

PRESS RELEASE

Toppenish School District Faces Budget Shortfall for 2024/25 School Year

Toppenish, WA – 4/22/2024

As many of you know, the Toppenish School District, like many districts across the state, is facing some financial challenges as we look toward the next school year. At this time, the District is facing an \$8.6M shortfall for the 2024/25 school year. There are several reasons the District is in this financial trouble. First, grant funding expected to pay for the new state-of-the-art preschool did not come through, requiring the District to dip into funding reserves to make up the \$5M shortfall. Added to that, student enrollment has still not rebounded following COVID-19. Across the state, public school enrollment, a significant factor in determining the state funding for schools, is still down nearly 6%. TSD also lost nearly 250 Alternative Learning Education (ALE) students attending school online, which further reduced TSD funding. Finally, in a mixed blessing of sorts, Toppenish property values have significantly increased. However, that means levy equalization funding provided by the state for school districts with lower property values has decreased significantly. A lot of unforeseen issues surfaced at one time that we had no way of anticipating. Right now, our main objective is dealing with the situation in front of us while still providing the high-quality education our students deserve.

The District formulated a budget advisory committee several months ago and gathered input and ideas to help guide strategies for addressing the budget shortfall. With over eighty percent of the District budget being spent on personnel, the budget shortfall will mean reducing positions. Although other cuts are necessary and are being made, cutting staff was really the only way to make up a shortfall of this extent. The districts' first step was to look at attrition—how many staff members were planning to retire or resign and if those positions could remain open. The next step was looking at support positions like the number of nurses needed now that COVID-19 requirements have relaxed. Reducing teaching staff and direct support for our students was the last and final thing the District considered.

Overall, the District will be reducing salaries and benefits for all central office administrators and cutting 2 central office administrative positions. The District will also be reducing salaries and benefits for all school and department administrative staff. The district is reducing 3 school administrative positions, 10 teacher positions, 2 graduation specialists, 7 classified staff positions and 1 supervisor. Another 24 positions were reduced through retirements or resignations.

This is painful work, and these are painful conversations to have to reach this level of budget reduction, but it's necessary for the District to move forward and continue to serve students in a meaningful way. We welcome parents, staff, and community members to reach out with questions or concerns. The best way to stay informed is to attend upcoming school board meetings. The next school board meeting is April 23rd from 7-9 p.m. at the District Office.

For further inquiries, please contact:

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