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School budget passes with late addition

Federal funds stir debate

By Sara Cunningham • scunningham@courier-journal.com • October 6, 2010

After some last-minute wrangling, a divided Oldham County school board approved a \$110 million working budget at its Sept. 27 meeting.

School board members had expected to vote on a \$107.5 million budget, but more than \$2 million in federal funding was added at the "last minute," prompting Walt Schumm and Larry Dodson to vote no.

Board members Joyce Fletcher, Kevin Woosley and Jennifer Jones approved the budget.

The district increased the budget by more than \$2 million to reflect its share of nearly \$135 million in federal "Edujobs" funding coming to Kentucky schools, said Chuck Litrell, the district's finance officer and treasurer.

The "Edujobs" funding bill, which includes a total of about \$10 billion to be allocated across the country, was signed into law in August by President Barack Obama, and Gov. Steve Beshear applied for Kentucky's share in September. Individual districts weren't given information about what they should expect until Sept. 20, after the Oldham district had completed a draft of its working budget, Litrell said.

The money is supposed to be used to save

education jobs, but the full list of requirements and limitations hasn't been handed down, Litrell said. But school districts are supposed to include the money in their budgets, which are supposed to be filed with the state by Sept. 30, Litrell said.

Dodson said he blames the state and not the district for the last-minute change, but said he couldn't vote for a budget that included such a large change without more time to think it over.

The other major change to the budget since April, when board members discussed a tentative budget of about \$105 million, was the addition of about \$2.2 million the district is expecting to generate in property tax revenue. The board voted in August to raise the property tax rate by 2 cents to 68.9 cents per \$100 of assessed value for real estate and personal property.

When the rate increase passed, Superintendent Paul Upchurch said the



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money hopefully would help the district restore its 22-to-1 student-teacher ratio and allow the district to raise teacher salaries.

The \$110 million budget includes a 1.15 percent raise for classified and certified staff, in addition to step increases staff members already get.

Schumm said he didn't like the extra \$2 million being added from the federal funding, but he probably wouldn't have voted for the \$107.5 million budget anyway because he preferred the \$105 million budget discussed in April. Schumm also was the only school board member to vote against raising the tax **rate** in August.

"I didn't vote for the tax increase, so it wouldn't have made sense for me to vote for a budget that included it," Schumm said.

He said he also agreed with Dodson about the federal funding being too last-minute. During the vote, Schumm called the funding "fiscally irresponsible" and a bribe, saying it would allow the federal government more control over local school boards.

"I think it makes us look foolish to accept it," Schumm said. "I definitely think letting us know about the **money** last minute puts us in an unfair position."

Litrell also was frustrated about the timing, but said the funds could help the district.

"It's the first time in 16 years that I've had

to do the budget twice, but these funds are out there to help kids."

Reporter Sara Cunningham can be reached at (502) 582-4335.



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NO, I have some rules!

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