PONTIAC DIST. 429

District still not getting state money

By Luke Smucker
Staff Reporter

With only two additional meetings left in the fiscal year, Superintendent Brian Dukes put an emphasis on his report for April. The entire report was based on the impact that the budget impasse in Springfield is having on school districts across the state.

"We've had these hopes that Springfield would get past the impasse," Dukes said. "We wanted them to move forward with the state budget, but clearly that is not happening. I think they are about as far away from passing a budget as they could ever be.

"That causes concern for us, because there is about $1,000,000 that the state owes us in reimbursement for our special needs students and transportation costs. We have already provided these services at our own cost and the state is not reimbursing us for that."

Dukes said he had been in contact with the comptroller's office this week, they thought the district might possibly see one additional payment over the next few days. However, Dukes was told that the district would still be short $750,000.

"What that means for next year, nobody knows," Dukes said. "Without a budget, there are plenty of unknowns for what is going on. I am beginning to talk with our staff and informing them of where we're at, but I also want to make contact with Springfield and make them aware that this is not acceptable.

"The decisions that are being made with this budget impasse are impacting not only kids in Pontiac, but across the state. Enough already, something has got to be done."

Although he began with negativity about Springfield, Dukes finished his report by discussing a recent donation from the Greater Livingston County Economic Development Council. Dukes said that GLCEDC CEO Adam Dontz worked with the Livingston County Board to approve the donation of $60,000, through a grant, which will help pay for the resources associated with the STEAM program.

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"Even though Springfield continues to let us down each day, the county and GLCEDC are stepping up and believing in us and education," Dukes concluded.

Before moving on to the next agenda item, Dukes told the board that the budget impasse will be a topic of discussion at every meeting for the remainder of the fiscal year.

During the action items, the board approved an asphalt quote from Opperman's Construction. Dukes said the project was a recommendation from the buildings and grounds committee.

"We met weeks ago and this was one of the recommendations that the committee and I came up with. Essentially, we're going to be repaving from the bus lane, down to the fence west of the school building. We're going to offer diagonal parking, since traffic moves in one direction," Dukes said of work to be done at the junior high.

"We'll have a couple visitor parking, a couple handicap parking spots — we just want a more cohesive parking lot in the morning. We put it out for requests for proposals and Opperman came in as the lowest quote. Our hope is to get the project done sometime before July."

The board also approved a State Farm donation of computers. Dukes called it a "prime example of the business community stepping up as Springfield is failing."

"Most of you guys know, but we have a lot of people who work at State Farm in Bloomington and drive from Livingston County every day," Dukes said. "State Farm has decided to donate 100 computer units to our school district, which boils down to 25 desktop computers, which will be placed in our offices, and 75 laptops, which will replace the teachers' laptops."

Dukes said the donation will replace the majority of the district's current devices and unlike the current devices, which are around six or seven years old, these new devices are only two to three years old.

"This is a really big upgrade at no cost to the district, thanks to State Farm's very generous donation," Dukes concluded.

The board also approved a quote from Raptor Technologies. Dukes explained that the Raptor offers visitor management software. The district will purchase a system which can be used to run a quick background check for building guests.

"Basically, if someone comes into the building, we ask for their ID and we can run that ID through a system that will tell us if the individual is a sex offender, has any restraining orders against them — just things that we aren't able to catch because we're not generally aware of it," Dukes said.

Once the guest is approved, Dukes said the system will print out a badge that the individual can wear in the building to alert other staff that they have been cleared to be in the building.

"We have funds available within our Tort account, that is something that we are currently only using for crossing guards," Dukes said. "There are very specific things that we can use that fund for. So, we're looking at a five-year deal and we'll just chip away at it every year. But, there are the funds available within our Tort account to pay for this."

After the approval, board member Dan Krueger added, "Anything we can do to provide that much more difficulty for some people who shouldn't be in our schools, it's all worth it. It doesn't do anything to stop somebody from coming in, but at least we might capture somebody we weren't aware of."

During the principal's report, Pontiac Junior High School Principal Brian Hensley said that eighth grade graduation will take place on May 19.

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