

Mankato schools seek technology levy renewal

District would continue getting \$500,000 per year if levy is renewed

By Tanner Kent

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MANKATO — A technology levy for Mankato Area Public Schools won't raise property taxes if it's approved by voters on Election Day, but officials say it will help Mankato students stay on the leading edge of technology use in the classroom.

"We are ahead of the curve," Supt. Sheri Allen said Thursday during a lightly attended information session about the district's upcoming ballot question. "We want to continue that."

As it's technically called, the district's capital projects levy is a renewal of a levy first passed in 2005.

If renewed, the levy would continue generating \$500,000 per year for the next seven years and continue to be earmarked specifically for technology-related expenditures. If rejected, the property taxes on a \$150,000 home would decrease \$14 per year and \$40 per year for a \$250,000 commercial property as well as a 160-acre agricultural property with homestead.

Since the passage of the first technology levy, the district has installed hundreds of interactive white boards in all but a few dozen classrooms in the district.

Nearly every instructional area in the district has been equipped with an LCD projector.

The district also purchased Infinite Campus in 2007. At the time, the software cost \$134,000 and now serves as the student management system for the entire district. The software tracks nearly every conceivable piece of data related to students — including attendance and grades — and has access for students and parents.

Allen also said the levy has been spent on technology training workshops for teachers, classroom equipment (such as microscopes) and updated computer labs.

If the technology levy is renewed, Allen said the funds will be spent on sound amplification systems for classrooms and purchasing mobile technology for student use, to name a few. Citing a recent district survey, Allen said the funds also will be used to ensure technology access for the 5 percent of students who don't have computers at home and the 10 percent that don't have access to the Internet.

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“ This is about developing 21st century skills,” she said.

During the information session, the pair of audience members and moderator Jonathan Zierdt, president and CEO of Greater Mankato Growth, asked several questions about technology use in the classroom. Does it distract from learning? Is cheating a problem?

Do teachers struggle to engage technology in the curriculum?

In a general sense, Allen answered “no” to each of those questions but added that every teacher manages a classroom differently.

Regardless, she said, technology is omnipresent and schools must embrace it.

“Students who are 18 years old have never lived in a time without Internet,” she said.

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