

May 20, 2009

Dear Issaquah School District Community,

What a difference a month can make. In anticipation of momentous state revenue reductions to public education, I presented a [worst-case financial plan to the School Board on April 22](#) that outlined up to \$10.5 million in cuts to our operations budget. With the Governor's signature finalizing the state budget this week along with corresponding instruction to school districts from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, I am relieved to finally be able to offer more specificity about our fiscal outlook. **While significant, the reductions in state revenue—and our resulting reconciled District budget—will be considerably better than our worst-case scenario.**

The certificated employee contract stipulates that we notify the teachers association by mid April if we must establish a Reduction in Force (RIF) line to stay solvent, which was the basis for bringing forward a broad financial plan in April—even as lawmakers continued to shift around millions of dollars in education funding during budget negotiations. The \$10.5-million figure represented our best conservative forecast to protect the District against the plausible possibility that lawmakers could land on the lowest funding model for K-12 education while also diverting federal stimulus dollars away from schools to other service areas—a true worst-case scenario.

The actual state budget has not cut quite as deep. [Our loss of revenue is about \\$7.3 million.](#) In the face of such an unprecedented step backward in public education funding, there is some *relatively* good news for the Issaquah School District.

After reconciling the \$7.3 million in lost state revenue with other mitigating factors in our budget process—such as increased funding from student growth—we will be able to cover more than a third of our deficit with the [\\$2.2-million in off-setting, non-classroom related reductions](#) we identified in April. **We will bridge the rest of the deficit through a one-student increase in class-size ratios.** While not ideal, I believe this financial plan will allow the Issaquah School District to continue to provide a balanced, comprehensive educational experience for students next year while still maintaining some of the lowest class sizes in the state.

The single-student increase in class-size ratios results in about 40 to 45 fewer certificated positions District-wide; because this approximates the number of teachers we generally lose each year due to [attrition, retirement, and non-continuing contracts](#), **we expect to recall most certificated employees who received a RIF notification.**

Budget implications

Please remember: Our reconciled 2009-2010 budget offers *relatively* good news. Although reductions could have been deeper (a real possibility for upcoming budget cycles, especially as federal stimulus money expires), our schools will look and feel different come September.

The \$2.2 million in off-setting cuts represents a significant funding decrease in service levels that are not related to classroom teachers. You will likely notice the tradeoffs: Your phone calls might not be answered as quickly because of trimmed secretarial hours; facilities might not be vacuumed as frequently because of reduced custodial hours; students on activity runs might be dropped off at consolidated, central stops; teachers will have less support from trained peer experts and educational assistants; central administrative support to buildings and the community will have to be prioritized because positions have been cut ...

These reductions are not painless. We receive [less per-pupil funding](#) than almost every other school district in the state, and we [rank the lowest in King County](#) and among large school districts in administrative spending. We are among the leanest and we are getting leaner. We have cut as aggressively as possible in non-teacher service areas while being cognizant of minimum standards in health, safety, support, laws, and regulations that we must meet.

District-wide, class sizes will also increase. Because actual class sizes are based on many factors, the one-student-ratio increase may or may not be distinguishable at a class or building level. Class-size ratios always come with an acceptable

range, and it is extremely challenging to manage the splitting point in class sections because students never come in neat ratio packages at each building. Additionally, principals have the latitude to work with their teacher teams to implement best instructional decisions. For instance, they may increase class ratios at one grade level in order to create staff time for a targeted, pull-out reading program; or they may increase the number of students in an elective class to lower class size in a more challenging core subject.

In the Issaquah School District, we have chosen for the past several years to funnel I-728 dollars directly into smaller class sizes, which has kept our ratios among the lowest in the state. We expect that trend to continue next year, even though the state budget has slashed I-728 funding and dollars for class-size enhancements. Again, this class-size increase is not painless. District-wide, one implication of shedding 40 to 45 certificated positions is the possibility of moving teachers between buildings as we reconfigure staffing levels and begin to recall RIF'ed employees.

Please refer to budget information on our District homepage, www.issaquah.wednet.edu, for more detailed information about the budget process and timeline, including FAQs about class sizes and more.

Looking forward

We are on a progressive path toward every graduate meeting the Issaquah School District [mission](#): *Our students will be prepared for and eager to accept the academic, occupational, personal, and practical challenges of life in a dynamic global environment.* As Superintendent, I wish I could bring you a budget message flush with resources that acknowledge and lay the foundation for the advancements we need to best serve our students. Any step backward in state funding is disappointing.

However—like in your own households— times of economic hardship can provide an opportunity to scrutinize and recommit to our most important priorities. Facing significant revenue decreases, my budget philosophy has been to preserve a balanced, rigorous educational experience for students. Our schools are the richest in the state and nation in two unquantifiable resources: Excellent staff and community support. More than ever next year, we will rely on and appreciate our skillful and expert employees as well as our legions of volunteers, PTSA and Issaquah Schools Foundation members, legislative advocates, and school supporters. Together, we will make sure our students succeed.

Come September, our schools will be open and excited for another quality year of learning.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steve Rasmussen