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### **(Neb)-Chadron School Board Approves Budget**

By: John Axtell Posted at: 09/10/2019 03:21 PM  
By Kerri Rempp *Chadron Record Editor*

CHADRON - The Chadron School Board approved its 2019-20 budget Monday, keeping its mill levy the same and asking for \$5.9 million in property tax dollars.

The district will levy \$1 for every \$100 of property tax valuation for its general fund expenses, and five cents for its special building fund.

The special building fund appears to increase significantly this year, but the change only reflects money from D.A. Davidson that the district will run through the fund to convert its performance contract to a lease-purchase agreement. That step will save taxpayers \$150,000 long-term, said Superintendent Dr. Caroline Winchester.

Also included in the budget are the district's mental health grant and a salary increase for teachers. The teachers agreed to a wage freeze two years ago and a minimal increase last year, and the pay scale needed to be adjusted, Dr. Winchester said. Salaries equate to 80% of the district's budget.

The district did see a \$261,141 increase in state aid, mostly due to an increase in students. That increase, however, was essentially offset by the changes in salaries.

"We gave the biggest pay raise in the history of Chadron Public Schools, and it's still only at the median," said board member Boone Huffman. "It's not at the top. We were in a position that Hay Springs and Crawford were paying higher than Chadron."

Class sizes across much of the district are maxed out at more than 20 kids per teacher, and the district still has \$6 million in facility issues to address, including an HVAC system at the high school that is 50 years old, Huffman said.

"There are just massive needs," he continued, adding that his goal when he joined the board was to decrease the mill levy. "I didn't quite realize the facility needs. I didn't realize our teachers were that low on the scale."

Only one property owner was present for the district's budget hearing to protest. Casey Schuhmacher. "This budget has to go down," he said. "You're spending other people's money."

Mentioning a difficult agricultural economy and the real chance producers will go out of business this year, Schuhmacher said he's frustrated with what he called "reckless" spending and the unwillingness of local and state officials to address the property tax problem.

"Everybody passes the buck."