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Board tries to simplify finance info

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By [MARIO BARTOLETTI](#) Staff Writer

Elementary School District 15 board members are considering ways to make district budget forecasts clearer for residents.

"We want to put our financial status in an easy-to-understand format on the Web and in a newsletter and make it accessible to the community," board member Sue Quinn said. "It will be a snapshot of where we've been in terms of revenue and expenditures and where we're at now."

"We're looking at creating a financial report card," Board President Tim Millar said.

Millar said the board is also looking at long-term planning, policies for a balanced budget and how to avoid the kind of cuts the district made after the failed referendum in 2005. "Obviously, a goal is to tie yourself to your income stream," Millar said. "Mostly these meetings are long-term planning and educating board members so they have the tools to make good decisions."

Millar said about 90 percent of the decisions the School Board makes are financial, and it is difficult to make decision without knowing the financial impact and consequences.

The board's Finance Committee has looked closely at bidding, Millar said.

"Recently we approved buying copiers from a bid process, and we saved \$100,000 a year on just 19 copiers by going for bid," he said. "We don't have to bid on it (by law) because it's technology. But the staff looked into it and did a great job on it."

Changes in spending, whether due to savings or cost increases, will be reflected by the time the report comes out, Quinn said, because it will be distributed after the end of the budget year.

"We will know what our actual dollar figures are," she said. "We will have approved a budget for the coming year so that will give everyone a good idea where we are at the moment and what the forecasts are for five years down the road."

The key to reporting finances to the public will be in using non-technical language and graphics.

"It's not going to be a full financial report," Quinn said. "The idea is to communicate in a clear fashion so everyone can understand what's going on."



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