

Washington Township school budget defeated  
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WASHINGTON TWP. More teaching jobs in the county's largest school district will likely be cut after voters rejected the \$137.5 million budget that already included cuts to some 30 positions and was calling for a tax increase.

The budget was defeated 2,275 to 2,213 Ð a difference of 62 votes.

Voters elected incumbents Eileen Abbott (2,462) and Charles Earling (2,410) to two, three-year terms on the board of education, and joining them will be newcomer Paul Marino (2,038). They defeated Chet Nawoyski (1,768), Lee Robledo (1,481) and Bob Kells (1,272).

The 2009-2010 spending plan called for a tax levy of about \$69.1 million Ð about 1 percent more than what voters approved last year. It called for a tax increase of about \$143 for the owner of a home assessed at the township average of \$129,902.

The budget will now go back to the township council for review and possible cuts to be made.

The fact that the budget went down by just 62 votes, is not a "mandate" by the public to make even more drastic cuts, said Superintendent Cheryl Simone.

"To me, it's not a mandate," Simone said. "This is a very close yes/no. Hopefully they're going to be looking very carefully at the budget. Hopefully it's very minor cuts."

Because of declining enrollment over the years, the district opted to cut positions from the budget proposal. Over the past three years, enrollment has dropped by about 560 students.

Some of the jobs that were taken out of the budget included: an assistant high school principal, nine high school teachers, six middle school teachers, four elementary teachers, three part-time librarian aides at the middle schools, four secretarial positions, a bus driver and a custodian.

And the cuts aren't likely to be made through attrition because the district has not received the same amount of retirement notices as it has in the past.

Simone said if the council decides to cut the budget even more, programs and positions will most likely be affected. However, she did not name anything specifically.

"Class sizes will probably increase," she said.

About 83 percent of the total budget is for salaries and benefits.

Tuition costs saw a 25 percent increase in its own category, up \$1.2 million.

About \$4.7 million is being used from the fund balance in the proposed budget, which is money that wasn't spent on items such as utilities.

The economy was on the minds of many voters as they headed to the polls Tuesday.

Linda Bond said she rejected the budget.

"The present economy is a big consideration," Bond said. "I can't afford the increase."

Tom and Linda Wharton said they feel "overtaxed" in the township that's been constantly growing for the past two decades. Their kids have since graduated from the township's schools.

"I just think the budget's too high," said Tom Wharton. "I'm looking to retire soon but I can't afford to."

Linda Wharton said she didn't understand why taxes were going up under the proposed budget if enrollment was decreasing.

"Why do they need to increase it if we got along all these years without it," Linda Wharton asked.

Kathleen Yhlen, who has three kids who went through the school system, said the economy played a role in her decision, but she declined to say how she voted.

"I think we all need to look at spending money wisely in these economic times," Yhlen said.