



## STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT MEDIA RELEASE

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### CONTACT:

Chris Rosenblum  
SCASD Communications Director  
[jcr19@scasd.org](mailto:jcr19@scasd.org)  
O: 814-272-8699  
C:814-441-2715

## SCASD Board of Directors Approves Budget Resolution; Data Warehouse System

On Monday, Dec. 19, the State College Area School District Board of Directors approved a budget resolution that will keep the district's 2017-2018 property tax rate increase at or below the Act I index of 2.5 percent.

[The resolution](#) was proposed as part of the ongoing 2017-2018 proposed preliminary budget discussion.

At present, the proposed preliminary 2017-2018 budget calls for a 1.55 percent tax increase, significantly lower than recent district budgets that applied for Act 1 index exceptions to pay for high school referendum debt.

The Board also approved a [recommended data warehouse system for the district](#) and four State High Project change orders.

Among the announced retirements was Athletic Director Peg Pennepacker, who will step down at the end of the school year.

Discussions included an [updated proposed 2017-2018 school calendar](#); updates on the Memorial Field renovation project, elementary school projects and State High Project; and an update on the SCASD Education Foundation's development efforts.

Board member Penni Fishbaine attended by phone.

### Accelerated Budget Opt Out Resolution

At its Dec. 5 meeting, the Board discussed the Accelerated Budget Opt Out Resolution, which allows the district to skip the "accelerated budget adoption timeline and procedure" required for the budget process if a district seeks Act 1 index exceptions.

The Act 1 index sets maximum tax increases for district.

For the district, the mandated proposed preliminary budget adoption timeline next month would have included adopting a resolution authorizing a proposed preliminary budget for display and advertising, proposing a preliminary budget for public viewing and publishing a notice of intent to apply for Act 1 index exceptions. The Board plans to vote on adopting a preliminary budget on Feb. 13, 2017.

The deadline for choosing the opt out alternative is Jan. 27, 2017.

The [district administration had recommended the opt out resolution](#) because of the district's ability to fund current operations and proposed programming additions with a tax increase below the Act 1 Index of 2.5 percent.

Based on analysis of available estimates at this time, the district believes a 1.55 percent tax increase would be necessary to present a balanced budget.

According to preliminary estimates, a 2.5 percent tax increase would add \$918,638 in revenue, but no tax increase would require \$1,499,181 in district resources to meet expenses in the budget.

At a previous meeting, Assistant Business Administrator Donna Watson noted the opt out resolution would reduce administrative paperwork tied to meeting deadlines, allowing the district financial office to concentrate more on the budget.

Board Vice President Jim Leous on Monday asked whether the resolution locked the district into a specific rate, and Watson replied that it only established that the tax increase would not exceed the Act 1 index.

The 2017-2018 proposed preliminary budget calls for \$149,978.094 in revenue and \$150,145,245 in total expenses and fund balance transfers.

**Revenue** breaks down to:

- Local — \$121,488,565
- State — \$27,344,529
- Federal — \$1,145,000

**The top three expenses** are:

- Salaries (\$65,956,706)
- PSERS (Pennsylvania State Employee Retirement System) payments (\$21,064,552, includes an updated PSERS rate of 32.57 percent as of Dec. 7)
- Health insurance (\$14,111,448)

Under the current budget process timeline, the Board expects to receive a proposed final budget on April 24. A public hearing for the final budget is scheduled for June 5, and the Board anticipates voting whether to adopt the final budget on June 12.

## **Data warehouse system**

The Board unanimously voted to accept [the district's recommendation to purchase a district data warehouse system from the DecisionEd firm](#).

The system will provide district administrators, teachers and counselors with more comprehensive and integrated data analysis than is currently available to them.

Board Vice President Jim Leous noted that, under the warehouse system, all data will be housed in the district's servers on district property, meaning the information will be secure.

"That's the really the most important factor for me, because it preserves the privacy of our students, teachers and staff," he said.

The DecisionEd system also integrates well with the district's existing systems, offering specific "dashboards" of data for district employees, he said.

"The user interface design is really good with this," Leous said.

For the past two years, a team led by Director of Technology Nicole Steele has been exploring options for a new data warehouse system. During its research, the team looked for a system that:

- Integrates with the district's current and future systems
- Provides the ability to run reports that include data such as:
  - Assessments (state, local, third party vendors)
  - Demographics
  - Attendance
  - Activities
  - Grades, GPA
  - Financial data
  - Human resource information
  - Connection to curricular standards
- Offers easy accessibility to data and reports
- Enables predictive analysis
- Allows for program evaluation

"DecisionEd connects and analyzes data located in different native systems," the district administration stated in a memo for the Dec. 19 meeting. "This provides flexibility to the District now as well as in the future based upon the volume of systems currently held. This ability proves to be a significant advantage as we currently predict changes in our data system holdings in the near future."

At the Dec. 5 Board meeting, Supervisor of Elementary Education Vernon Bock said when he joined the district this year, he sought to analyze student achievement data to orient himself, but wound up frustrated by the limitations of the district's existing data systems. Those shortcomings, he said, present a significant barrier for administrators and teachers.

