

No new taxes in schools' \$163M budget

Subheadline: Board passes initial reading; public hearing set for June 13

Slug: LANNWS-05-24-23 LCSD BUDGET

Print depth: 26.89 (4007 characters)

Start date/time: May 22, 2023 05:43 PM

Section tags: nc-lan
nc-lan/news
nc-lan/news/education

Authors: hjones@thelancasternews.com

Byline: By Haley Jones
hjones@thelancasternews.com

Content

The Lancaster County School District budget for 2023-24 totals \$163,274,426, and will not increase taxes in any way, shape or form for county taxpayers. The budget passed first reading unanimously at the May 16 school board meeting.

Taxes will remain the same due to the millage staying the same — 171 mills in operating millage and 65 mills in debt service millage.

Expenses

The largest expense for the district is salaries and employee benefits, which total \$139,388,890, or 85% of the budget.

“Salary and employee benefits are typically 85% of your general fund budget,” said Chief Financial Officer Jatana Norris. “We are spot on in line” with state laws mandating this percentage.

Per-pupil expenditures were at an estimated \$13,506 per student in 2022-23 in Lancaster County, according to the South Carolina ESSA report. Of that per-pupil amount, \$899 came from federal per-pupil funding, \$7,273 from state per-pupil funding and \$5,335 from local per-pupil funding. In 2023, there are about 15,000 students in Lancaster County schools.

The district does not yet have state, federal or local per-pupil funding estimates for 2023-24.

Revenue

The district expects to receive \$89,833,349 in state revenue, \$19,194,382 in state reimbursements from Education Act 388 and \$50,348,039 in local revenue from property taxes.

Norris said that in an effort to balance the budget, the district is proposing that it use \$3,898,656 from the fund balance, which now stands at \$32,447,494.

In 2010, the LCSD fund balance was \$11,291,646, so it has grown by 97% over 12 years.

State revenue makes up roughly 55% of the new budget, state reimbursements are 12%, local revenue is 31% and use of fund balance is 2%.

Comparing by year

“We are proposing an 11.4% increase over FY 22-23,” Norris said. The 2022-23 budget was \$146,528,129, with the same millage.

In per-pupil expenditures, for 2018-2019, total expenditures were \$12,648, and they have remained around the \$12,000-\$13,500 mark through this last year.

Salary increases

The new budget allocates a 5% cost-of-living increase for every employee, besides bus drivers and teachers, as well as five additional step increases. Step increases are incremental salary increases given to employees, based on their educational degrees and years with the district.

“This is one of the most aggressive salary increases across the board that this district has ever done,” said Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Phipps.

Teachers will be getting a 9% step increase next year. Starting salaries for teachers will increase from \$42,940 to \$45,940, which is 8.1% above the state minimum of \$42,500.

There will also be salary step increases for bus drivers, and all salary schedules have been extended five years “to strengthen retention, as well as recruitment,” Norris said.

The bus driver hourly rate will increase by a state-mandated 25%. The hourly rate for LCSD drivers will now be \$17.13 per hour, which is 50% greater than the state minimum of \$11.40 per hour.

“We did look at the surrounding areas, I just want to add that, we did look at their salary schedules,” Norris said. “Teachers ... we want to reward them for being here.”

Board Chair Brad Small thanked Norris after her budget presentation.

“I want to thank you, you and your staff for the proposed budgets and for not raising millage, especially on some of our fixed-income folks. I know they get worried about that,” he said. “For us to present them a budget like this and be so aggressive, and to help our educators and our staff, I think it is very, very important to our community, and I applaud you guys.”

Phipps will be available to discuss the budget May 31 from 7:30-8:30 a.m. and 12:15-1:15 p.m. at the district office, 300 S. Catawba St., Lancaster. To schedule an appointment at another time, call 803-286-6972.

The public hearing for the budget will be at 5:30 p.m. June 13, before the 7 p.m. school board meeting in the boardroom at the district office. The second reading will take place after public hearing at the board meeting.

Child images

LANNWS-05-24-23 LCSD BUDGET Jatana Norris



