

Edwardsville School Board puts tax increase on the ballot

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EDWARDSVILLE - The **Edwardsville Board of Education** voted unanimously to place a tax increase on the Nov. 8 ballot at their Aug. 22 meeting.

The district is currently operating on a \$4 million deficit, despite many budget cuts and reforms. It estimates the current school year will end with it being \$6.7 million in the red. This will force the district's hand and cause them to have to borrow from taxpayers using various tools at their disposal. A proposal to issue as much as \$10 million in bonds

was dropped in 2015 after petitions collected from voters in the district would force the motion to a public vote.

Estimates from the district put an additional monthly cost of just over \$20 for each home with an assessed value of \$150,000, if the initiative passes.

"At its Monday, August 22 meeting, the District 7 Board of Education took an important step toward ensuring future financial stability and maintaining academic excellence," **Edwardsville Superintendent Dr. Lynda Andre** said in a statement. "The Board unanimously approved a resolution that will place a request for an Education Fund tax rate increase of \$0.55 on the November 8, 2016 General Election ballot."

Andre said the additional funding will be used to replace aging textbooks and update curricula, replace failing school security systems, upgrade building technology infrastructure to support student access to technology, restore the technology replacement cycle, maintain existing elementary, middle and high school performing arts programs and maintain existing middle and high school athletic programs.

"This rate provides the revenue necessary to operate District 7 with its current level of programs and services and is only possible with the commitment that the Board and administration consider annual expenditure reductions as opportunities become available or as needed to balance the budget," she said in a statement.

Reasons behind the current budget shortfall, according to Andre's comments, include revenue shortfalls caused by eight years of declining state revenue and stagnation of local property tax revenues. If it passes, Andre said the tax increase will ensure the district has a balanced budget by June 2019, as required by the **Illinois State Board of Education**.

"Without these additional funds, the District may be subject to “**Certification of Financial Difficulty**” by the Illinois State Board of Education, which allows the state to exercise its authority to assume financial oversight of the school district, thereby removing local control," Andre said.

Since 2009, District 7 has been on the **State’s Financial Watch List**.

According to Andre's comments from Aug. 23, the Edwardsville School District currently has 476 teachers and certified staff members serving 7,540 students in 13 schools on 15 campuses. To address these enrollment needs, the district added 7.5 additional certified staff positions at the elementary level, at a cost of an additional \$350,000 to the schools growing expenses. These additions increased the projected Education Fund deficit to \$2.7 million.

That \$2.7 million annual cost is in addition to a \$1.7 million annual cost to eliminate the June 2017 Education Fund operating debt of \$6.7 million by June 2021 and building cash reserves by 2022, \$1.5 million annual cost to allocate sufficient funding for annual increases in expenditures such as contracts, salaries, software and food and a \$1 million annual cost to address academic, technology and security needs.

To remedy this growing crisis, the Edwardsville Board of Education has reduced operating expenditures by more than \$14 million, depleted cash reserves of \$9 million, refinanced a portion of the district's outstanding debt, instituted salary freezes for all employees, approved the issuance of \$9 million in Working Cash Bonds in Dec. 2013 and depleted cash reserves on June 30, 2016.