Board Approves $6.4 Million in Budget Cuts

The school board approved on a 4-3 vote an administration recommendation for $6,413,503 in budget reductions, with the exception of the removal of a $605,282 line item for a reorganization of library media services. Instead, the board accepted a revised proposal drafted by district library media specialists to cut approximately but not more than $240,320 in library media staffing, and $24,000 in elementary substitute costs as proposed by the Elementary Scheduling Committee.

The board directed the administration to make up the $364,962 difference between the original and revised library media services proposals through a combination of cuts to the district’s learning coach program and additional reductions in administration costs. The original budget-savings recommendation included $400,000 in administrative cuts. The board directed district leadership to bring this plan back to the board for review and final approval.

During public comment, the board heard from 13 individuals opposed to library media cuts. “I know the important role that learning coaches play. This is not to pit the librarians against the learning coaches,” said Kelly Jones, board member.

The administration had not recommended previously proposed cuts to learning coaches to ensure the district could provide support for the changes that would be occurring as a result of combined budget reductions. This includes providing support for teachers of multi-age classrooms and shared building administrators across smaller schools at the elementary level.

“We’re trying to make the best out of the worst. I suppose it is frustrating to me that even though as we are looking at increasing wages, we can also be looking at these numbers, just like we are doing with the library number, and trying to find a better balance,” said Kay Emerson, board member. Emerson added that she is still hung up on the idea of sharing elementary principals and having multi-age classrooms without funding additional paraeducator support.

During a Special Meeting last week, the board reached a consensus to remove $30,506 in recommended cuts to clubs, activities, and co-curricular activities. It also delayed further discussion of discontinuing girls’ gymnastics until a Title IX evaluation is completed. Current coaching salaries for gymnastics are approx. $10,332; however, the administration had recommended the program be eliminated for a variety of reasons, including safety and cost avoidance of replacing equipment or renting equipment and private practice space.

Monday night’s budget decisions were made to bridge an estimated $3.62-$4.27 million shortfall, due largely to declining enrollment and corresponding losses in state aid. The board called for deeper cuts to reallocate funds to priorities, including staff raises. Each 1% increase to employee salary pools costs approx. $825,000.

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