

W. Aurora schools pursue spring vote

By John Johnston

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West Aurora School District 129 hopes that open and frank dialogue will lead to a successful referendum request this spring.

The school board Monday approved a referendum question for the April 17 ballot that would ask for an additional \$.50 on \$100 equalized assessed value.

For the owner of a \$100,000 house, that would mean a property tax increase of more than \$165 the first year. Taking appreciation into account, the increase would be more than \$400 in the fourth year, officials said.

The money would be used for operating expenses, such as paying bills and refreshing large equipment and technology. The district is about \$2 million in the red this year and projects the deficit to increase to \$3 million next year.

“This is a responsible, moderate increase that will help us move forward,” Superintendent James Rydland said. “We need to support the buildings we have.”

“With some respect, our future is at stake,” board member Laurie Hoffman said, “We can’t sustain what we have right now, let alone raise standards for our kids.”

The district knows it will have to get its message out if it has any chance to gain more money.

Building off experience gained from more than 60 public forums to make the case for more money, Rydland said the open communication will continue with the creation of a citizens committee.

Debbie Nardone, head of the Fearn Elementary PTA and parent of two children in the district, has been tapped to lead the committee, and she said there were already several people who expressed interest. No meeting dates have been set, but she said the committee will get to work soon.

“This is an excellent opportunity to get information out to the citizens of Aurora. Communication is needed to let people know West Aurora has needs,” Nardone said.

If the referendum passes, the extra money would bring portable classrooms to Fearn, which is over capacity in its sixth year, Nardone said.

Board member Allyson Herget said the forums piqued community interest, and she would like that to continue.

“We need to make sure the community knows we value their input and want it to continue,” she said.

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