



Superintendent's Corner...

The Cost of State Funding Inadequacies and Failed Referendums - 30 Positions Eliminated at MAPS for Next School Year

Since starting my role as superintendent of schools last summer, I have shared on many occasions that MAPS has some unique financial challenges that we are facing between declining enrollment, the end of one-time federal Covid funds, and inadequate state funding. These issues were shared with the community through many avenues as MAPS prepared for the operations referendum this past November. Unfortunately, that referendum failed and we were charged with the task of creating a budget for the 2023-24 school year that included over \$3 million in budget reductions.

The declining enrollment part of the equation is relatively simple--fewer students means fewer staff, fewer resources needed, fewer buildings, fewer expenses, etc. That's logical and we've done that for many years as we've gotten smaller. We were fully prepared to do that again this year--to the tune of approximately \$800,000--and we have done that. The end of the federal ESSER (Covid) funds was a bit trickier, but was also something we could plan for and made those reductions accordingly; accounting for almost \$500,000 in cuts for next year. It's the other \$2 million--funds that result from flat revenue limits for schools for the past several years and the subsequent failed referendum--that get really challenging.

I think it's important for the community to know our financial situation, understand how we have responded, and the impact it will have on our staff, students and community. You simply cannot cut millions of dollars out of a district budget without it having a significant impact on our district and community. That said, here's what will be different starting in the 2023-24 school year:

- 30 staff positions have been cut from MAPS going into next year. Of these, 20 are certified staff (administrators, counselors, teachers, etc.) and 10 are support staff (secretaries, aids, custodians, etc.).
- With 20 fewer certified staff, we will see less student support available due to the elimination of pupil services positions like social workers and counselors. It will be harder, and take longer, to support students who need letters of recommendation, college and career advice and guidance, mental health support, need to be tested for accommodations, or need support both in school and at home. This, of course, takes place at a time when the mental health needs of students is as high as they have ever

been. With regard to the administrative cut, student management and discipline will be more challenging, teacher evaluations will take longer, communication to families will be more difficult, and the tasks required to run a school will become much more challenging. As for the teacher cuts, class sizes will increase, programs such as tech ed, art, physical education and music will be reduced for students, some specialized courses at the high school will not be offered, communication with families will take a bit longer, and the amount of time and attention available to each student will be reduced. In addition, the elimination of interventionists means that struggling students will no longer get the extra help they need from those adults and the elimination of instructional coaches makes it more difficult to ensure that the best instructional practices are taking place in our classrooms. Each of those reductions will have an adverse effect on our students and the operations of our schools.

- The reduction of 10 support staff positions means that our libraries will not be as accessible to our students as much at some locations, that supervision of students in the lunchroom and playgrounds falls on other staff, and that extra help for students is diminished. In addition, study spaces at the high school will be closed, and classrooms will not be cleaned as frequently as we are used to. All of these cuts impact our students.
- A reduction to our transportation budget means that we will have more kids on fewer buses, potentially taking longer bus rides each day. In addition, we will have to rethink our in-town pick up distances to align to state minimums.
- A reduction in the athletic and activities budget means that we will have fewer coaches in many sports which could lead to the elimination of some sub-varsity teams and fewer opportunities for our students. The district will no longer fund overnight athletic trips to tournaments outside of our area.
- A 20% reduction in building budgets will mean fewer resources, equipment and supplies for our students at each of our classrooms and buildings.
- The elimination of a family support position at Head Start reduces support for students and families who benefit from those services.

It should be noted that the reductions could, in fact, have been deeper but our Board considered strategies that involve potentially using our fund balance as a one-time solution to soften the impact this year. However, if state funding doesn't catch up in the next budget cycle and we are forced to go back to the community for a referendum next year, we will be looking at similar cuts again next year.

It is pretty clear that all of the reductions, especially when looked at collectively, will mean a different experience for our students moving forward. I personally wonder about the different opportunities and advantages that students in neighboring, better-funded districts will realize and what impact that will have on our young people moving forward.

Those 30 positions mean lost opportunities and supports for our students--there is no way around that. However, this is the situation we find ourselves in and we have to respond to the challenging financial conditions in which we operate while still providing the best learning

opportunities for the children of our community that we can. As always, if you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Shannon Murray