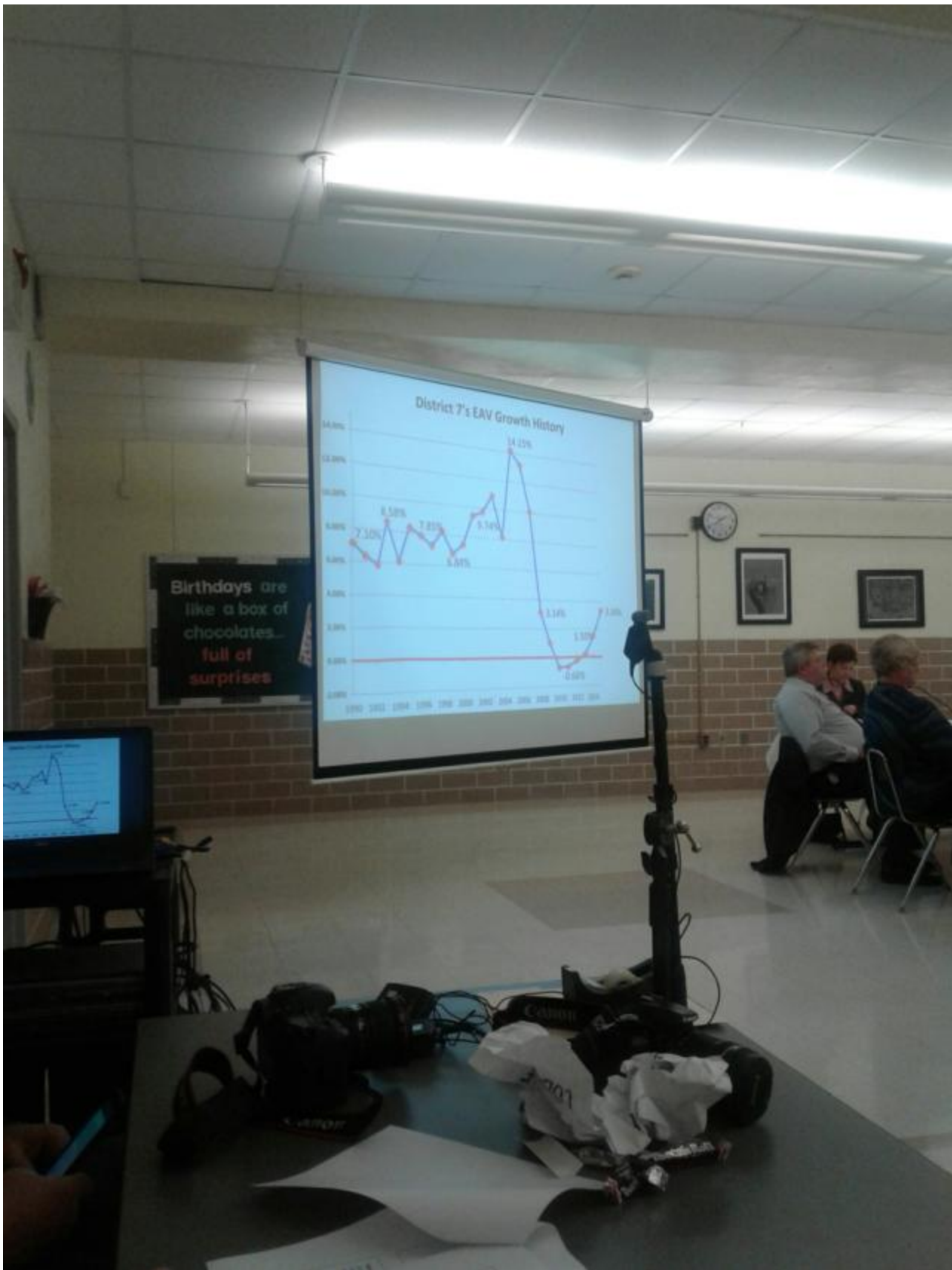




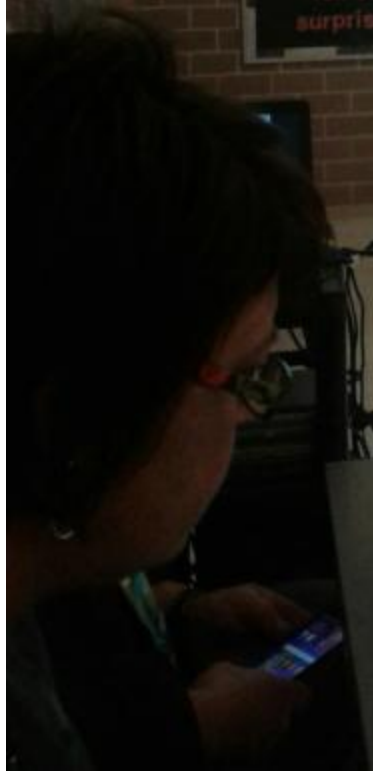
Edwardsville School District reveals possible cuts if referendum doesn't pass

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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Birthdays are
like a box of
chocolates...
full of
surprises



EDWARDSVILLE - At the Monday, Feb. 13, meeting of the **Edwardsville Board of Education**, **Edwardsville Superintendent Lynda Andre** revealed a list of possible cuts if a proposed tax referendum cannot pass an **April 4, 2017**, ballot.

