

Pontiac elementary schools threaten program, job cuts

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PONTIAC — Pontiac elementary schools may have to eliminate all extracurricular and sports programs and 39 jobs as part of about \$1 million in budget cuts expected to be made if the Feb. 2 tax referendum fails.

“This does not come with any level of enjoyment,” said Mike Fairfield, president of the Pontiac Elementary School District 429 school board in a statement. “It comes with a lot of concern.”

Voters will be asked to approve raising the property tax rate from \$3.09 per \$100 equalized assessed valuation to \$3.59 per \$100 EAV for four years. If it is approved, the tax bill on a \$150,000 house would increase by \$250, from \$1,545 to \$1,795.

If voters reject the increase, the board would vote on budget cuts in March.

The 39 positions up for elimination include cooks, librarians, custodians and teaching positions. The elimination of particular teaching positions also could also mean the elimination of teaching assistants and technology, art and band classes, Fairfield said in the statement.

“As funds do become available, this list will be prioritized with emphasis on the academic needs of our students,” Fairfield said.

Superintendent Steve Graham said that the 39 positions do not necessarily equate to 39 people losing their jobs because some employees have multiple roles and may lose part of them. For example, a teacher may lose a coaching assignment.

The main reason for the cuts is the uncertainty of state funding and a law that limits growth in property tax levies in Livingston County, officials have said.

Graham said the state was \$500,000 in arrears in aid payments to the district at the end of last school year. That amount nearly doubled halfway into the current school year, peaking at about \$900,000, he said.

The state made payments earlier this week, reducing the debt to \$691,000, but those payments were originally scheduled to be given in August, Graham said.

“The problem is that we don’t know how much we are actually going to receive from the state next year,” he said. “No one wants to make these cuts ... but we need to live within our means.”