

Grafton district poised to consolidate directors' posts, lay off teachers to offset revenue shortfall for 2011-12 year

Personnel cuts, including the consolidation of directors' positions and teacher layoffs, are among the cost-saving options being explored by Grafton School District officials for the 2011-12 school year.

Supt. Jeff Pechura said the district is considering ways to trim as much as \$1.2 million from the next budget, primarily in response to an anticipated reduction in state aid.

"We're preparing for a potential shortfall of \$1.7 million, depending on what happens with the state budget," Pechura said. "We know that all districts are going to face cutbacks that have to be made, and we're no different."

By gathering input from administrators, teachers, students and residents early this year, the School Board will be better prepared to make tough budget decisions, according to Pechura.

With 84% of the district's budget going to salaries and benefits, the bulk of \$1.2 million in potential cuts points to staff reductions. Pechura said district enrollment has fallen by 12 resident students each of the last two years, and an even larger decline is expected this fall.

"We're anticipating a bit of a drop at the high school. We have 240 seniors this year, and only 170 coming in next year as freshmen," Pechura said.

The district is also planning cost-saving changes with the pending retirement of two longtime staff members — business manager Don Amundson and buildings and grounds director Mike Karrels, who are both leaving at the end of the current school year.

Pechura said plans call for the business manager's post to be combined with the human-resources director. The latter job is a half-time position currently held by Susan Dannemiller, who is also stepping down in June.

"We have four very qualified candidates to interview for the new (combined) position," said Pechura, who will make a recommendation to the board in February after the field has been pared by a district interview team.

Karrels' position is likely to be filled by a current staff member, but the district may not hire an additional maintenance worker to save money, Pechura said.

The staff changes after the directors' retirements are expected to save more than \$100,000 in salaries and benefits, he noted.

Also helping the district offset the anticipated aid shortfall is half of a \$679,000 federal

Paring school budget points to personnel cuts

Written by Steve Ostermann

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Education Job Fund grant it was awarded last fall. Pechura noted the district could use the remaining \$339,000 to defray the cost of staff salaries and benefits, replicating a move it made in October.

Pechura said the district will trim staff numbers regardless of the impact of the state budget, but the extent of cutbacks will depend largely on aid reductions. Layoff notices would be issued as early as possible in spring, he added.

“It’s a step we have to take. We’re in a need situation, as is every other school district,” Pechura said.

“We have to look at maximizing efficiency and saving money without affecting the quality of education.”

In September, district residents approved a \$16.6 million levy supporting a 2010-11 budget that included a 3.4% tax-rate increase. However, a number of residents strongly criticized the rate hike.

The previous year, district officials came under considerable fire when the board adopted a budget that included a 13.3% tax increase.