

School Enrollment and Funding

my mind that's a very positive thing for the district and it's a very positive thing for the community."

In 2014-15 the Oregon schools across the state received \$6,947 per student from the State School Fund (SSF). An increase of twenty-eight students would therefore appear to be a significant boon to the ever tightening budget of the cash strapped Vernonia School District, which has been struggling to make ends meet due to cuts in state funding, their declining enrollment, and expenses related to the construction of the new campus.

And, it is a boon. More students, means more money, right?

The short answer is yes. But the long answer is much more complicated. **What's the problem?**

The increase in students can be seen as both a positive and a negative. The growth in enrollment could be a sign that things are finally turning around for the school district and for the community, and obviously means more funding. The flip side is that extra students also put a strain on the resources the district is currently able to provide.

Comprehending the impact of the increase in enrollment is trickier than one might think. First of all, school enrollment is an ever changing number, with families and registered students coming into, and moving out of the district constantly. The exact number of students enrolled can change from week to week, even day to day.

Secondly, the amount the school district receives is initially based entirely on estimates, and involves a complex process of reconciliations throughout a school year to adjust the amount of payments the district receives from the state. District officials and the district budget are constantly in flux and in the dark about the actual amount of funding they will receive from the state during any given school year; which makes planning a budget somewhat challenging.

Thirdly, what makes figuring the numbers so convoluted is that the final numbers involve enrollment statistics and funding for parts of at least three fiscal school years; the previous year, the current year and the upcoming year.

How does the state figure funding?

The state has developed a formula they use to take the Average Daily Membership (ADM), which is the number of students attending the school full time, and turning it into the Extended ADM (ADMw), the figure the

state uses to calculate the amount each school district will receive from the SSF. Without getting into all the nitty gritty details, here is a brief summation of how the state and the district figure out school district funding.

They start with school district local revenue, which is an estimate of all the money the school district will receive from local property taxes, the Common School fund, the county school fund, and state managed timber. For the 2014-15 school year Vernonia estimated Local Revenue at \$2,900,161.

For the most part, the system does work. But there are several holes in the system, some of them more gaping than others.

Next they figure the district's Extended ADM. Taking the initial ADM, (the number of students the school district estimates they will have enrolled for the school year) they multiply by a number of factors that increase costs to the district to provide services, to calculate the final Extended ADM. Among the weighted factors are: students in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program, students in Pregnant and Parenting Programs, students in Special Education programs, and students in poverty and foster care programs. Vernonia also receives extra factors for the students enrolled at the remote Mist School and extra factors for being a small high school.

As an example, students in an ESL program count as an additional factor of .5, students in poverty count as an extra .25 and a percentage of high school students count as an extra 1.0. Those extra factors give the district additional funding and resources to help compensate for these special issues and student needs they must meet.

Remember, these are all estimates that needed to be included in and are part of the school district 2014-15 budget process, which took place in the spring of 2014. With all the weighted factors, Vernonia's ADM went from an estimated 550 students for the 2014-15

continued from front page

school year to an Extended ADM for 2014-15 of 756.24.

The state then takes that Extended ADM and multiplies it by their basic grant funds and several other ratios and then adds in some additional costs (remember, we're trying to make this easy to understand) to come up with a total formula amount. For 2014-15 that number for Vernonia was \$5,773,657, which includes an additional call-out Transportation Grant of \$520,000. They then subtract the Local Revenue (\$2,900,161 from above) to get a final SSF estimate of \$2,873,495.

This is the amount that should be paid to the District in monthly installments. The state begins making those payments in July and they are paid through May.

Because these Local Revenue and ADM amounts are estimates, the state has built into the process several opportunities to adjust numbers. The district has a chance to revise their number in the fall based on changes that have occurred, like the unexpected increase in enrollment they experienced this year. There is also an opportunity to make changes in December. A final reconciliation for estimated payments versus actual data happens in May.

Does this system really work?

For the most part, the system does work. But there are several holes in the system, some of them more gaping than others.

One hole is that it is all guess work. A school district's SSF payments for the next year could be impacted if they over or under estimated enrollment or local revenue. This is what happened at the Vernonia School District during the last several fiscal cycles. According to Superintendent Miller, district officials expected to see an upswing in enrollment when the new school campus opened in 2012 and made modest increases in their estimates. When those increases in enrollment failed to materialize, the district found themselves in the position of owing back to the state some of the funds they had already budgeted and even spent, which impacted future payments. In the 2013-14 budget cycle, the District estimated for 540 students and ended with a reconciled number of 532.

The reverse is true this year, at least so far. For 2014-15 the district estimated 550 students and currently have 560 enrolled; which means the district has not yet received funding for students they have to provide resources

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for and teach. The five K-2 blended classrooms were expected to have twenty-three students in each class when the idea was proposed and implemented this past summer; because of the influx of young families into the district over the summer, those classes have twenty-seven and twenty-eight students each. Without funding in the budget to hire additional teachers, class sizes have turned out to be larger than anticipated throughout the school system.

"As we see needs, we can move forward and address those issues in some cases with extra employee hours," explains Miller. "And we did that this past summer when we saw a need in the size of the incoming kindergarten class; we hired an additional teacher

continued on page 17

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