



teachers OR tutors?

WILL BUDGET WOES MAKE TUTORS THE ONLY WAY
EUGENE KIDS GET AN EDUCATION? BY ALEX ZIELINSKI

It's halfway through the school year, and South Eugene High School Spanish teacher Lynette Williams is already fed up with the lack of school funding.

With an estimated \$22 million 4J budget deficit on the horizon for the 2011-12 school year and smaller cuts being made every month, Williams sees her classroom and others struggling to meet basic requirements.

"We teachers are doing the best we can, but there's a tipping point, and we have absolutely hit that tipping point," Williams says.

"This isn't a teacher issue, but a state issue," Williams says. "At the same time that the state is drastically cutting the budget, you have them imposing stricter regulations on grade level requirements. How is that supposed to balance out?"

However, instead of promoting a switch to private schools, a concept that some have advocated for, Williams believes that another area of the education sector can keep public schools afloat: tutors.

"I'm for a combination of keeping students in public schools and offering inexpensive tutoring to supplement for what can't be covered in the classroom," Williams says.

For those who can afford it, tutoring has become a more prominent option as teachers and parents alike see

classroom standards plummet due to the shrinking state budget. While some schools offer free assistance, the price of commercial tutoring leaves many aspiring students behind.

The shortage of in-class help due to higher student-to-teacher ratios has also resulted in a cycle of across-the-board performance deflation. Williams' upper-level Spanish class has remained a teachable size, but she notices SEHS math classes, in particular, growing up to 52 students.

"With a class that large, there's no way to get to a student's needs," says Williams, who has watched her students entering her class with dropping levels of education as the cuts increase.

paying for public education?

In response to a projected \$240 million loss in state funding for the 2011-12 school year, Eugene's 4J and Bethel school districts are preparing for massive cuts to their already tight budgets.

George Russell, 4J superintendent, outlined the most recent budget cut recommendations at a Dec. 8 board meeting. His estimated \$22 million budget shortfall, around 15 percent of the upcoming school year's general fund budget, leaves little room for

flexibility. In conjunction with closing five district schools, Russell suggested consolidating schools, leading to increased student populations. He also recommended cutting six more school days, and creating a total of 12 staff unpaid furlough days from the 2011-12 schedule. Russell expects to lay off 62 teachers and 43 administrative staff members, further crowding those already packed classrooms.

For Russell and most school districts across the county and state, minimizing resources appears to be the solution to the looming financial deficits.

SEHS provides free tutoring by upperclassmen and UO students, but Williams says the best tutors, whom she recommends to her students' parents, come at a high price. An average tutor charges from \$25 to \$50 an hour, which she says creates discrimination within the classroom.

"It's all about the have and have nots," Williams says. "The gap has widened between those who can afford or have time to schedule tutors and those who can't."

And she doesn't face the consequences of unbalanced tutoring only in the classroom. Williams has two teenagers at home and finds it necessary to hire regular tutors to keep her children on track to college. She says she feels guilty at times knowing that so many potentially bright students will fall behind since they can't afford such assistance.

"With increased budget cuts, affordable tutors and in-class assistants must become a necessity," Williams says.

Williams is not alone in her observations.

Kim Pash-Bell, director of Eugene's Tutoring Tree, says she thinks most parents who don't bring their struggling child to be tutored do so because of the price.

"It's a vicious cycle," Pash-Bell says. "Those who can afford tutoring will come and benefit and those who are unable to afford it leave their kids without enough resources."

The students who do come to Pash-Bell for help need it more than ever, she says. Larger class sizes