

# City school budget lowers tax rate, pays off pool early

By JACK FICHTER  
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — The Board of Education of Cape May City Elementary School approved its 2022-2023 budget that includes a decrease in the local purpose tax.

The rate is dropping from 5.8 cents per \$100 of assessed property value to 5.3 cents. Overall, the tax levy is increasing 2 percent to \$1.9 million.

The school is receiving \$446,963 less in Military Impact Aid, dropping from \$1.5 million to \$1.1 million.

Due to the S2 state legislation passed in 2018 to eliminate Adjustment Aid, Cape May City Elementary School will get zero Adjustment Aid by 2025. This year's budget is showing a \$42,652 reduction.

An unforeseen provision of the law required the elementary school to raise the tax levy by 2 percent

in fiscal year 2020, based on a state calculation that the school's minimum tax levy should have been \$2,090,433.

The school contends that since Cape May receives Federal Impact Aid, the amount of Impact Aid received should be combined with the local tax levy when calculating local share, since impact aid was created and is meant to supplement the local tax levy.

In fiscal year 2021, and again in fiscal year 2022, the school was at or above the minimum tax rate, so no increase was required by S2 law.

This year, however, fiscal year 2023, the school again fell short of the minimum tax rate and was required to increase the local tax levy by 2 percent or \$37,728.

Enrollment was budgeted for 178 students. Actual enrollment as of Oct. 21,

2021, was 167 students.

Under expenditures in the budget, the school is spending \$1.3 million on instruction, teacher salaries, substitutes, textbooks and home instruction. A total of \$197,606 is spent on special education with \$69,912 spent on basic skills/remedial instruction.

The state established administrative cost per pupil regional limit is \$2,299. Cape May City Element-

tary School's 2022-23 budgeted administrative cost per pupil is \$2,248.

The school is planning to pay off a shared services agreement with the city for the swimming pool five years early, making a total payment to Cape May of \$550,000 in 2022.

According to Business Administrator John Thomas, the school is able to pay off the swimming pool due to state Impact Aid received.

The pool had its grand opening in October 2017. The project included demolishing the school's original 50-year-old pool, which closed in 2013 due to leaks.

Along with a new pool, skylights, lighting and piping, the project included renovation of the boys and girls locker rooms, pool office and natatorium, pool deck and pool equipment.

New locker room facilities are handicapped-accessible and feature new lockers and showers.

The pool replacement was a joint project of the school and the city, which loaned the school \$1 million at zero interest with a 10-year payoff.

The city agreed to increase the amount it contributed to the project over and above \$1 million dollars the school board is paying for the project.

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