

District's update 09-10 School year

Needless to say, the biggest news for the 08-09 school year was budget cuts. I hope this will help everyone understand what was done and what our plans for the next two years will be.

First of all, USD 290 cut \$1.64 million from the 09-10 budget. Since 83% of the budget is taken up by salaries/benefits, this is where a large portion of the cuts came from. The overall percentages cut from the three salary classifications were 11.07% from Administration, 3.43% from certified (licensed) staff, and 8.23% from classified staff. The overall reduction in salaries was \$820,000, which equates to 31.9 total staff positions cut. Extended day contracts and class offerings of those who taught on their planning period were reduced and several coaching and sponsoring positions were eliminated.

Secondly, USD 290 will not purchase textbooks for the next two years, which will save the district an estimated \$175,000 each year. Scheduled technology purchases, other than necessities, were put on hold for this year and next year saving \$300,000 each year. Inservice training was reduced to half of the original amount budgeted saving \$40,000. These three options are short term remedies. All of these budgets will have to be increased in two years to maintain the current technology level, to assure the students have the materials necessary to succeed in their classes, and to keep the staff well trained and up to date in the latest educational initiatives.

Thirdly, every budget was cut by 3% early in the year and other saving measures were implemented to be as frugal as possible to enhance the amount of carryover funds into the 09-10 school year. Staff salaries were frozen. The Contingency Reserve Fund (a fund that is used for retirement benefits and other emergency purposes) is maxed out at 10% of the general fund. Other funds have healthy reserves, knowing they will have to be used to get through the state's financial crisis.

Despite all of the cuts USD 290 was able to keep All Day Kindergarten, the academic coaches, and class sizes down to a manageable level. However, given the cuts in the budget, class numbers can be expected to climb. The staff has worked harder than they ever have, and our test scores are higher than they have ever been.

State school funding will be a major concern for the next few years. The state cut school funding in 08-09 and announced another cut of \$62 to begin the year. This brings the amount USD 290 receives per student down to \$4218. This is lower than the amount schools received in the 05-06 school year, which was \$4257. The amount of money USD 290 was scheduled to receive; if the state followed the school finance law that was passed in 2006, would have been approximately \$4597. In two years, the \$195 million the state receives in federal stimulus money each year will run out. The legislatures will be faced with difficult decisions on how to make up the approximately \$218 per student the stimulus money equates to. If they choose to do nothing, USD 290 will see an additional cut in funds of this amount in the 2012-2013 school year.

In spite of all of the changes, both financially and organizationally, the district will see over the next few years, the expectations for student success will continue to rise. USD 290 is committed to assuring students meet these expectations. The staff will be expected to accomplish more with fewer resources.

Test scores and overall student achievement has never been higher, the buildings and grounds haven't been in better condition. This is largely attributed to staff training, providing resources where they are needed the most, and a proactive, dedicated staff. The staff will rise to these challenges and continue to meet the needs of the students.

USD 290 will continue to be very prudent with future spending. If funding continues to be cut, more drastic cuts will have to be made to assure the financial integrity of the district. The district has been fortunate in having reserve funds to help carry it through the tough financial times. However, these funds will run out and the district will have to make more cuts in the near future, if state school funding isn't restored. The next series of cuts will have to include further cuts in personnel, entire programs and other activities that will have a devastating effect on student achievement. The USD 290 School Board will always put kids first when making tough decisions. Being well-versed in the status of school funding and the latest innovative trends in education will assure the school board will make decisions that will keep student achievement their number one focus.

Seeking additional revenue sources will play a critical role in funding our current programs and continuing to develop new innovative programs. USD 290 received more than \$800,000 in grant funding over the past few years. Grant money is always temporary and this too will come to an end. More grants will be written and, if they are awarded, will make a difference in the number of opportunities available to our students.

Another source of additional revenue is state At-Risk aid. A large portion of the state funding formula is based on At-Risk aid. The district qualifies for At-Risk aid by the number of students that qualify for free lunches. The district free and reduced lunch numbers have increased and will continue to increase with the condition of the economy. This increase in free lunch applications has qualified USD 290 for more state funding this past year. The percentage of free lunch applicants in the elementary school is 50%. The numbers in the middle and high school dropped off drastically to 31%. The district is encouraging anyone that qualified for free lunches in elementary school to continue to apply when their students enter the middle school and high school. This not only helps families during tough economic times, but also helps the district fund many of the special programs needed to assure student success. A higher overall district free and reduced lunch percentage will qualify the district for more state At-Risk funding. Anyone that feels they may qualify for free or reduced lunches can inquire at the district office.

The school district has many positive things taking place and innovative programs being implemented to help students succeed. Continuing to make the huge gains the district has experienced the past few years will be more difficult; however, USD 290 will make every effort to assure students have the resources available to help them reach their full potential.

Feel free to contact the district office at any time. Your opinions are always welcome.