

By Jan Schultz

The Imperial Republican

Thanks, in part, to the final payment being made on the East 9th school building bonds this year, the property tax levy to support Chase County Schools will drop by about eight cents in the 2009-10 budget.

School Supt. Matt Fisher said the school's final bond payment on the building will be made this month.

There is no levy for the bond fund in the 2009-10 budget that board members will consider at Tuesday's monthly school board meeting.

The proposed budget has a net levy decrease of just under eight cents overall.

Last year's levy to support the school budget of 1.0779 will drop to .9981 this year, if the budget is approved as proposed.

But that doesn't mean taxpayers will pay less across the board this coming year. If an individual property owner saw valuation increases the past year, even though the levy dropped, those individuals may not see a drop in taxes.

Chase County Schools is also benefitting from an increase in the valuation within the school district of \$50 million, which helps spread the levy over more property values.

That's largely due to the increased ag land valuations, Fisher said.

Valuations in the school district rose from \$495,660,691 to \$545,790,885, or just over a 10% increase.

If a taxpayer's property valuation didn't change the past year, their taxes to support the school should drop.

Tax askings to support the school budget will rise by \$179,240 for 2009-10, or 3.4%.

Last year's property tax askings were \$5,268,210.

In the proposed 2009-10 budget, the tax askings are \$5,447,450.

Bldg. fund only one to increase

Levies for the General Fund and the Quality Capital Purpose Undertaking Fund, which is paying off the heating/AC projects completed the last couple of years, both dropped in the budget.

And, then there are no tax askings in the bond fund this year. Last year, that bond fund included a levy of 9.18 cents.

The only fund to propose an increase is the building fund, from 2.06 cents to 3.70 cents (per \$100 valuation).

That 3.70 cents will generate an additional \$200,000 for the building fund, Supt. Fisher said, adding to the \$408,000 now in that fund (CDs and funds held by the treasurer).

"It's great to have the building paid off, but when it gets this age, you start having to have things done," Fisher said.

Such as the roof. It's leaking in several places, and that's a project the school will have to undertake soon, he said.

A small section of the school roof over the weight room and lobby had hail damage in the recent storms, which will be covered by insurance.

The past two school budgets have shown a decrease in the levy to support the building fund.

Total budget over \$9 million

The total proposed General Fund budget for 2009-10 is \$9,102,620, or up 6.63%.

The 2008-09 budget was \$8,536,270.

However, Supt. Fisher noted that actual tax askings are only increasing \$179,240, largely due to increases in employee salaries.

Earlier this year, board members approved a two-year teacher pay package that includes a base pay of \$29,650 this year, up from the 2008-09 base of \$28,570. In 2009-10, the base will increase to \$30,450.

The board struggled with keeping the tax askings the same as the previous year, Supt. Fisher said, but with an eye on the future, opted to increase the school's cash reserve by \$250,000, and add to the building fund in the proposed budget.

If those two "savings" hadn't been included, Fisher noted, the increase would be 2.91%.

The General Fund also includes the school's \$110,000 bond payment for the new pool/athletic facility. Board members chose to put that expense in the General Fund rather than placing it in a separate bond fund.

The proposed General Fund levy for 2009-10 is 95.27 cents.

Fisher said it's important to keep the General Fund levy above the 95-cent Mark. School districts that fall below that levy figure will likely receive less state aid the next year, he said.

If the board would pull out the \$179,000 from the General Fund (to keep tax askings the same), it could mean a loss of between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in state aid next year, according to Supt. Fisher.

Chase County Schools' state aid for 2009-10 dropped \$55,314, from \$566,390 to \$511,076.

Some stimulus funds received

CCS received more than \$111,000 in federal stimulus funds, Supt. Fisher said, but they must be used in Title I or special education areas.

The \$42,740 in Title I funds will help pay for the additional aides hired for the K-6 Reading Mastery program.

In the special education area, the \$68,770 received will assist with costs of the new high needs special ed. program, which Carol Vetter is directing, and possibly for additional facility improvements and another handicap-accessible van, said Supt. Fisher.

Budget hearing Tuesday

Tuesday's school board meeting starts at 5 p.m. in the board room at the school.

The budget hearing is set for 6 p.m. as part of the meeting.