

Amherst School District

Ways & Means Committee

Report and Recommendations on FY19 Warrant Articles

Introduction

Amherst School District (ASD) Ways & Means committee members were appointed by ASD Moderator, Nate Jensen. It is the responsibility of the committee to review the proposed budgets, provide recommendations to the ASD, and vote on the associated warrant articles.

ASD Ways & Means worked with SAU 39 Superintendent, Peter Warburton; SAU 39 Business Administrator and Transportation, Adam Steel; Amherst Middle School Principal, Porter Dodge; Clark-Wilkins School Principal, Gerry St. Amand; Special Education Director, Meg Beauchamp; Curriculum and Professional Development Director, Christine Landwehrle; Technology Director, Bruce Chakrin; Building and Grounds, John Robichaud; and Food Service, John Lash. ASD Ways & Means is pleased with the professionalism and dedication of those individuals as well as all of the ASD members that attended various meetings. The new computerized budget format provided an easier method to review and compare the budget data, allowing in a thorough and efficient review.. ASD Ways & Means conducted a line-by-line review and analysis of each of ten budget categories of the proposed budgets with the responsible ASD individual to justify requested expenditures and to identify potential cost savings. In addition to the budget proposal article, ASD Ways and Means also reviewed the five additional article placed on the Warrant for their justification and cost. Particular focus was given to any increases or decreases relative to the current fiscal year budget, to consistently large allocations, and to staffing levels.

Article 11: School District Officer Elections

ASD Ways & Means takes no position on this article.

Article 12: Operating Budget

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

The FY19 proposed operating budget of \$26,291,602 reflects an increase of approximately 3.2% (\$813,703) relative to the FY17 voter-approved operating budget. This increase is due in great part to increases in health care costs mandated by contracts, state retirement fund contributions, and special education requirements. Through the ASD Ways & Means review process, there were minimal additional savings recommended by the committee. The budgets as prepared by the District staff demonstrated a sensitivity to control costs and were in many cases reduced from the prior year with the exception of the above mandated costs.

The overall high per student cost of the District are due to the large percentage of highly educated and senior staff that are at the top of their respective salary levels, the associated increased pension contributions, and the generous medical benefits mandated by contract.

To address the increased requirement for services and provide the opportunity to reduce expenses for Special Services, the Special Needs staff will be expanded to replace outside contracted services and expand services offerings that in certain situations allow all students to remain in Amherst Schools that have previously needed to be placed out of District at very high tuition costs.

With the exception of Special Services staffing, all other elements of the budget were justified with staffing levels maintained or reduced as detailed above.

The FY19 default budget of \$25,814,208 is less than the proposed operating budget by a total of \$477,394, the same as last year's budget.

ASD Ways & Means has a continued concern with the comparison of the "cost-per-pupil in ASD" with the surrounding towns and quality schools. Any discrepancy lies with the seniority of the ASD staff and the contract terms offered previously. Both new contracts awaiting approval, address these structural issues as the District implements terms to reduce the cost-per-pupil (and save taxpayers money) and keep ASD an attractive place to work.

Article 13: Approval of Collective Bargaining Agreement between ASD School Board and ASSA (Amherst Support Staff Association)

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

ASD Ways & Means have carefully reviewed this contract and is in agreement with the ASD board that the modest cost increases in the short term due to a salary increase and the

guaranteeing of five (5) paid snow days, will be offset by the increasing percentage of costs of healthcare benefits that an employee will contribute in the future.

Article 14: If Article 13 is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting to address the Article 13 cost items only

ASD Ways & Means takes no position on this article.

Article 15: Approval of Collective Bargaining Agreement between ASD School Board and AEA (Amherst Education Association)

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

The ASD staff covered by the AEA has been without an agreement for two years due to an impasse over contract terms, principally retirement and medical benefits. The new agreement balances short term increases, long term changes in the retirement benefits and medical benefits that provide for the mutual benefit of all parties. ,

Article 16: If Article 15 is defeated, authorize the governing body to call one special meeting to address the Article 15 cost items only

ASD Ways & Means takes no position on this article.

Article 17: Repair of Septic System at Clark School

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

ASD Ways & Means agrees with the Board that the issue with the septic field is serious and needs to be addressed. ASD Ways & Means is also aware that grants money has been requested to help address this issue.

Article 18: Repair and /or replace plumbing at AMS due to the presence of lead in the drinking water

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

ASD Ways & Means agrees with the Board to remediate lead in the drinking water. ASD Ways & Means is also aware that grant money has been requested to help address this issue.

Article 19: Capital Reserve Fund for Educating Students with Disabilities

ASD Ways & Means unanimously supports this article by a vote of 6-0

A capital reserve fund, for unexpected expenses, such as Special Education costs, is an excellent management of funds to meet such expenditures without a spike in the tax rate. Over the last few years, there have been unforeseen occasions of unallocated surplus fund to provide for these surprise situations. Up to \$50,000 will be added to the capital reserve, if the surplus funds are available in July. Conservative budgeting and sound fiscal management in the past, have resulted in a surplus.. Passage of this article does not increase the budget, only reallocate any surplus.