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Over \$1M cut from Milaca Schools in 'right-sizing'

Milaca School District making cuts to prevent state intervention

CONNOR CUMMISKEY
Union-Times

The Milaca School District will see over \$1 million in cuts to staff and programming this year.

School Board members approved \$1,155,786.33 in budget cuts during a March 15 meeting. Another roughly \$30,000 in cuts is needed to avoid state intervention in the district's budgeting process.

Cuts were generally classified into three categories: right-sizing, reductions and reprogramming. Right-sizing is adjusting staffing levels to meet enrollment levels, and should be done every year, according to Superintendent David Wedin. Reductions are cuts from existing programs, and reprogramming means cuts that cause significant changes to existing programs, according to Wedin.

Among the right-sizing cuts are four full-time elementary classroom teachers as well as two half-time teachers in art and music. All together those teachers account for \$337,080. Another \$100,000 was cut out of the transportation budget.

A total of \$535,943.93 was classified as reductions. Three elementary teach-

ers and three high school teachers were cut, for a total reduction of \$404,496. The board also approved cutting one section of high school (\$8,802.33), a school resource officer (\$34,000), and three paraprofessionals who left and weren't replaced (\$33,645.60).

A total of \$40,000 was cut from activities, including marching band, chamber choir and reduced travel to non-conference games. The board also cut a wrestling coach, a speech coach and the fall play assistant.

Under reprogramming the board cut \$182,762.40. Within that category two school readiness teachers were cut (\$134,832), and another two paraprofessionals were cut (\$22,430.40). Another

\$15,500 was cut from the adult basic education budget.

The district is making these cuts, in part, to avoid going into what's called Statutory Operating Debt, which is when the state takes a more hands-on approach to overseeing district budgeting. To avoid that a school district must keep its operating debt at less than 2.5% of its expenditures in the most recent fiscal amount, according to state statute.

"We don't want to lose our local control," Wedin said.

\$1.18 million is the target amount of cuts the district needs to make this year to avoid the state stepping in. Wedin ex-

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Tiger wrestlers earn first trip to state



Submitted Photo

The 2021 Princeton wrestling team was able to make history on March 13 as they wrapped up their first Section 7AA Team Title after defeating Foley by a 41-26 score. The Tigers then continued their strong day on the mats, defeating Section 8AA Champions, Pequot Lakes/Pine River-Backus, 47-21 to secure a team bid to the State Tournament. See story in Sports on Page 6.



Jeffrey Hage / Union-Times

Firefighters attack a fire at 33459 Helium Street in Wyanett Township on the morning of Wednesday, March 10.

Spectacle Lake home destroyed by fire

JEFFREY HAGE
Union-Times

A Wyanett Township couple were in town getting their COVID-19 vaccinations while their home on Spectacle Lake burned Wednesday, March 10.

The four-alarm fire was reported at a lakefront home of Ralph and Lana Borchardt at 33459 Helium St. NW shortly after 10 a.m. on March 10.

The fire was reported by a resident on the opposite side of Spectacle Lake, who observed the fire through her binoculars and called 911.

The reporting party noted that flames were visible on the side of the home facing the lake.

The initial call went to the Dalbo Fire Department, which requested mutual aid from fire departments in Isanti, Cambridge, and Princeton. The mutual aid depart-

ments provided water and manpower at the fire scene. When the first Dalbo firefighters arrived on scene, the home was fully engulfed and fire and black smoke were coming from the windows and doors of the home, according to radio traffic from the Isanti County 911 Dispatch Center.

At one point, firefighters were directed to "cool down" some homes adjacent to the burning house that were in danger of being compromised because of the heat and fire.

Soon afterward, there were reports that the intense heat caused windows to break in a neighboring home.

Witnesses at the scene told the Union-Times that the Borchardts were not home at the time of the fire because they had appointments for COVID-19 vaccinations.

Witnesses also said that the couple's home was entirely heated through the burning of wood.

Mystery chemical threatens city wastewater plant

CONNOR CUMMISKEY
Union-Times

Princeton water quality could go down the tubes if residents don't stop dumping harmful chemicals into the wastewater system.

The city of Princeton is asking residents to be careful about what they dump down the drain, because something is hurting the wastewater treatment plant's capacity for cleaning water. Twice recently, once on Feb. 22 and again on March 1, the plant was hit by a mystery chemical, according to city documents.

"The chemical they're dumping down is messing with our bacteria," plant manager Chris Klinghagen said. "So what that means is the bacteria which cleans the water isn't necessarily cleaning the water anymore."

Staff at the treatment plant have observed cloudy water and foaming bubbles, which indicated a problem. Along with that, the thrice-weekly tests they perform on the water are showing higher than normal levels of phosphorus and total suspended solids, Klinghagen said.

"So that's a big indicator that something's wrong," Klinghagen said.

The bacteria is important because it consumes waste suspended in the water, according to Klinghagen.

"These bacteria eat everything and then they settle out," Klinghagen said.

The dumped chemicals harm the wastewater system and requires the city to add extra chemicals to settle out solids and order extra testing, which incurs a greater cost to the city. The dumping also could hurt the water quality of the river, according to a draft of the letter sent to businesses.

So far it is unclear what chemical is being dumped. Tests on the water have been inconclusive, but Klinghagen suspects it is some kind of cleaning chemical, he said.

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