



Englewood school budget hikes taxes \$105

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ENGLEWOOD — The owner of an average city home will pay \$105 more in school taxes in support of a 2015-16 budget that includes funding for a vocational training program, new math initiatives and restoration of a college-readiness program at the middle school.

The school board voted 6-1 Thursday to adopt the \$69.3 million budget. The lone dissenter was Glenn Garrison.

The board had been expected to vote on a slightly higher budget amount, but after meeting in closed session for about an hour Thursday, it was reduced by \$48,453.

That money will come from secretarial services, which are provided by a firm called Mission One Educational Services, said Business Administrator Maria Engeleit.

The last-minute cut means the school-tax rate will now increase to \$1.1861 per \$100 of assessed property value, instead of \$1.1872, as had been expected. For the owner of a home assessed at the city average of \$458,000, this translates to a \$105 increase rather than \$110.

The budget vote was preceded by what one resident called "the best education presentation that we've had in years."

Interim Schools Superintendent Michael Roth outlined the district's priorities and discussed plans for several new initiatives and enhancements to existing programs.

School officials have struggled to raise students' lagging math scores and Roth has said that improving math instruction should be the district's "major academic achievement" for 2015-16.

To that end, Roth said the district will extend use of the Singapore math method — which incorporates hands-on, pictorial and abstract learning — from kindergarten to eighth grade, rather than switch to a different program in sixth grade, as is the current practice.

In addition to providing continuity of instruction, according to Roth, the method is more in line with how standardized tests are assessing students.

Teachers will also receive professional development in math; high school math teachers will be given new textbooks and materials; and an abacus-based learning program at Dr. John Grieco Elementary School will be continued, according to budget documents.

The budget also includes \$115,000 to create an in-house vocational training program. What will be taught has yet to be decided, but Roth said the options could include food service, child care, electrical work and information technology.

Funding has also been allocated to restore AVID — a college-readiness program — at the Janis E. Dismus Middle School, hire an athletic coordinator, enhance Mandarin instruction, beef up the district's PSAT and SAT preparation offerings and prepare a long-range facilities plan.

Priorities will also include building students' writing skills, improving communication among students, parents and teachers, and increasing the amount of time students spend actively engaged in learning, said Roth.

There are also plans to renovate the Dwight Morrow High School auditorium lobby and upgrade the district's locker system, Engeleit said. The two projects are expected to cost about \$130,000, she said.

A handful of residents spoke at Thursday's meeting. Speakers voiced a host of concerns, including calls to reinstate an academy prep program at the middle school and invest more in the dual language program.

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