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J-P Correspondent

The status of Illini West High School has been restored to Fully Recognized by the Illinois State Board of Education.

- After providing evidence that district is now in compliance with the universal masking requirements set forth in Executive Order 2021-18, the board received an electronic letter from ISBE dated Aug. 31, about their improved status.
- The board voted Aug. 30 to change the district Return to School plan, so that masks are required by anyone in the building.
- “Please be aware that ISBE will continue to investigate any received complaints of noncompliance,” the letter warned. “If we determine that the district is no longer in compliance with the mandate, the district will be returned to ‘On Probation’ status.”
- Principal Jim Short said there have not been problems with required masks.
- “Kudos to the kids, there have been no mask issues,” Short said.

The board approved a budget for the 2021-2022 school year, with expenses of \$5,223,179. This is roughly \$200,000 more than expected income for the year. With healthy beginning balances in district accounts, the ending balance of all funds is estimated at \$3,397,965.

- “I tend to be pretty conservative in my budgeting,” explained Superintendent Jay Harnack after the meeting.
- “It is unbalanced, but the budget is reflective of being conservative with revenues and cautious with expenditures.”
- Harnack said he expected that the budget would be amended during the year, because there are grants the district should receive. The approved budget is available on the district website.
- Illinois is offering a \$50,000 matching maintenance grant for school districts. The Illini West board approved the grant application for a \$50,000 grant for the HVAC project in the gymnasium. The total cost of the work in the gym is \$192,000.
- Harnack anticipates ESSR II and III grants to be received by the district. This money must be used to address needs created by the pandemic. He suggested these funds could be used for school buses.
- A feasibility study was approved for \$4,750 to look into a football locker room building near the weight room, and an accessibility ramp into the music room.

Short reported that the student council is working on Homecoming events for the week of Sept. 20-25.

- The theme is Disney. Activities are planned throughout the week, with the parade on Friday at 2:30 p.m. starting around the courthouse square in Carthage, and a pep rally to follow at the courthouse.
- The game is Friday at 7 p.m. The dance Saturday is planned outside so that students can be mask free.

The board approved Dennis Dooley as a volunteer softball coach; Holly Wilde-Tillman and Dina Schaller as volunteer cheer coaches; and Dustin Logan as a volunteer football coach.

Tiffany Shepler was hired as the high school principal’s secretary.

Early graduation was approved for McKenna Merritt.