

2018-2019 West ISD Budget Outlook

By David Truitt, Superintendent

During the month of August, two events occur each year that help shape the financial stability and integrity of school districts and charters across the state of Texas. These two events are the approval of the annual district budget and tax rate and the release of the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) preliminary financial accountability ratings. In the case of West ISD, both events help show our fiscal health and share additional school finance information with our taxpayers. Whether on the federal, state, or local level, West ISD has continuously received outstanding audit ratings and reports.

Just last week, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released the preliminary financial accountability ratings for the more than 1,100 school districts and charters across the state. Created by the 77th Texas Legislature in 2001, the School Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas (FIRST) was designed to encourage public schools to better manage their financial resources to provide the maximum allocation possible for direct instructional purposes. The FIRST ratings are calculated using 15 financial indicators, such as administrative cost expenditures; the accuracy of a district or charter's financial information submitted to TEA; and any financial vulnerabilities or material weaknesses in internal controls as determined by an external auditor. Ratings for 2017-2018 are based on annual financial reports provided to TEA by districts and charters for the 2017 fiscal year. The financial accountability system requires TEA to review the audited financial reports from all districts and charters. Once again, West ISD received the "Above Standard Achievement" rating.

On Wednesday, August 22, 2018, the West Independent School District (ISD) will hold a Public Hearing on the 2018-2019 district budget and tax rate during a Special Called Meeting at 6:30 PM in the West ISD Administration Building at 406 W. Shook Street. Following this Hearing, the Board of Trustees will consider taking action on both important budgetary items for the new school year. Mr. Charles Mikeska, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, will lead the presentation. An overview of the budget will be available at the meeting for review.

Since school ended in May 2018, Mr. Mikeska has been working hard to review all General Fund Revenues at the federal, state, or local levels. New budget and staffing requests were reviewed and student enrollment figures projected. Each campus and department turned in budget outlines for discussion, review, and approval. For the 2018-2019 school year, student enrollment projections show an increase from when school ended in May 2018.

The proposed district budget is set for \$11,756,126. The Food Service Fund is \$593,908., and Debt Service is \$1,000,795. Local Revenue is proposed at \$4,788,455. The budget also includes money for the replacement of student technology, two district vehicles, athletic uniforms, and band equipment. The proposed Tax Rate is \$1.26; reduced by another 3 cents since last school year. The tax rate has now been reduced by 6 cents since 2016-2017. The tax rate in 2016-2017 was \$1.32.

With a majority of the proposed budget targeted for personnel and the district's compensation package, the district was once again able to consider several new initiatives for our staff members. Currently, our Board of Trustees is considering for approval: (1). the annual step increase in pay for all certified staff members, (2). an increase in the number of Local Paid Leave Days from 1 to 5 for all staff members, (3). to add seventeen, new extracurricular activity and club stipends, (4). to add advanced degree stipends, (5). to increase the annual salary schedule for our most experienced certified staff members, and (6). to

add extra duty pay for the new Trojan Academy tutorial and intervention program. If the Local Paid Leave policy is approved, West ISD will be one of only a few districts in central Texas to offer 5 local days.

As you can see, West ISD has much to be proud of as we enter the new school year. Even with the challenges we face each year in school funding at the state level, we always strive to improve our staff compensation packets, increase our campus and department budgets, continue our replacement initiatives, and increase critical staff areas. Thanks to the work of Mr. Mikeska and our Board of Trustees, we are once again able to do these things and reduce the tax rate by another 3 cents. If you ever have questions about the district's finances or budget, please do not hesitate to come by the Administration Building. We are here to serve and will always be transparent and forthright about any budget questions or considerations with our wonderful community.