

This tax increase is all inclusive

Dist. 129 leaders says they won't repeat past referendum mistakes

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To avoid repeating past mistakes, West Aurora school officials say they have factored the future into a tax increase request on the April 17 ballot.

The measure includes funds not only to operate facilities built two years ago, but also construction yet to come down the pike, officials say.

So far, the district has not finalized plans for any future referendum efforts. But officials say a bond request could appear on a ballot as early as next spring if voters answer "yes" to this year's referendum.

Unlike bond requests in the past, however, district officials say they won't build new facilities without the money to run them — a practice administrators point to as reason for a \$1.9 million operating fund deficit and this year's tax hike request.

"We can build buildings, but we need to take into account what it costs to heat them, to provide lights for them, to be able to mow the lawn out front," Superintendent James Rydland said. "It's like your own home. If you add square-footage, you increase your operating costs. And that's what has happened to this district."

If approved, this year's tax increase request would be the first for operating money since 1988.

Among other issues, the increase would go toward staffing, security equipment, technology upgrades, utilities and temporary classrooms at crowded schools.

It would cost about \$167 in additional property taxes for the owner of a \$100,000 home in the first year, and about \$500 for the owner of a \$300,000 home.

The district already has outlined cuts that would eliminate 44 teacher jobs, 84 staff support positions, 12 administrators and three transportation workers should the tax hike request be rejected. Some but not all of those positions may survive if the measure is successful.

In addition, the district has cut more than \$4.2 million in spending by eliminating administrator posts and refinancing bonds. While those efforts have helped the schools chug along without new operating money, Rydland said basics, such as well-maintained facilities and up-to-date textbooks, are still lacking.

"We're talking about things you need to operate schools and support our staff," he said. "I call those fundamentals — not frills."

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