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School board takes first look at tonight's meeting

By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

In a regular meeting tonight at 6:30 p.m., the USD 480 School Board will tackle the usual mixture of district business — directors' reports, hiring decisions and the material matters that keep Liberal's schools running smoothly. The evening doesn't wind down with small loose ends, however: the agenda also includes the first of this year's budget workshop materials, a 113-page document listing all the financial details for school year 2013-14.



Prepared by finance director Jerry Clay, the report features multiple charts and graphs to explain where the district's money originates and how it is to be divvied up. Despite the upward trend in student enrollment, the district's budget for the coming year shows only a slight increase in funding requirements. The total proposed budget for 2013-14 comes in at \$30,810,313, up \$218,766 from the previous year. The not-quite-a-quarter-million-dollar increase totals less than 1 percent.

District budget increases by less than 1 percent

Tuesday, 23 July 2013 10:21

Other USD 480 business on the agenda tonight includes regular reports from new administrators: superintendent of schools Paul Larkin, deputy superintendent Renae Hickert and director of human resources Jason McAfee. Employment, resignation and transfer reports continue to flow in as the district fills teaching positions and auxiliary jobs.

New business includes discussion of several enhancement opportunities for students of various ages. Among them is a partnership with the city-operated robotics program, based at the Mid-America Air Museum. Though free robotics programs are also available for students through the Seward County 4H program, the city seeks to provide materials for each of Liberal's six elementary schools and its two intermediate schools. The city has also proposed the provision of a \$2,000 stipend for a college-level intern to staff the programs. According to the memo, the programs may take place at the schools, or at MAAM, and they may occur during school hours or as afterschool programs, depending upon what schools prefer.

At Liberal High School, thanks to a \$7,500 grant from the Cooper Clark Foundation, a Youth Entrepreneurs program is slated to begin soon.

Finally, the district's ongoing after-school tutoring and enhancement programs, "BEST," "ROCK" and "SOAR," for McDermott and Southlawn Elementary Schools, Cottonwood and Sunflower Intermediate Schools, and Garfield and Lincoln Elementary Schools, have received funding through a special state program. By setting up "21st Century Community Learning Centers," the district qualifies for about a quarter of a million dollars in funding, which must be spent on the three projects before June 2014.

Tonight's board meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Education Service Center, 624 N. Grant Ave. The agenda, including a copy of the 113-page budget, may be viewed on the district website, www.usd480.net.

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