

Riverdale School District sets Tax Levy at Annual Meeting

On Wednesday, October 22nd, the Riverdale School Board held its Annual Meeting to report on the 2024-2025 financial year end and presented the projected 2025-2026 school year's budget. During this meeting and the special board meeting following the Annual Meeting, the Riverdale School District set the tax levy and approved the 2025-2026 school year budget.

The Riverdale School District's 2024-2025 year finished with a deficit of \$229,354.50. The budget deficit was due to increased service costs and a reduction in revenue.

The total budget for Riverdale Schools for the 2025-2026 school year for all funds is \$14,465,301. Fund 10, our general fund, is projected to have a \$2,976 surplus. Projected revenues in Fund 10 are estimated at \$11,682,825. Revenues that are projected to increase for the 2025-26 school year are per-pupil aid from \$11,325 to \$11,681.63 per student, state aid is up \$122,816, open enrollment is up \$80,608, and grant funding for rural schools and mental health is steady at \$67,000.

Projected expenses for fund 10 are estimated at \$11,679,849. Expenses projected to increase are full-time positions for teaching staff and the Special Education transfer increase of \$86,100 for a total of \$942,682. Open enrollment out increased by \$86,100 from last year. Salaries and benefits will increase by \$504,555 for the 2025-26 school year. The district's property and general liability insurance policies decreased by \$8,121 for 25-26.

A couple of maintenance projects continue to be deferred for multiple years, with review at a committee meeting later in the year. One project that the district is moving forward with is replacing the maintenance sheds at the high school. The project should begin this spring, with \$30,000 budgeted for excavating and a cement pad for a new shed next to the practice football field. Replacing the old sheds will help the district complete the secure fencing around the JH/HS. The other large project not initially included in the 25-26 budget was the reconstruction of the track. The track project finished in the fall and cost \$255,000.

Immediately following the Annual Meeting, the Riverdale School Board approved the tax levy of \$4,552,560 at the special board meeting and the 2025-26 school year budget. The equalized property value increased by \$62,380,753 to \$604,309,485. The school district's mill rate will be \$7.53.

The district is operating in a small surplus for this school year thanks to the community's support of an operating referendum in April 2025. The district saw a 5% increase in benefits this year and will have a 6% increase next year. Negotiations for the next three-year cycle of benefit increases will begin this year.

Another area where the district saw an increase in expenses is the funding of private school vouchers. The district had an increase of \$90,919 this year, from \$97,121 last year to \$188,040 this year. This

money is taxpayer money given to students living in the district who attend private schools. The district is not notified of this amount until October 15 of each school year.

Wisconsin state public school funding continues to lag behind the cost of basic expenses and inflation. The funding formula froze schools in 1993 at a rate per student still in place today. Schools that were financially responsible at that time continue to lag behind higher spending districts since 1993. The amount per student at Riverdale this year is \$11,681, which is in the bottom tier of the CESA. Riverdale is ranked 27 out of 31 schools in CESA 3. To compare the top two receiving districts in CESA 3 is Potosi, which receives \$16,224 per student, and Highland, with \$15,791 per student. Pectanica, Iowa Grant, and Barneveld receive over \$14,000 per student.

This year, the state government decided not to increase the equalized state aid amount. It stayed steady, directly impacting the amount needed to levy from the district taxpayers. The main burden for funding the district falls on the taxpayers. More state aid would ease the tax burden put on district constituents. In not putting more into the state aid pot, the district saw a decrease of \$171,074 from the previous school year and a reduction of \$48,461 in federal funds.

The increase in Special Education reimbursement was one increase in the previous state budget that helps the Riverdale School District. The rate is sum sufficient, so the move from 30% to 46% is not guaranteed to be 46% but it is definitely a step in the right direction. The district has an almost 25% special education population. Along with this increase and a 90% reimbursement rate for high cost special education, the state of Wisconsin is making progress in funding special education.

The school year is off to a great start! Please continue to visit the Riverdale Schools Facebook page to see the great things happening daily at Riverdale.

Jeff Campbell
District Administrator