



WEST CHESTER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Educating and inspiring students to achieve their personal best

Dr. James R. Scanlon, Superintendent of Schools

Contact: Jennifer Neill
Telephone: 484-266-1170
Email: jneill@wcasd.net
Website: www.wcasd.net

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WCASD School Board Passes 2018-19 Proposed Final Budget

West Chester, PA - The West Chester Area School District's School Board passed a proposed final budget for the 2018-19 school year of \$253,778,000, a 4.1 percent increase over the current budget. The district is anticipating a \$9.9 million increase in expenses, and more than \$4.3 million of that increase is directly related to the following state and federal mandates:

- \$1.9 million increase in state-mandated pension expenses, a 6.3 percent increase over the current year budget.
- \$1.8 million increase in tuitions and services for special education students, a 12.8 percent increase over the current year.
- \$600,000 increase in charter school tuitions, a 5.6 percent increase over the current year.

The current budget includes a 3.2 percent tax increase for Chester County (about \$127 per average household) and a 6.1 percent increase for Delaware County (about \$265 per average household). The property tax millage rates for West Chester remains one of the lowest in Chester County. The budget uses \$6.3 million from the district's fund balance, leaving approximately \$15.7 million in an undesignated fund balance.

The largest part of the school district's budget is salary and benefits. The budget includes a 2.9 percent increase in these areas for 1,400 employees, including the addition of five new teachers needed to accommodate student growth. It also includes \$1 million set aside for staffing in preparation for the opening of a new elementary school in 2020. The total increase in salary and benefits is about \$3.7 million.

"Because we anticipate the need for approximately \$3.3 million in additional staffing due to enrollment increases over the next four years, we have to begin to plan for that. We will not be able to generate that amount of money in one budget year due to limits on tax increases," said Superintendent Jim Scanlon. "We have to phase this expense in over the next three budget cycles."

The District is projecting a \$900,000 increase in alternative education expenses which includes the expansion of mental health programs at the middle school level. The remaining \$1.0 million increase in this year's budget covers books, supplies, utilities, debt service, transportation, and other operating expenses.

“The board and administration will continue to work to identify additional revenue and savings prior to passing our final budget in May,” said Gary Bevilacqua, chair of the Property and Finance Committee. “The federal and state mandates such as rising costs for special education, and pension continue to be large contributors to this year’s budget.”

The state imposed Act 1 limit would have allowed the board to increase taxes up to 4.2 percent with the utilization of exceptions in the amount of \$3.2 million for increased special education costs over the past two years. However, the board has been looking for ways to absorb these mandated increases to lessen the impact on taxpayers.

“One of our challenges is to balance rising special education costs and our obligation to our students with our need to control taxes,” said board president Chris McCune.

The budget will be available for public review for 30 days on the district’s website. The school board will vote on the final budget on Wednesday, May 29 at 7:30 p.m. at the Spellman Administration Building.

2018-19 District Tax Rates

Based on the proposed final budget, the real estate tax rate for Chester County will increase by .67 mills over the previous year’s budget to 21.3557 mills, up 3.2 percent, and the rate for Delaware County will increase by .93 mills to 16.1391 mills, an increase of 6.1 percent over 2017-18. The average assessed home value in Chester County is now \$189,250, and the average assessed home value in the Delaware County portion of the district is \$285,700. Assessed value is approximately one-half of a home’s actual market value. At the proposed rate increase, the average tax hike would be \$127 for Chester County residents and \$265 for Delaware County residents. The differences in county average assessments account for formula differences resulting in the differing tax rates.

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