

Favorable vote allows West to 'work the plan'

April 19, 2007

By TIM WAGNER STAFF WRITER
Beacon News

AURORA -- West Aurora taxpayers voted "yes" Tuesday when asked to support a tax rate increase.

And School Superintendent Jim Rydland had the same answer Wednesday when asked if the community will remain involved in future decision-making.

"The operating-rate passed, enabling the students of District 129 to have competitive instructional opportunities, and allow us to be a more effective organization," Rydland said. "But this must be reinforced: We are committed to community involvement, and we will continue to collect feedback, listen and make decisions based on what we hear.

"We will be reporting to the community on a regular basis, so we can stay on target and ensure that our use of resources is in concert with what the community has given us."

The 11th-hour passage of the 50-cent tax hike per \$100 of equalized assessed valuation -- a victory decided by just 173 votes -- places the district on a firm financial ground.

Tuesday marked the first time since 1988 that West passed an operating-rate referendum. Attempts in 1995 and 2001 were rejected by West Side voters.

"We now have the opportunity to work the plan," Rydland said.

The plan includes: implementing a refresh cycle on buses, computers and band instruments; installing security systems at district schools; funding the "Teaching and Learning" plan, including an enhanced K-12 science curriculum currently being developed; putting temporary, portable facilities to accommodate overcrowding at Hill, Nicholson, Fearn and McCleery elementary schools; partnering with the East Aurora School District to jointly bid out the districts' special education bus services as one contract; and inviting teachers, who earlier this month received reduction-in-force letters based on economic reasons, back to district classrooms.

"We're now reversing that process by looking at individuals we want to ask back," Rydland said. "Priority No. 1 is to not lose capable staff."

Debbie Nardone, chairman of West Aurora Volunteers for Education -- the citizens referendum support group -- hovered around the computer Tuesday night at the Pine Room at Bliss Creek Golf Course, as the final results were posted. The decision hinged on two precincts that had not reported by 10:15 p.m.

"I've never experienced anything where the tension was that high," Nardone said. "We're excited for the kids -- that's what it's all about."

Though its role is unclear at this point, WAVE figures to maintain a strong presence within the district, Nardone said.

"We'll look to the School Board and ask how we can be of service and where they see us in the future," Nardone said. "Now there are incredible ways to go forward."

twagner@scn1.com