If the referendum, which proposes a property tax increase of 55 cents per \$100 (from \$4.22 to \$4.77), does not pass, Andre said several programs through all levels of education will be forced to be cut from the 2017-18 school year. The referendum, which is nearly identical to **Proposition E**, a referendum voted down by citizens of the district by a 1,076 vote margin (14,517 to 13,441). Andre hopes this current push will change the minds of many taxpayers who might have voted against it in Nov. 2016.

The cuts being considered in case the referendum does not pass are as follows:

All Ninth Grade Sports

- Football
- Boys' Soccer
- Girls' Volleyball
- Boys' Golf
- Boys' Basketball
- Girls' Basketball
- Baseball
- Girls' Soccer
- Field Hockey
- Boys' Track
- Girls' Track
- Wrestling
- Girls' Golf

All Middle School Athletics

- Baseball
- Boys' Basketball
- Boys' Track
- Boys' Volleyball
- Football
- Wrestling
- Poms/Dance
- Cheerleading
- Cross Country
- Field Hockey

- Girls' Basketball
- Girls' Track
- Girls' Volleyball
- Softball

Performing Arts

- Eliminate fourth-grade band
- Eliminate fifth-grade band
- Eliminate fourth-grade orchestra
- Eliminate fifth-grade orchestra
- Reduce Edwardsville High School drama performances to one per year
- Reduce middle school drama performances to one per school per year

50 Percent of Middle School Extracurricular Activities

- Act 1
- Art Club
- Computer Club
- Ecology Club
- Future Farmers of America
- FIT/GO
- Intramurals
- Math Team
- Model UN
- Newspaper
- Robotics
- Scholar Bowl
- Science Club
- Yearbook
- Young Authors

50 Percent of High School Extracurricular Activities

- Computer Team
- Debate
- Environmental Club
- EPIC
- Interact Club
- Key Club
- Literary Magazine
- Math Team

- Model UN
- National Honor Society
- Newspaper
- Prom
- Student Council
- Thespian Club
- Yearbook

All Elementary Extracurricular Activities

- Elimination of Elementary Math Club

Andre said the entire list was "not something she wanted to see happen." She blamed the need for the cuts on both 2016's failed referendum vote and current funding situations within the district. A steady decline of both property values and state funding has resulted in a very dire situation for the Edwardsville School District, which has been on the **Illinois State Board of Education's Financial Watch List** since 2009.

In a PowerPoint presentation given to the board by Andre, Andre outlined the factors leading to this decline, including 95 percent of the district's revenue sources being on a decline for the past nine years. State funding to the district, according to the presentation has been an estimated \$7 million a year, leading to a cumulative loss of \$53.6 million in funding since 2008. Annual state funding has declined from \$16,724,328 in 2008 to \$9,592,230 in 2016.

Property taxes have also declined.

"In the years of significant EAV (equalized assessed value) growth prior to 2008, the district was able to absorb increased operational costs associated with increasing enrollment and new schools," Andre said in her presentation. "Since 2009, the district's EAV growth stagnated near zero, resulting in property tax revenues collected for the Education Fund remaining essentially unchanged.

In a line graph given in the presentation, the district's EAV growth was having steady and stable ups and downs from 7.1 percent in 1990 to a peak of 14.15 percent in 2005. After falling slightly from 2005-2008, the graph descends to 3.14 percent in 2008 and begins to decline in 2010-2011 with a negative growth of 0.66 percent. Currently, the graph is on a slight increase again at 3.34 percent.

Unfortunately for the district, the decline of EAV numbers does not correlate with enrollment numbers. Andre said enrollment numbers have hovered around 7,500 every year, with this year having an estimated 7,600 students on 15 different district campuses.

Besides the cuts listed above, Andre said the district will not be able to make significant and needed upgrades, including replacing all textbooks in core academic areas, maintaining the curriculum development cycle, installing building-wide Wi-Fi access at high school and middle schools, maintaining technology replacement cycle, updating school security systems and maintaining necessary cash reserves.

Those cash reserves were depleted in 2013, after beginning that depletion in 2009. The district had \$9 million in cash reserves. The district also reduced more than \$14 million in operating expenditures by reducing 101 positions. Salaries of all employees in the district are also currently frozen.

Despite those measures to reduce expenditures, the State of Illinois is conducting financial monitoring of the district since 2015-16 school year, due to a 2014-15 audit conducted. The district may soon receive a Certification of Financial Difficulty from the state. Once that occurs, Edwardsville District #7 may be subject to financial oversight by the State of Illinois as soon as June 2019 if a balanced budget cannot be reached.

To remedy that possibility, which Andre said would not be in anyone's best interests, she and the board are submitting a proposition to the April 4, 2017 ballot petitioning for an education fund tax measure.

"The education fund is responsible for everything you can see and touch inside of a school," Andre said. "All the supplies, teachers, anything is paid for through the education fund."

Andre said the district will be working at a \$6.7 million deficit, assuming the state pays its outstanding payments to the district - an ability Andre described as "increasingly in doubt." Currently, the state owes the district approximately \$2.6 million for both the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years. It has yet to pay the district any mandated categorical payments, which goes toward special education and transportation. It has given the district only three of eight Early Childhood payments as well.

The state has indicated to school districts that "due to a current backlog of state bills totaling \$11 billion, the district should only expect two of the four mandated quarterly categorical payments this year," according to the presentation.

Andre said the total cost of maintaining the current quality of education in the Edwardsville School District would be \$6.9 million annually or an increase for \$0.55 per \$100 of EAV. Even with that increase, the tax rate of the Edwardsville School District would be lower than most in **Madison County**, with the exception of **Collinsville**, but including **Alton**.

