

2013-14 Budget Message

April 23, 2013

As the state continues to climb out of the depths of the worst recession in recent history, and as the Legislature tries to find ways to begin to reinvest in K-12 education, it is still hard for us to understand and cope with the depth of cuts and reductions we have made in recent years at Bend-La Pine Schools.

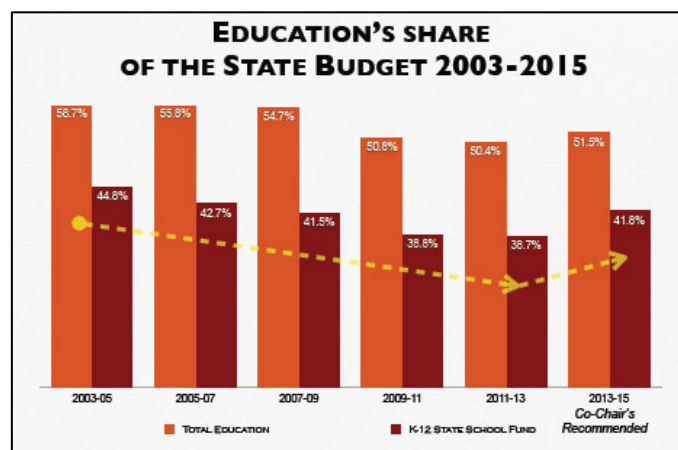
With Oregon's tight financial challenge during the recession, we have also seen a steady decrease in the portion of state resources being allocated to education by our Legislature, coupled with ever increasing PERS employer rates. As a result school days, teachers and support staff have been reduced at alarming rates. In our community during the past five years, Bend-La Pine Schools has grown by more than 750 students, yet are staffed with 100 fewer teachers than what our pre-recession staffing ratios would have provided. Even greater reductions have been made in our support staff positions or hours. These cuts hit where it hurts the most, in the classroom. Our community suffers too with fewer jobs available locally and fewer dollars stimulating our economy.

Though some of the darkest financial times in recent history have left scars in our community, we only need look to the bright eyes of each of our nearly 17,000 students for the strength to persevere.

Just like our friends, families and business owners in our communities – we too are resilient. Our staff has been working hard to maintain the academic gains that our students are realizing and they are determined to position our students and schools to be even more successful than ever before.

Today, more elected officials are embracing the importance of K-12 education and the long-term impacts that will be felt if funding is not restored to levels last seen in the mid 2000s. The outlook is encouraging; it appears that the Legislature will increase its investment to the future of our state's children and are proposing funding levels to at least cover the most basic education essentials.

The real test is the balance they select between increased funding and legislation to limit the major PERS cost driver.



We remain hopeful that they are able to strike a balance that will allow us to restore teaching jobs, reduce class sizes, and get back to a full school year. However, the

recovery - or reinvestment - for us will not be as quick as we would like as these funds simply get us closer to being able to deliver the basics.

The 2013-14 budget proposal works within our available resources to do what we believe is best for our students and families. It stops the cuts and allows us to retain our current teacher staffing levels. We have remained unwavering in our efforts to deliver one of the longest school years in Oregon. This budget allows us to make the school year 'whole' for students by adding back the days that were cut due to the statewide budget shortfalls.

Our budget commits to building upon past investments in instructional technology and taking the next steps in our conversion to the digital society in which we live. We are preparing students in a world that is literally at their fingertips. Making the transition from a paper & pencil based system to one that is primarily digital forces a number of changes for all of us. However, it is essential that we make those changes in how we prepare for and deliver instruction in order to become more effective and cost efficient in delivering a world-class education to our students. We intend to maximize learning opportunities for students in all disciplines, whether it is the first class they enter as a Kindergartener or their last as a high school senior.

This budget reflects our commitment to the preparation of each and every student for his or her future. That commitment to providing a World-Class education for all students does not waiver and the 2013-14 budget gives us an opportunity to look for ways to assure equity in staffing to address our most needy students at the same time we are enriching and stretching all students.

What we are presenting tonight is a reflection of our long-range planning work, of our mission and goals. It reflects local priorities and key performance indicators as well as those state investment priorities and indicators of success.

Our employee groups have worked closely with us to find ways to make the financial reductions work with regard to compensation and benefits in order to minimize the impacts on students. Continued collaboration will be essential as we move forward to find strategies that build a solid foundation for the future.

This proposed budget meets the requirements of Bend-La Pine Schools Board Governance Policy BDGOV A.3 Financial Planning and Budgeting. To the extent possible, the proposed budget reflects the priorities established by the school board. Finally, we believe this proposed budget reflects our purpose of *Educating Each Student to be a Thriving Citizen*.

Bend-La Pine Schools is well on the way to becoming the best school district in Oregon, thanks to hard work and the support of our student, parents, staff and community.

We thank you for your continued support of Bend-La Pine Schools.

Sincerely,

Ron Wilkinson, Superintendent