

Grand Island schools are in good financial shape, board is told

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A review of reserve funds shows that the Grand Island School District is “in a good spot,” the finance director told the School Board on Monday.

Joseph Giarrizzo, noting that a complete audit report will be available at the board’s Oct. 29 meeting, said the \$23 million in total reserves means, “We’re in a good spot, but we have to remain vigilant.”

Interim Superintendent Robert W. Christmann said, “We’ve worked very hard for many years to keep our financial house in order.”

Christmann, a past president of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, is the new executive director of the Western New York Educational Services Council. He is part-time interim superintendent until the district hires a successor.

The superintendents council is expected to release the results of a financial survey of school districts across the state today and Wednesday.

Christmann, who is privy to the survey results, said Grand Island is in a much better fiscal situation than a number of other school districts, all of which are coping with the state’s new cap on tax increases.

The board met in Sidway Elementary School, where administrators and teachers gave a report on the Reading Recovery Program for the past year.

Pupils needing assistance with reading skills work one-on-one with a reading teacher for an hour in a room with two-way glass. That allows support personnel, who might include the school psychologist, to evaluate progress. Sometimes a pupil’s parents also observe.

Last year, 82 percent of pupils in the program were “discontinued,” meaning they no longer need the specialized program.

The remaining 18 percent are moved into other levels of the program that have more intense instruction.

In other business, the board approved refinancing \$7 million in bond anticipation notes – first issued in 2004 – that Giarrizzo said would save the district an estimated \$215,000 in interest within the next few years.

It also approved a sabbatical for Andre R. Arroyo, assistant high school principal, for November and December to complete work on a doctoral degree.