

**BUDGET:** Community partners have provided budget infusion

*Continued from page 1*

budget, with \$12,632,832 in the general fund. Thanks to more robust state funding, that's about \$140,000 better than last year's budget. However, expenses — almost entirely made up of personnel costs — have gone up. So, while the district is projected to receive some \$60 more per student, the district won't be in a position to hire more teachers.

"Even though you've got more dollars, you're not getting more service," Golden said.

That could change for the better if the state legislature decides to kick more money into the K-12 budget. The current local budget is based on a state budget of \$7.255 billion.

"The hope is to get more money," Golden said. "The hope is to get to \$7.5 (billion)."

If that happens, Golden said the district has about \$225,000 in priorities for the extra money it could receive. At the top of that list is a music teacher for Sisters Elementary School. The district would also like to devote some funds to improving online programming; allocate funds to retain its Chinese language program; fund instructional coaching; and get some counseling support back into the schools, particularly at Sisters Elementary School, which lost its counselor position two years ago and has been working with Deschutes County personnel to cover necessary services.

The "no-layoff" budget does not mean there are no losses. Two secretaries are retiring from Sisters High School (SHS) and Rob Corrigan is leaving teaching

to return to the private sector, so personnel costs are reduced through "attrition" rather than through a layoff.

The level of enrollment remains a critical issue. Since state funding is provided on a per-student basis, the only way toward a positive budget scenario is for enrollment to grow. That's not happening in Sisters. The district will end the 2014-15 school year down approximately 44 students from the 2013-14 year-end enrollment. While that beat the district's own projections, it's still decline, not growth.

Golden noted that enrollment is now about the same as it was when he was first here in 1996.

Availability of family-wage jobs and affordable housing and rentals remain a challenge for the district to attract young families with children.

The district's innovative programs, however, remain a magnet for families interested in providing their children with exceptional opportunities and experiences in programs from Chinese language instruction to The Americana Project music program to IEE (Interdisciplinary Environmental Expedition) classes.

Several local nonprofits contribute directly to school district programs.

"I look at the budget as what keeps our district doing the Three Rs," said outgoing school board member Melvin Herburger.

He likened the basic budget to a bowl of vanilla ice cream. Community partners are contributing the nuts and chocolate and cherry on top.

On that note, Sisters Folk Festival Creative Director Brad Tisdell ran through with the committee a brief accounting of the tens of thousands of dollars the Sisters Folk Festival (SFF) nonprofit contributes each

year to school programs.

The festival is just ending the first year of a five-year "Studio to Schools Grant" through the Oregon Community Foundation that provides a total of \$280,000 to develop and support overall music programming in the district. SFF also funds the SHS luthier (guitar-building) program; funds a position for a middle school Americana Project teacher, and provides thousands of dollars in supplies, equipment, scholarships and other support.

Other organizations like the Sisters Science Club similarly work to support programs that would otherwise not exist.

"We've been innovative and partnered with public/private entities to improve our budget," Golden said.

Budget committee members asked a series of probing questions on how funds and FTE (full-time-equivalent personnel) positions were allocated.

A casual look at the budget would show increases in administrative personnel in certain funds — an appearance that some committee members worry could lead the public to think the district was spending more overall on administration.

The personnel haven't changed, according to Golden, but where they are allocated in the budget has.

"It's the same amount of people; it's just where you put 'em," Golden said.

School board member Stephen King urged Golden and financial manager Sandy Tartaglia to make notes on the budget that is posted on the school's website so that it is clear where administrative FTE have been moved around to avoid misperceptions and misunderstandings.

"I think the point is not so much the reality as the optics," he said. "There's no reason to raise the ire if we don't need to."

**Equine illness threatens state championships**

An outbreak of equine herpes has put the Oregon High School Equestrian Teams state championship event in peril. As of press time, the event has been cancelled, pending the possibility of rescheduling later in the year.

An outbreak of EHV-1 (Equine Herpes Virus-1) infected numerous horses from the Willamette District. The disease can cause nerve damage and other long-term effects. In a letter to participants, OHSET officials stated:

"Due to progressions with the EHV-1 outbreak the State Championship Meet has been cancelled. There is likely more than one exposure point and we (the OHSET State Board and the state veterinarian) no longer feel simply keeping Willamette District horses home provides enough risk mitigation to move forward with the state meet. Given what we know today about potential exposure, this is the most responsible decision we can make."

OHSET sent out a survey to gauge the possibility of postponing the championships into June, but it is not certain that alternative dates would work. A decision was to be made late this week.

Outlaws equestrian Coach Yvette Chandler said, "Needless to say, this is a

heartbreaking blow. A special consideration goes out to the seniors who may not get the opportunity to compete this, their final high school year. I totally concur and respect the OHSET's board and state veterinarian's decision to cancel State for the safety sake of all equines.

"This has brought about an amazing show of sportsmanship and horsemanship statewide, from fine athletes, families and friends, as well as all the volunteers that OHSET depends so heavily on to continue this great program."

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