



Lake Oswego School District

Staffing and Program Decisions, March 2010

During the week of March 15, staff members were informed of reductions in teaching positions and teacher transfers, consistent with the teacher staffing framework previously announced. These changes will include modification of the instructional delivery model for the district's elementary PE program. The following message from Superintendent Korach provides background and details regarding these decisions.

Our schools have faced funding challenges repeatedly over the past 20 years. From the passage of Measure 5 in 1990, through a number of cyclical economic downturns and recoveries, the district has addressed, managed, and adapted to funding shortages, while maintaining high student achievement in the process. The success of the district is directly attributed to the quality, commitment, and resilience of teachers, administrators, and support staff.

But we should not lose sight of the fact that survival at every turn has required downsizing, change, and adjustment. We have lost programs and positions that have never been recovered, and we have adapted to doing some things differently.

Regardless of how we reorganize, the district cannot escape the impact of the immense economic challenges currently facing the state and the nation. The problem is serious, severe, and real. The response that will be required is expected to be of a magnitude beyond anything we have experienced in the past 20 years. There is no magic solution on the horizon.

Our challenge now is to respond to worsening economic conditions with strategic decisions that protect, to the extent possible, our educational programs. We will have to make difficult decisions regarding programs and staff that would not be made under more favorable conditions. We have no choice but to operate within the limits of the available resources.

With the district's current staffing, providing contracted salary and associated benefit increases for next year would cost an additional \$2 million. With another \$1 million cost increase in science textbooks and materials, as well as increases in fuel and electricity, the district faces cost increases for 2010-11 of over \$3 million. We no longer have significant revenue reserves, so when funding can't cover cost increases, staff reductions become necessary.

We are communicating the first round of difficult decisions this week with reductions in force, transfers, and changes to the instructional model for elementary PE. The staffing reduction decisions the district has made thus far will account for a decrease in district expenses of approximately \$1.15 million for 2010-2011.

A second round of cost reduction decisions addressing special services, central services, management services, and classified staffing will be communicated in late April.

Last year, the district did considerable work in anticipation of downsizing and reorganization decisions, including the following:

- The district determined a relative hierarchy of essential programs and services that the district would strive to maintain.
- The district conducted an extensive parent survey to ask for feedback on essential programs and services, and to gather perspective on priorities and trade-offs regarding class size, programs, and fees.
- The results of this survey indicated that breadth of program, including elementary teaching specialists and secondary level electives, is highly valued by parents. Most parents would choose to retain all teaching specialists and electives if it could be done with only a small increase in core curriculum class size. At the point that significant increases in class size would have to occur, minimizing class size became a higher priority than retaining all teaching specialists and electives.

The district's two major priorities for the next school year are 1) to protect class sizes, particularly at the primary grades, while continuing to provide the most comprehensive instructional program possible, and 2) to reconfigure the middle level instructional day, instituting a rollover block schedule which better allows for the sharing of secondary teaching staff. It is expected that the economic conditions will require an additional schedule change at the high school level for the 2011-2012 school year.

As cost-reduction options have been discussed and evaluated, building administrators have helped shape decisions and have reached consensus with district administration on the following changes.

Elementary (a reduction of 4 FTE*, including both classroom and physical education positions)

- Students will continue to have PE twice a week: once a week with a PE teacher; once a week with the classroom teacher.

This change will require that classroom teachers provide instruction for one section of PE each week in grades 1-6. We recognize that this will not be the same as having a PE specialist deliver program. We will be supporting elementary teachers to design the best possible physical education program under these conditions, focusing on collaborative efforts and larger group activities.

- Kindergarten students will not have PE instruction.

The 2-1/2 hour length of the half-day kindergarten will include recess, but not physical education taught by a physical education specialist.

Secondary

Middle Level (a reduction of 2.67 FTE at each of the middle schools)

- A total of 15 teachers will be impacted by downsizing decisions including reduction in force, loss of hours, or transfer.

High School (a reduction of 3.0 FTE at each of the district's two high schools)

- A total of 20 teachers will be impacted by downsizing decisions including reduction in force, loss of hours, or transfer.

Difficult as these staffing and program decisions are for the district and for the individuals affected, we must recognize that 87% of our school district's operating budget is dedicated to salaries and associated benefit costs. In short, a school district is a living organization. Our district is, for the most part, people. When we must reduce costs because our resources do not cover our expenses, people are going to be impacted.

Our first cost-reduction priority was to address the majority of teacher staffing changes to be made for next year so forecasting and instructional program planning could be undertaken. As stated earlier, a second round of staffing decisions is currently being considered and is scheduled to be shared in late April.

Bill Korach
Superintendent

*FTE stands for full-time equivalent. 1.0 FTE equals one full-time position.