

# **Grand Island School Board, educators call for end to over-testing**

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Grand Island School District leaders and educators are giving the state a mandate of their own: stop over-testing and allow schools to prepare students for the future.

To a round of applause from a standing-room-only crowd, the Grand Island School Board unanimously adopted a call upon the state education commissioner, the state Board of Regents and other policy-makers to reduce the use of standardized testing. The resolution also asks Congress and the Obama administration to reduce federal testing mandates and support the focus of multiple measures of student learning and school success.

Interim Superintendent Paul Hashem said that the Grand Island Teachers Association sought support for the measure, arguing that state assessment requirements are draining district resources. That has forced the district to cut other programming. Association members also said that the growing reliance on standardized tests is eroding student learning time and narrowing the curriculum teachers can offer.

Tracy Beatty, a high school French teacher and president of the association, stressed that while assessments are necessary and that everyone from students to administration should be held accountable, the emphasis on standardized testing is harming students.

"It's making students not like school," she said. "Learning is more than a test score."

Senior Cassie Bennett told the board that testing leaves her and her classmates stressed out and limited in what they can study.

"I believe there's too much emphasis on standardized tests," she said. "I think there needs to be a greater focus on helping us prepare for our future."

The board also was applauded for its work on the 2013-14 budget, which it adopted unanimously Monday.

The \$54.4 million spending plan is about \$1.3 million more than this year's and calls for a 2.67 percent tax levy increase. About \$30.4 million would be raised

by the tax levy, while \$15.5 million would come from the state and about \$5 million would be taken from the fund balance and reserves, among other revenues. Fixed expenditures including salaries, pensions and health benefits are expected to increase about \$2 million.

Joseph Giarrizzo, assistant superintendent for finance and support services, said that tax bill increases are difficult to pinpoint at this time because Grand Island is going through a re-assessment project that is not yet completed.

The budget will be the first proposition voters will consider. The second concerns the purchase of school buses and other vehicles for an amount not to exceed \$709,860. The Board of Education would determine the tax levied and the finance terms at a later date if the proposition is approved.

Also, three candidates filed petitions by Monday's deadline to run for the three available School Board seats. Incumbents Paul Krull and Donna Tomkins, as well as newcomer Lisa Pyc, will be on the ballot for the May 21 election. The first two highest vote-getters will win three-year terms, while the third-highest will be appointed immediately to fill out the last two years of the seat left vacant when Board President David Goris resigned in January, according to District Clerk Janet Schuster.

The annual school board election and budget vote will be held 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday, May 21, at Grand Island High School.

The Board of Education's next meeting will be a joint session with the Grand Island Town Board at 7:30 p.m. Monday, April 29, in the Veronica E. Connor Middle School Little Theater