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By JESSICA CRAWFORD

- Daily Leader

A budget workshop was conducted prior to USD No. 480's regular board meeting Monday evening. After a reduction of \$1,587,302 compared to last year's budget, the board approved publishing the budget with local media by July 31. The final approval of the budget will take place at the Aug. 10 board meeting.

With a general fund of \$28,527,178 up for approval, the board does have the opportunity, prior to the Aug. 10 meeting, to make changes to the budget.

In order to make the cuts possible, according to director of business and finance Jerry Clay, several items have been cut to reach the final number. He said the State of Kansas has cut funds \$182 per student – that is why the budget must be cut \$1.5 million.

The purchase of textbooks and technology upgrades have been deferred, each taking \$200,000 off of the budget. Another \$60,000 will be saved in software purchases and \$100,000 in general education supplies. Any purchases of buses or vehicles have been deferred as well, deducting \$150,000 from the proposed budget.

“The previous year we have built into our budget higher electrical costs and gas cost, utility and oil has dropped,” Clay explained. “If things stay the way they are now, everybody can live with what I have budgeted.”

“I am using the past year’s numbers as my base,” he continued. “I have upped it a little because it was a mild winter last year – I don’t know what next winter will do.”

Clay did state that if enough funds are not available to cover utility and gas costs, the remaining funds will come from the contingency reserve fund.

“This gives us a budget we can all function on,” Clay said. “We can pay our salaries, our utility and fuel costs and our basic general supply budgets for the buildings.

“Last year if buildings wanted extra money, we could find it,” Clay continued. “This year is going to be tight. I am going to be saying ‘no’ a lot more this year.”

The district has one last chance to raise the budget and that is with actual student head counts. On Sept. 20, if the count is higher than last year, state aid can go up, therefore making up for some of the

\$1.5 million difference in the budgets between this year and last year.

The mill levy, Clay said, will be raised due to the loss of state aid. Last year’s mill rate was 39.049, and this year, it has been raised to 41.537. The mill levy will go up approximately a mill and a half to make up for the drop in assessed valuation.

“This is the number the public and everybody wants to know,” Clay said. “What is the mill levy going to be next year for USD No. 480?”

“Part of this is due to decrease in assessed valuation,” he explained. “Our local option budget stays the same but it takes an additional mill to make those dollars back because assessed valuation dropped.”

Clay explained that although the mill levy must go up about a mill and a half, that is just to make up the difference in loss of money in assessed valuation. He assured the board it was not being raised due to higher spending. He again explained the lack of state aid, due to the economy, is the reason the mill must be raised.

“Our mill levy over the last four years has went down,” Clay said.

“This is the first time it has went up in five years.”

Kevin Greishar of DLR Group was once again in front of the board of education in order to discuss with them the prospect of another bond issue. Although all board members will not vow to support a bond issue if one were to come before them, they did form a committee with the intent of better conveying to the voters the needs of the district in order to possibly get the public behind another bond issue.

“We need to educate the community,” board member Nick Hatcher said.

“They deserve to know where they are at and what kind of shape that they are in.”

With the primary focus this time around on the elementary schools, the board suggested open houses to better inform the community of the condition of the schools throughout the district.

“It’s necessary,” board member Tammy Sutherland-Abbott said of the need for improvements and repairs a bond issue would bring. “That’s the bottom line.”

Following the indecision two weeks ago, without missing a beat, the board quickly selected a vice president to serve the district. Dan Diepenbrock surprisingly nominated Dr. Jim Jury. Reid Petty nominated Cheryl Louderback for a second term as vice president. With a vote of four to three, Jury was selected as vice president of the board of education.

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