

Chalkboard

By

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Part 3. For first time or occasional readers, the first two parts of this *Chalkboard* series have dealt with the issues involved in the school district asking its citizens to approve a 5-mill increase in the local tax rate in support of a building program. The facilities to be built, if the increase is approved, will be a new elementary school, classroom additions to the high school, and classroom additions to the middle school.

Last week's article attempted to answer the question of **“So if we are building a new elementary school, what will we do with the old one?”** In short, the answer was that the “free space” left by the Intermediate or Primary school moving across town would initially be absorbed by the other and future plans included the space possibly being used as a District In-School Suspension classroom, district storage, a vocational campus, or a possible satellite campus for one or more of the local universities. This week's piece seeks to answer the question, **“So what about all that money the state put into education by raising the sales tax? Why aren't we using that to build new facilities?”**

That is a fair question in light of the fact that the money the state will send Gentry Public Schools increased almost \$ 1,000,000 from last year to this new school year. Last school term the Gentry District received \$3,618,905 in State Equalization Funding. By a different name, the district is scheduled to receive \$4,656,309 in State Foundation Funding. (I note I am limiting, for purposes of space, this explanation to unrestricted state funds. “Unrestricted” means the local district has some discretion on how the money will be spent.)

So how will that extra million be spent? \$383,270.43 went to mandated increases in the certified salary fund. Tag another \$325,240.36 to increases in classified salaries and increased cost in FICA, Insurance, Worker's Compensation, Unemployment, and similar benefits for both classified and certified. Add on \$ 34,006.75 for the scheduled increase to retiring existing bonded debt. That leaves the district with about \$257,482.46 “extra” as compared to last year's state revenue to spend on increased costs in operating the physical plant and transportation fleet. Should you add up the expenses for salaries, operation of the plant, capital

expenditures, and debt service expenditures of the district for last year, the total is \$7,790,180.91. \$257,482.46 is about 3.31% of that amount.

An equally important point to consider is that this one-year large increase in state funding is just that- a one-time increase based on the new state school funding formula. The manner in which that increase was allocated to be spent by the district, in all practicality, “locked” it to that type of expenditure for the future.

For the record, since the district is asking you for additional money, let me summarize the district’s budget for you for the current year. \$4,230,606.52 will be expended for certified salaries. \$5,317,363.71 will be spent for classified salaries, salary “matching parts” for all employees, a loan payback, and operational expenses to keep the buildings open and the buses running. \$695,843 will be expended for scheduled existing bonded debt payments. \$819,063 will be spent in the federal programs. An estimated \$400,000 will be run through the four campuses activity funds. Another estimated \$400,000 would be spent in the food services program. \$123,407.23 is budgeted to be spent from the existing building fund balance, and \$57,000 has been budgeted for capital outlay. That all adds up to a little more than twelve million dollars.

I invite you a third time to the regular school board meeting to be held a week early on September 13, 2004, at the middle/high school cafeteria. As noted for the last two weeks, included within the regular order of business, the Annual Report to the Public will be presented, the district’s Teacher Of The Year will be named, the candidates for the contested board seat will be invited to speak, and the architects will be present to give an update on the proposed building program. Being a regular meeting, you will have the opportunity to voice your opinion during the “Public Comments” item on the agenda.