

Answers to questions asked at Budget Information Meetings

Q. What has happened to cause Bellevue School District to have to make budget reductions?

A. Bellevue, like all school districts in Washington, is facing a loss of revenue from the state. The following is an explanation from the Washington Association of School Administrators.

The Levy Lid and Funding Basic Education

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“Because the percentage of state funding for basic education has declined while NERCs (Non-employee related costs), COLAs (cost of living allowances), student achievement standards, school district accountability and other unfunded mandates have increased, school districts across the state are now faced with an unprecedented fiscal crisis. Reserves are gone—or will be. The potential of insolvency is real—if not this year, then in the years ahead.”

“It is the state’s responsibility to fully fund basic education. The state’s decision to continue to shift the burden of raising taxes from the state level to the local level ignores its constitutionally mandated paramount duty. Both the citizens of this state and our legislature must face this reality. We can hardly be proud of our ranking as forty-fifth in the nation for per pupil funding. If schools are to be accountable for giving students the opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to be active participants in a democratic society and to be competitive in the global marketplace, then at a minimum the state should be required to be competitive with other states in providing funding for schools to do their job. We must identify and pass legislation that establishes a stable, equitable and ample funding source for K–12 at the state level. The state must be held accountable for providing schools with ample resources for our students in the twenty-first century.”

Q: What about delaying the purchase of curriculum materials?

A: There are two types of curriculum material costs to consider. First, schools need to purchase textbooks to replace those that are damaged or not returned, or to have enough books in cases when enrollment is rising. Second, there are the costs of updating and replacing ageing texts. We have identified about \$800,000 at the district level for essential curriculum materials for core subjects, primarily literacy and math. Math textbooks for grades 8-10 are 10 years old and we have chosen a replacement text. We will need to order K-5 literacy materials, as well as provide resources to support science instruction in grades K-10. Breaking the cycle of purchasing curriculum materials in core subjects has implications for student performance and may have an adverse impact on student achievement.

Q: How will we deliver PE to elementary school students?

A: Since PE is required, the issue would be discussed at the building level. We would have to negotiate planning time.

Q: Is the school district required to have an enrichment program?

A: We are required to offer a program for students in the top 3%, but the model does not have to look like the current enrichment program.

Q. Why don't you eliminate or restructure International School and Spanish Immersion

A. These schools follow the same basic funding model as other schools. Staff is assigned at the same ratio and the schools receive the same building funds as other schools based on their student enrollments. Class sizes are approximately the same as other schools.

Q. Why are you funding professional development for Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT's) at this time?

A. We are funding professional development for these teams because our two district-wide goals of eliminating the achievement gap and extending learning for students requires that teachers develop new knowledge and skills in the area of instructional strategies. Teacher leaders, such as the ILT, are instrumental in leading and implementing instructional changes in their schools. Funding for monthly ILT professional development is mainly coming from grant funds not from general funds.

Q. If you eliminated the 7th period in middle school, would the student day be shorter?

A. The state requires that students attend school so many minutes a day. For this reason, we would have to increase the length of each period and then decide if we thought the student day should be shortened or not.

Q. Why isn't the high school 7-period day on the reductions list?

A. We considered this option but did not place it on the list for the following reasons. First, because our graduation requirements are more rigorous than the State graduation requirements, the elimination of the 7-period day would have made graduation for some of our high school students much more challenging. We believe the 7-period day has also contributed to a reduction in the District's dropout rate. In 1996-97 we had a dropout rate of 17%. It went to 14% the first year after the 7-period day was instituted and by 2001 had dropped to 9%. Factors to which we attributed the decline in dropouts included adding the 7th period to middle and high schools, bringing the counselors under one umbrella, building a connected curriculum and revamping Robinswood High so that students could earn credits more quickly than in a regular high school. Another factor could have been better recordkeeping.

In addition, high school students develop a four-year plan based on graduation requirements and it is too late to change those requirements for next year's students that graduate in 2011, 2012 and 2013. We can change the graduation requirements for next year's 9th grade students, but it is not ethical to change graduation requirements mid-stream for our current high school students.

Q: What is the capital technology fund use for and can we push more costs there?

A: The District is currently undertaking a thorough review of what costs can be paid for through the capital technology fund within the requirements of state law. The capital technology fund currently pays for the following:

- Curriculum developers who work on the Curriculum Web – a completely web-based curriculum tool
- Curriculum/technology coaches – who train and work with school staff on the implementation of technology in the classroom. This includes using the “Teacher Dashboard.”
- Computer hardware

Some instructional materials can also be purchased with these funds as long as they are technology related.