After evaluating 12 data warehouse systems, including reference checks with other school districts, the team recommended the DecisionEd product.

"It's really cross-walking multiple data points to tell us the true story of our students and how to increase student achievement in multiple ways," Bock said at the Dec. 5 meeting, noting later, "By two or three clicks, the power you could glean from an individual report is impressive."

Bock said DecisionEd was the team's clear top choice.

"We could not find a product that would integrate all that information and work with our systems," he said.

The first year cost will be \$175,000, including all technical support, data upload and professional training for district staff. In the second year and thereafter, the annual maintenance cost will amount to \$35,100.

### **State High Project change orders**

The Board unanimously approved [four State High Project change orders](#) totalling \$42,409.63. The change orders are for:

- **\$2,063.46** —steel modifications. The original structural drawings showed a support beam for the gym floor resting on a masonry wall, but modifications to the architectural drawings moved the wall and, the structural drawings did not reflect the change. The beam had to be extended to meet the new wall location.
- **\$13,010.68** — smoke screen glass in the main entrance stairs. This open stair extends three stories. Additional glass in the landing areas is necessary in order to prevent smoke from migrating through the tower and keeping fire and smoke detectors from operating properly.
- **\$23,092.50** — rock removal from site in October and November.
- **\$4,243.00** — net amount for deleting two unneeded baseboard electric heaters and adding six electric baseboard heaters not shown in original structural drawings.

### Discussion items

#### Proposed 2017-2018 school year calendar

For Board review, the district presented [a proposed 2017-2018 school year calendar](#) that includes a winter break of two weeks.

The extended break would be necessary because of the high school construction schedule. Over the winter break, the district expects to move classrooms from the North Building into the newly constructed 3-story units on the south campus. The extra time is needed to prepare for students returning on Jan. 8, 2018.

As a result of the long break, the proposed calendar does not have any built-in snow days. Any snow make-up days would follow the scheduled last day of the year on June 11.

Under the proposed calendar, the last day of the first semester would be Jan. 19, moving the end of the quarter closer to the secondary “records day” on Jan. 15. It also would allow a weekend prior to students starting new semester classes on Jan. 22.

Board President Amber Concepcion asked whether the district’s community education department might consider adding programs or activities to help parents during the long winter break.

“We can take a look at that,” Assistant Superintendent Jason Perrin said.

Other comments addressed potential attendance problems from extending the school year or curtailing spring break by adding snow make-up days. Board member Laurel Zydney said that if the district has a spring break, it should align with Penn State’s break, but that the district also might consider a calendar without a break.

Concepcion noted that Board discussion about the calendar will continue.

“We’ll bring another version of this back in January,” she said.

#### Memorial Field renovation project

The Board reviewed [an alternate timeline for the Memorial Field renovation project](#).

Originally, the timeline called for a February Board decision about the two renovation design proposals — one with a refurbished Nittany Avenue building and one with the building removed.

As proposed, the alternate timeline would accelerate the Board decision to Jan. 9 and delay a community forum planned for Jan. 16 to February. If shifted, the community forum would become an opportunity for public feedback on the schematic design development, rather than for comparing options.

Board member Dan Duffy said he appreciates that a February forum wouldn't pose just an either/or choice for residents, but instead, give them a chance to make constructive suggestions.

Board President Amber Concepcion said she would like board members to see a depiction of what the locker rooms and other facilities would look like located under the bleachers in the option without the Nittany Avenue building.

Board member Laurel Zydney said renderings that showed the renovation options from various angles would be helpful.

### **Elementary school projects**

The Board reviewed [an updated draft calendar of key dates for the elementary school projects](#).

A revised location and site plan is being developed for Houserville Elementary School, based on feedback and discussion during the option selection process. This plan will be presented to the Board Facilities and Grounds Committee on Jan. 4, then to the full Board on Jan. 9.

In light of the revision, the district administration recommended rescheduling the public forum for Houserville, originally planned for Jan. 10, to Jan. 24.

The public forum for Corl Street Elementary School, scheduled for Jan. 24, would move to Jan. 10.

Projects at Corl Street, Houserville and Radio Park will follow a 30 percent, 60 percent and 90 percent review and approval process, leading to final design approvals on Sept. 25, 2017.

### **State High Project**

The Board received a regular [update on the State High Project construction](#).

### **SCASD Education Foundation**

The Board heard [an update on the activities of the SCASD Education Foundation and district development efforts in general](#).

Providing background, Superintendent Bob O'Donnell said the district administration wanted to inform the Board about development efforts since the foundation was approved during the summer of 2015, and to provide some historical background.

O'Donnell said the district employed a full-time development officer and consulted a Citizens Advisory Committee for Private Fundraising from 1997 to 2011.

To date, he said, the district continues its relationship with the Centre Foundation through endowment supported scholarships for students. In 2015, the district received \$82,000

for scholarships and student opportunities from the foundation, which maintains \$2.3 million in funds given to the district, about 60 percent of which are endowed for providing scholarships to graduating seniors.

