

By Joy Swearingen

Journal-Pilot correspondent

- 1) Illini West High School students will return to in-person school after the Christmas break.
 - a) The board agreed to start classes Jan. 4, with the group A attending in person that week, and group B attending starting Jan. 11. Remote learning will be used for the students during their alternate at-home weeks, and for some who have chosen a totally remote learning plan. The board agreed with this plan during their regular meeting Dec. 16.
 - b) The board had considered starting with remote learning for the first two weeks in January before beginning in-person classes, in case holiday and family gatherings caused an increase in COVID cases. Several board members expressed the view that students should be back in school if at all possible.
 - c) "The teachers would like to know what is going to happen," said Superintendent Kim Schilson. Schilson said the administrators would keep a close watch on COVID numbers in the county through the end of the year. "If conditions deteriorate, we will re-examine the plan," Schilson said.
- 2) Teachers could be on the COVID vaccination list by the end of January. School staff is part of group 1B to receive the vaccine, along with first responders.
- 3) The board discussed two plans for helping students recover any academic credits lost with the disruption caused by COVID, and to prepare next year's students to be ready for SAT testing.
- 4) Schilson said there could be grants available to help schools in a future stimulus bill.
 - a) "We don't know whether this will be offered, or how much we could get, but if it comes up, we should have something in place," Schilson said. She proposed offering a summer school session for academic recovery working in math, science, English and writing. A grant could be used to pay for the staff and a shuttle. One section of summer school (20 students) would cost around \$11,000. Two sections would cost \$20,000. Summer school would be free for Illini West students. If space is available, students from other districts could attend.

- 5) An SAT boot camp was proposed for three Saturdays a month from September to April, covering math, science, English and writing. The cost for the whole program would be \$23,000 for one section of students. Plans will continue on these proposals, but no action was taken at the meeting.
- 6) The board approved the 2020 tax levy for funds to be used in the 2020-2021 school year. A hearing was held at the beginning of the board meeting. No one came before the board to make comment.
 - a) Schilson explained that the levy request of \$3,136,942 is an increase of 5.43 percent over the actual Hancock County property tax extension received by Illini West this year.
 - b) The tax rate increased 0.41 percent from \$1.9185 to \$1.9264, to be applied to the assessed value of land in the district. This land value amount has not yet been determined by county assessment office. Last year the assessed value was \$155,082,632.
 - c) Schilson based the tax levy amount on an estimated assessed value increase of 5 percent or \$162,836,764. The school also gets funding from Illinois state aid and federal grants.
- 7) The board approved a two-year lease extension for five 2019 school buses at a total cost of \$67,000. They also approved purchase of a new white, 15-passenger activity bus for \$57,000.
- 8) Following closed session, the board accepted the retirement of Darrell Kraft as bus driver.
- 9) A special board meeting was set for Monday, Dec. 21, to discuss the superintendent search for a candidate to replace Schilson who has announced her retirement as of June 30, 2021.