

Oldham Era
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School district prepares to tighten a tight belt

By Glypie Grider

Though Oldham County Schools completed the 2009-10 fiscal year in an improved financial position — up \$427,500 from the previous year — district treasurer Chuck Littrell cautions that “darker times” may be ahead.

Littrell said the state may not be able to replace stimulus funds set to expire in 2011.

For the moment, however, Littrell said he is “cautiously optimistic.”

Littrell attributes the district’s improved finances to the effects of three federal stimulus fund initiatives.

State stabilization funds brought \$3.3 million to the district, but will be reduced to \$2.7 million for FY 2011. The promised state support for FY 2012 will be known in the spring of 2011 at the completion of the legislative session.

Additional federal support for special education and preschool brought in \$1.2 million and more than \$81,000, respectively, and is expected to continue at the same level for the next academic year.

“But we will see a time when stimulus funds will be retracting,” Littrell told members of the board Monday evening. “There’s potential for them to go offline in about nine months. My challenge to you in future years it to take care of Oldham County while things try to get back on course.”

Littrell reminded board members that property taxes for the county “are very flat,” bringing in only \$137,000 in additional revenue (0.6 percent) above FY 2009.

“Despite your politics, it’s not deemed good policy to run your business at a deficit,” Littrell said.

To help counterbalance the financial impact of the recession, Littrell said the district increased the student-to-teacher ratio from 22- to 23-1.

“Although our ending balance may look good, we’ve had to increase the class size and keep salaries to a minimum,” Superintendent Paul Upchurch said. “This stimulus package was just one-time money and doesn’t fix the real issues,” he said.

Though a representative from the Oldham County Educational Foundation said its group has already raised \$55,000 for the 2010-11 academic school year, and the board approved fundraising requests from schools in the district to total slightly more than \$3 million, Littrell said Oldham’s financial future rests primarily with the state legislature.

In a July 14 press release, state budget director Mary Lassiter said they’ve reviewed the budget seven times during the past two-and-a-half years, and they’re in the process of cutting again.

Lassiter has already asked heads of state agencies to identify new areas to cut, and Gov. Steve Beshear announced a plan to furlough state workers for a savings of \$24 million.

"I've been working here for the past 17 years," Littrell said. "I've never been this concerned."

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