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Members of the seventh-grade red team read letters extolling the benefits of the pen-pal program and explaining why it should be continued. They said the program taught them how to write letters properly and address envelopes, appreciate their places in society and befriend strangers they might not have otherwise met. The board expressed admiration for the students' work.

A married couple involved in the pen-pal program praised the project for helping to link generations. The board agreed that it is a worthwhile project that deserves to be maintained.

Budget update

Assistant Superintendent Cheryl Wangeman said D-38's budget is currently balanced. However, it is estimated that educating the district's 5,763 students will cost roughly \$6,142 each. Wangeman said the recently approved bus fees will help make costs more manageable. The district does not plan to request an increase in lunch fees, even though food costs are expected to rise 8 percent in the coming year.

Wangeman's summary of the 2011-12 budget was accepted by the board. She also presented the proposed district budget for the 2012-13 year, which will be subject to a formal vote on June 21. This document can be viewed by the public. Contact Vicki

Wood, the superintendent's secretary, if interested: 719-481-9546 VWood@lewispalmer.org.

Director of Personnel and Student Services Bob Foster's proposed compensation packages were accepted for the upcoming year, with the pay freeze remaining in effect.

The 2006 general obligation bonds were partially refunded, saving \$900,000 in interest.

Feasibility Committee

The Feasibility Committee, represented by Russ Broshous and Rich Stewart, discussed the importance of maintaining the respect of D-38's community, not only to keep the school system afloat but to contribute to the kind of stellar education the district hopes to provide students.

Broshous and Stewart discussed a young man who was placed in special-education classes as a second-grader and who, thanks to the remarkable education he received, grew up into an up-and-coming doctor.

The fear is that funding cuts will impact classrooms negatively enough to deny students the same sort of benefits. It is important, the Feasibility Committee said, to "win" voters to the school district's cause, appealing to all age levels and getting teachers involved in particular. Mistakes were made in the past, but the committee believes that public regard for D-38 has risen in the

past 10 years, and the percentage of people who will definitely vote "no" to helping the district has decreased accordingly.

Other solutions to money problems mentioned were reducing administrative staff and imposing/increasing user fees.

Despite earning state accreditation with distinction, D-38 will need \$34 million to "get back to where (they are) supposed to be" monetarily. Still, it is vital that these funds not come out of students' direct classroom experiences.

Exceptional Student Services

Mary Anne Fleury, director of Exceptional Student Services, gave an update on the Exceptional Student Services Department, which fared very well in recent Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process audit assessments. The Colorado Department of Education said that most of D-38's Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are among the best in the state. There are currently 552 students in D-38 special education programs, with the district in good standing. Teachers were praised in the assessment for:

- Focusing on student strengths.
- LPedia—an online system providing access to "staff-related policies and procedures."
- All required student timelines having been met.
- The close collaboration between special and general education and the continued services afforded to students ages 3 to 21.

Potential corrections that could be made to the programs include:

- Goals created for achievement during the "transition age"—ages 15 and older.
- Goals should be kept measurable.
- Specific disability identification could be given more emphasis.

Fleury said the state is applying for a waiver to "reinvent" special education, and meetings are being conducted with the directors of special education to come to applicable conclusions. The idea would be to "start all over" to perfect the system. Only 25 percent of special education students in the nation are deemed proficient, and it is thought that a "multi-tiered system of support" could help resolve that problem.

The final goal would be to look out for more students, provide aid for students with any learning disorder, with or without diagnosis, and hire teachers with certification in subjects like literature and math. All pupils under the 35th student growth percentile would form individual growth plans and be given attention that may help them succeed.

Recently, \$11,000 in grant money was awarded to the D-38 special education program, and a teacher assistant coordinator has been assigned to the district. She has been working with school teams.

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