



Carterville school to get part of state money

BY JIM MUIR, THE SOUTHERN

CARTERVILLE - Carterville High School is expected to receive within the next two weeks approximately \$500,000 of the \$1.9 million in funding promised earlier this month by Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

That's the latest update on the controversial funding issue, according to Superintendent Tim Bleyer, who said the school district is currently in the process of filling out a grant application. After the application is approved, the district is expected to receive 25 percent of the funding.

"We will be sending it back to the state (this) week, so we are hoping that we will receive the first installment by the end of October," Bleyer said.

During a campaign swing through Southern Illinois earlier this month Blagojevich, at the urging of Carterville school officials, toured the Williamson County school and announced afterward he was moving Carterville to the top of the priority list for school construction funds.

Bleyer emphasized that the money will not be used to renovate a structure that is likely to go the way of the wrecking ball within three years. Instead, Bleyer said the funding will be used to take care of emergency items.

"I think that is very important for people to know," Bleyer said. "Our kids are going to go to school there for two or three years if we start building a new school tomorrow. We have some emergency items that must be taken care of first and we also need some additional fixes."

Bleyer said "modernizing the school's current boiler system" is a priority item that must be addressed.

"We've got two boilers. One is working at about 75 percent capacity and one is not working at all," he said. "If the one boiler goes out this winter, we are out of business."

Bleyer said a portion of the funding possibly could be used to repair the portion of the roof that will be razed while adding a new roof to the portion of the school that will remain when a new facility is built. He said that correcting an ongoing problem with outdated sewer lines will also be addressed.

"Those are the types of decisions we will be making in the future when the funding comes through," Bleyer said.

State Rep. Roger Eddy of Hutsonville, which is located near Robinson close to the Illinois-Indiana line, has sharply criticized the governor's action, saying Blagojevich is circumventing state law and disregarding the other 24 school districts on the 2002 waiting list.

"The governor's comment that he was putting Carterville on the list ahead of other schools is illegal, period," Eddy said. "There are rules in place; the State Board of Education itself has established procedures based on the law. These 24 other school districts have gone through the legal process of getting on the list based on state law and they have waited three and four years and still haven't gotten any money. Maybe some of those school districts need some of this \$1.9 million."

During a campaign stop in Marion on Sept. 1, Blagojevich spoke directly to those who have been critical of his decision to send nearly \$2 million to Carterville High school.

"If critics have a problem with me putting Carterville at the top of the list, sue me," he said.

Eddy said the needs of the students in the other 24 districts are being ignored.

"The actions of the governor on this issue are arrogant, irresponsible and dangerous," said Eddy. "If he can ignore the law in this case, what's next?"

Meta Minton, public information spokesperson with the State Board of Education, said the school funding issue was addressed by ISBE Superintendent Randy Dunn earlier this week.

"The 24 schools on the construction priority list, the folks that have been on the list since 2002, that list still exists and those are still the priority schools as they were ranked," Minton said. "However, what the governor has done is look at some emergency funds that could help schools that are in situations where repairs need to be done immediately. These are not full-scale school replacements; these are funds for schools that need to make immediate repairs."

Minton said Dunn made it "perfectly clear" that the 24 schools are still on the priority list.

"I don't want to get into the wording of what the governor said but we know that the list of 24 still stands in the exact order as they were prior to this

issue," Minton said. "The money that is being made available is for emergency repairs."

Becky Carroll, a spokesperson for the governor, said there are two issues involved.

"There is an existing list of school districts that have been in line for a significant amount of funding to meet their school construction needs and until we can get a capital bill passed we will have to wait until we can get the funding we need," Carroll said. "This money (\$1.9 million) is from a limited amount of funding from the capital development fund that is used for immediate and emergency needs. We always keep these funds to the side in the event that situations should come up like what we've seen in Carterville. The 24 school districts that were in line for funding are still in line and that will happen when a capital bill is passed."

Bleyer said it was never the intention of Carterville school officials to get caught in crossfire over the needed repairs.

"Our purpose was to show a need and ask the governor to make sure this was a priority in the November veto session," he said. "I'm always frustrated how the political process works. It should be about problem-solving instead of finger-pointing. These days I'm not sure we're getting many problems solved. Our kids feel like they are in the middle of a political ping-pong match and they are the ones suffering for it."

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