

Schools Update: Budgeting During COVID-19

By Superintendent Aaron Miller

Oh, how quickly things can change.

On February 27, 2020 the Vernonia School District (VSD) hosted a meeting with staff, parents, and Board members to determine how a \$515,000 increase in funding from the Student Success Act could most significantly impact our students' academic, physical, and mental well-being.

March 13 came, schools have been closed since, and the revenue outlook has changed from a once in a lifetime increase to a potential 17% budget cut.

On May 20 the revenue forecast came out for the State of Oregon, and although the exact numbers were not known at press time, the economic impacts on schools and state agencies are significant.

While the state revenue forecast was devastat-

ing, there are several factors that still remain to be determined before schools have a final answer as to how deep they will have to cut their budgets.

State legislators created a rainy day fund for schools just for a time like this. State leaders will have to determine how much, if any, of this fund they will use to help offset financial deficits.

In addition, State legislators will likely be called back to Salem for a special session to determine how they will address state spending in the midst of this financial crisis. One issue that will need to be addressed is the newly adopted Student Success Act and the funding that it will provide for schools. Whether the tax on large corporations is instituted later than planned, or on time, the impact of this economic crisis will ensure that Vernonia's funding will be significantly less than the \$515,000 that was planned for at that February 27 meeting.

Federal government support of the crisis through the CARES Act, potentially the Heroes Act, and other revenue streams will also factor in to exactly how deep of cuts will be needed to balance State and school budgets.

In preparation for these cuts, the Vernonia School Board approved, at its May 14 meeting, the furloughing of one work day per week (5 total) for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. This decision will save the District approximately \$150,000, which will help minimize cuts in the 2020-21 school year.

The state's revenue forecast was just the first step in the process of determining the full impact of these budget cuts on schools. Once that full impact is determined, the VSD will work as hard as ever to minimize those impacts on our students, and continue to provide a quality education for your children.

School Board Report

At the May 14, 2020 Virtual School Board Meeting:

Budget Committee Approves Budget – The Budget Committee voted to unanimously approve the 2020-21 proposed budget as presented. The budget now goes to the School Board for final adoption. Superintendent Aaron Miller told the Budget Committee the State of Oregon will announce their Department of Education revenue forecast on May 20, which means there may need to be adjustments to the final budget if there is a funding shortfall.

Distance Learning Update – The Board received updates from principals and other staff on how instructors, students, and families are navigating distance learning during the school shut down. While principals Michelle Eagleson and Nate Underwood reported the switch to distance learning has been a huge challenge, both commended all involved for their effort and patience. Students are regularly in contact with teachers, and progress is monitored, reported, and recorded. Schools are providing multiple and flexible opportunities for students to earn credit. Students have access to weekly packets of learning material, and some teachers are using video of themselves teaching new concepts, as well as holding virtual class meetings to provide students with the opportunity to connect socially.

Food Service Update – Meals (breakfast and lunch) continue to be prepared and served for students during the shut down. Meals can be picked up at the

school and are also being delivered to students at home. Superintendent Aaron Miller said the District is serving an average of 350 meals each day and delivered 11,130 total meals during the month of April.

Board Approves OSEA Contract – The Board approved a Memorandum of Understanding between the Vernonia School District and the Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA), Chapter 67. The agreement extends the contract for one year and provides a 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for all classified employees.

Board Approves 2019-20 Calendar Adjustment – The Board approved a recommendation from Superintendent Aaron Miller for the District to take five furlough days at the end of this school year to help save funds toward next year, when Miller says he expects budget cuts due to a shortfall of funding from the State. Miller said by cutting those days, the District will be able to apply for COVID-19 stimulus funds. The five furlough days would take place on May 15, 22, 29, June 5, and 12.

Board Approves 2020-21 Instructional Calendar – The Board approved the proposed 2020-21 instructional calendar which provides 167 student contact days, four more than last year. The first day of school will be September 8 and the last day will be June 11. The calendar includes a week off for Thanksgiving from November 23-27, a winter break from December 19-January 1, and a spring break from March 22-26.



Construction progress on the art room addition on May 15, 2020.

Vernonia Family Academy Expands to K-12 – The Vernonia Family Academy will begin serving homeschool students in high school this year after only serving students in K-8 during the Academy's first year. Laura Blacker, (formerly a 3rd grade teacher in the District) has been hired as the high school instructor and will work with current teacher Debbie Taylor.

School Art Room Addition Progressing – Superintendent Aaron Miller told the School Board the new art room addition is progressing. Miller said the foundation was scheduled to be poured, prep work for electrical and plumbing is nearing completion, and the preliminary work is being done to connect the addition to the main building. Miller said

the project is currently on schedule to be completed in late August.

Board Approves Replacement Timeline for Vacant Board Position – District Executive Assistant Barb Carr told the Board there was no interest expressed by the community for an open seat on the Board, left vacant when Melissa Zavales resigned. The Board approved advertising for the position again through June 4 so they could appoint someone at their June meeting.

Board Declares Pick-up Truck as Surplus – The Board approved the recommendation from Facility Supervisor Mark Brown to surplus a 1992 Ford F-250 pick-up truck.

IT'S TAX TIME
Call your LOCAL tax preparer

PAYROLL PLUS LLC

Edi Sheldon 503-429-1819
edisheldon@gmail.com

Licensed tax consultant • Full service payroll
Personal & small business bookkeeping • QuickBooks assistance
CORPS, S-CORPS, LLC, Partnerships • Personal one-on-one service

LTC #29629 - Oregon licensed tax consultant
RTRP #P00448199 - designated as a registered tax return preparer by the Internal Revenue Service
The IRS does not endorse any particular individual tax return preparer. For more information on tax return preparers, go to www.IRS.gov.

Meyer's Auto Body

493 Bridge Street
VERNONIA • 503-429-0248