

GUEST OPINION

West Bend school budgets months in the making

Annual schools budget meeting set for Sept. 26

By Jennifer Wimmer

At the West Bend School District's annual meeting and budget hearing on September 26, 2022, a preliminary budget for 2022-2023, which has been in development over the past 10 months, will be presented and discussed during the budget hearing.

Each year in the annual meeting portion of the evening, resolutions are presented for a vote by the electors. The resolutions include the recommended tax levies for the school district budget, the disposition/disposal of school property and how the School Board must approve it, and the yearly salary of the School Board members.

As mentioned, the budget is many months in the making. Planning for the upcoming fiscal year (July 1-June 30) budget begins with forecasting details such as enrollment and staffing as well as department and program needs. Other details like capital projects continue to be developed and prioritized in the ensuing months. There is board work almost monthly related to budget development. Even though the fiscal year begins on July 1, final information on state aid becomes available mid-October; therefore, the final budget, levy, and taxation rate is voted on by the



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School Board at its second meeting in October.

Being responsible stewards of taxpayer funds is a critical role of the West Bend School District and the West Bend School Board. As part of our long-term capital planning strategy, we have actively managed debt obligations from previous capital improvement referendums, including early repayment. In fact, the 2022-2023 tax levy includes funds to complete repayment of referendum debt and achieve debt-free status for the West Bend School District.

Our strategy also included refinancing for lower interest rates, which saved taxpayers more than \$1.5 million. State law permits a maximum of 20 years to repay debt. Our multi-year strategy will allow the West Bend School District to pay off each referendum in 14 and 11 years from each approval date.

Accelerating debt repayment was implemented along with a balanced operating budget. Recently, for the West Bend School District and many others, federal ESSER funds have been used to balance the budget. ESSER funds are one-time use only

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and will run out in 2024. I invite community members to get more information on our budget and finances on the West Bend School District website at west-bend.k12.wi.us under "Departments."

The West Bend School District and West Bend School Board will continue our trajectory of managing debt, balancing budgets, and establishing one of the lowest mill rates in the state. The communities we serve can be assured that this philosophy, which has been in place for many years, remains as we prepare for budget-related challenges that include effectively addressing aging facilities, rightsizing the district, and budgeting to address a projected funding shortfall.

(Jennifer Wimmer is superintendent of the West Bend School District.)