O'Donnell emphasized that the SCASD Educational Foundation is not replacing the Centre Foundation, nor was it ever intended to do so. Rather, he said, the district proposed the foundation to generate additional non-traditional revenue and help the district with its mission.

The district, O'Donnell said, needed a local education foundation to secure donations that align with student opportunities, via a pass-through vehicle directly to where donors wish. A foundation also was necessary for taking advantage of funds from local businesses under the state's Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program, he said.

Business Administrator Randy Brown said the foundation provides an official 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization for tax deductible gifts, and is part of a "holistic approach to development" centered on fundraising and building affinity for the district. The foundation, he said, is meant to hold donations for a set time as a pass-through before directly supporting programs and activities, not to invest gifts and then annually pass along the interest.

"It matches donors' desires as well as meeting the district's goal for meeting students' needs," Brown said.

Brown said the foundation initially has used a variety of inexpensive means — e-newsletters, a website — as well more expensive options such as a magazine and mailings to raise awareness of the foundation and donation opportunities.

"We have a goal of a coordinated advertising plan," he said. "That's something for Year Two, which is where we are now."

Brown said the foundation so far has received \$23,000 in contributions. The "Pave It Forward" brick campaign has raised about \$80,000, he said, but the campaign is run by his office with help from Affinity Connection, independent of the foundation.

Overall, Brown said, the \$120,000 budgeted by the district for development functions pays for all development costs, including contracted services such as database maintenance and mailings done by Affinity Connection and foundation Executive Director Paul Olivett's salary.

O'Donnell said the district administration initially grappled with the idea of when to expect donations to surpass overhead costs. Development professionals advised the district to plan for the long haul, O'Donnell said, adding the district administration set three years as its goal.

Olivett said the foundation Board is just getting started, and will have its third meeting on Jan. 4. At a fall meeting, Doug Lovisky, a Class of 1986 State High alumnus, district parent and local attorney, was elected board president.

"He has deep connections to the community, and he's very excited to help out," Olivett said.

Discussing the EITC program, Olivett said he has discovered that relatively few local businesses are aware of the opportunity. He said the foundation's "biggest concept over the next few months" will be to market the EITC concept.

Already, he said, the foundation has received two significant EITC contributions: \$10,000 from First National Bank and \$5,000 from Fulton Bank.

“Really, (the banks) just saw our name on the (EITC) list,” Olivett said. “Because they’re already involved with the program, they wanted to direct some of that money to our way.”

Olivett noted that EITC program stipulates that donations can only go to designated programs. For the district, he said, those are the Oracle Academy and the International Baccalaureate Program.

But, he said, the EITC program is flexible and strives to fund any innovative programming, so as the foundation grows, it could apply to have other beneficiaries.

In terms of naming opportunities and advertising signage, board member Amy Bader asked whether there could be a “tipping point,” a limit to what the district would permit. O’Donnell agreed that the district administration certainly will have to discuss naming rights, signage and what parameters the Board wishes for both.

Regarding signage, board member Gretchen Brandt said she has heard from administrators and board members that they would like to focus on locally owned and operated businesses.

Now that it has a board in place, Olivett said, the foundation is poised to expand its communication efforts and foster deeper community ties. One goal is starting a “Recognition Society/Hall of Honor” as soon as the fall of 2017, working with the high school Alumni Association and volunteers to recognize students and alumni in athletics, arts, music, theatre and academics.

In its early stages, Olivett said, the foundation had to send out traditional communications such as mailings and newsletters to residents to raise awareness. He sees the foundation entering a second stage, where it can organize fundraiser events and other more “organic ways to talk about the foundation.”

Looking farther ahead, he’s optimistic that the foundation will reach a third stage, when there will be opportunities to tell the stories of how gifts impact students and why it’s important to donate. Then, he said, the foundation will have chances “to make a much stronger case to the community.”

“From my perspective, and having been involved in this from the beginning stages, we’re more or less where I would like us to be,” Olivett said, noting he’s looking forward to where the foundation will be in a year.

Like other board members, Dan Duffy thanked Loviscky and Vice President Chris Buchignani for volunteering to sit on the board. But Duffy also asked what the foundation plans to do to increase its “face-to-face communication” with potential donors via local business and leadership organizations.

Loviscky said he and Centre Foundation Executive Director Molly Kunkel have stated publicly about not competing with each other and about talking to community groups together about their shared mission of supporting the district.

“I think it is important to speak about (the foundation), and not just send another letter in the mail,” Loviscky said.

SCASD Board Vice President Jim Leous noted that the foundation is an “investment,” and that development takes time, typically three to five years to realize significant returns.

“I’m willing to give that time because it is an investment,” he said.

## **Proposed School Climate/Inclusive Excellence Policy**

The Board further reviewed [a revised draft of the proposed School Climate/Inclusive Excellence Policy](#).

Board members first discussed the draft policy at their Dec. 5 meeting.