 and go even higher in future years."

Under the operations portion of the survey, the first two questions read:

- Would you support a 45- to 50-cent rate increase in order to maintain current programs and services? (This would return the tax rate to where it was in 2001 and bring the total increase to between \$150 and \$167 more per year in taxes per \$100,000 in home assessed valuation.)
- Would you support an additional 5-cent increase in order to fund the new teaching and learning initiative? (This would also return the tax rate where it was in 2001 and bring the total increase to between \$167 and \$183 more per year in taxes per \$100,000 in home assessed valuation.)

A demographic section, along with how residents value 23 categories — such as small class size, college prep curriculum, quality instructional and athletic facilities, and programming for at-risk students — appeared on the survey.

"The survey let the community know that we are listening," Rydland said. "We kind of used it as a dipstick to check the oil level."

Nearly 1,300 completed surveys were received, and all results will be released tonight.

"This was one more vehicle we used to identify what the priorities are for this community and to see how the community feels about our student services," Rydland said. "Community members expect us to be responsible, practical and frugal ... they expect their tax dollars to go toward the classrooms."

The district now serves nearly 5,000 more students than it did in 1988 — the last time voters approved a tax-rate increase for the funds that pay for schools' day-to-day operations.

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