

Consolidated Bus Run Part of Mid-Year Adjustments

By Neil Hufnagel, Superintendent

Starting Monday, January 25, we will be consolidating our five morning bus runs to four, just as we did with the afternoon routes at the beginning of the year. All students currently transported both in the country and in town will continue to have bus service. We will run the same routes in the morning as we have in the evening though there will need to be a few slight adjustments. The bus with the shortest route will drop their students and then make a quick run around town to pick up the town stops. Approximately \$10,000 per year will be saved by completing our transition from five routes to four.

This will result in more crowded buses and longer runs. We have been monitoring our rider numbers, and all indications are that four runs will be able to carry the approximate 220 students who ride into town each day. We have been averaging 45 students per 70 passenger bus and this will now rise to an average of 55 students. The earliest boarding students will likely ride all of an hour in the morning, though this will be offset by the fact that they will be the first off in the afternoon.

Other adjustments to our budget made at the January Board meeting included freezing and permanently reducing supply, capitol outlay and textbook lines in the budget, a voluntary reduction in aide time, and a reduction in expenditure from the general fund for athletics. These adjustments were made in response to the budget reduction of \$165 made when the state passed its budget in January. That created a deficit in our budget of \$89,000 in our previously adopted budget for 2009-2010. That deficit was closed through a relatively equal combination of spending from our fund equity, and the reductions listed above.

2010 – 2011 Budget Planning Continues

A community Forum was held on Tuesday, January 5 and approximately 25 community members were present to learn about the reasons for our continuing budget challenges, the size of that challenge, and to discuss possible ways to address it. This meeting is just the beginning of several forums, surveys, and discussions that I will be seeking with our community members as we develop a budget proposal for next year. Please visit our website at www.fowerschools.net for a copy of the presentation from the Jan. 5 meeting, a feedback form, and additional updates.

Recent Budget Developments – Good news, Bad News

First, the good news: After announcing in October that schools would see an additional \$127 per student proration (deduction) from their state allocation, she cancelled that order in early January. This would have deepened our current year deficit by an additional \$70,000 and would have resulted in additional staff reductions and further expenditures out of our fund equity.

Now for the bad news: The annual January state revenue estimating conference indicates that state revenues will continue to underfund state programs including schools. State budget leaders predict a shortfall in the school aide fund that will result in a \$268 per student reduction in the budget for next year. That equates to a shortfall of approximately \$145,000 in state revenues.

When combined with an estimated \$60,000 increase in inflationary and contractual costs, the actual deficit for next year is emerging as a minimum of \$205,000. I say minimum, because the revenue estimating conference has consistently over estimated revenues for the last 8 years, and it is likely that our actual reduction in funding for next year will be \$300 per student or more. These ongoing budget challenges will require us to redesign our schools in a way that allows us to educate our students just as well with fewer staff and restructured programs.

Online Community Survey Starts January 22 at www.fowerschools.net

To assist in gathering community input and identifying priorities, I will also be posting a community survey to our website starting on January 22. Please take advantage of the opportunity to provide this important feedback, and feel free to make copies of the survey to share with family and friends who may not be internet users. We will accept print copies of the survey in our school offices and hand enter them. Surveys will also be available in offices starting on January 20th. As always, please contact me at nhufnagel@fowerschools.net or 989-593-2250 for additional information on our continuing budget work.