

<http://news.opb.org/article/4979-some-teachers-futures-depends-forecasts-and-chance/>

Some Teachers' Futures Depend On Forecasts And Chance  
BY ROB MANNING

Portland, OR May 14, 2009 8:17 a.m.

Oregon school leaders are anticipating a dim budget forecast this Friday.

Over the last few weeks, though, district officials have been pressing their teachers and other staff to make early concessions, to get the budget process moving.

But as Rob Manning reports, many unions have balked - even as they've faced the consequences of the bad budget times.

It's happened more than once in recent weeks that teachers in Oregon have had to leave their careers to chance. They were walked into an office. Numbers were drawn from a hat. The number might mean relief that their job was safe, or heartbreak that it was likely gone.

Evelyn Bellotti-Busch: "Yes, there were lots of butterflies in stomachs, there was tears."

Evelyn Bellotti-Busch is the bargaining chair for the teachers' union at East Portland's Centennial School District.

Evelyn Bellotti-Busch: "That's human nature, and that is what is going to happen when something like that happens."

It's been in contracts for years that teachers lose and regain their jobs based on seniority, then licensure, then competence, and then last - by random drawing.

Centennial superintendent, Bob McKean says declining state revenues led McKean to plan a fifteen percent cut to Centennial's budget.

In spite of fighting to hold onto reserves the last few years, Centennial would still eliminate roughly one-eighth of the district's teaching positions. But he says teachers could reduce layoffs, if they accepted a pay freeze.

Bob McKean: "When I think of the impact on our staff members who will not be able to find work once we terminate them, when I think of the compromised education our children will have as a result of lost programs, increased class size, and the possibility of lost days, asking staff to take a freeze is simply the morally responsible thing to do."

Evelyn Bellotti-Busch: "Well in Centennial, we have told our members and the district that we are waiting for the projection that's coming out on this Friday, May 15th."

Again, that's Evelyn Bellotti-Busch, with the Centennial teachers' union.

Evelyn Bellotti-Busch: "Once that projection is set, we will be sitting down, discussing items with them."

**The lobbyist for the Oregon Parent-Teacher Association, Otto Schell, says his group wants to stick up for quality education, but is steering clear of debates over layoffs and concessions - that are happening all over the state.**

**Otto Schell: "We put inordinate pressure on teachers, principals and school boards to try to make decent programs go, where it's really mission-threatening."**

School advocates blame Oregon's tax structure and the terrible economy. Just as a sample: Beaverton may cut 100 positions to fill its anticipated 12 percent budget hole. Portland could eliminate 380 jobs, if it plugged its gap through layoffs alone.

Centennial's plans call for cutting 50 of its 400 teacher positions. And that's if tax revenues are on the high side of what's expected.

Centennial head, Bob McKean says Oregon will be infamous again.

Bob McKean: "We've been looking at Vancouver's public schools and hearing a lot of sorrow about the cuts they're making, and they're making cuts of about three to five percent. And they're very small compared with what we're talking about here. I don't believe there will be another state that will have to cut their budgets at the magnitude that Oregon is faced with."

Friday, Oregonians will hear new numbers from the state economist and a response from the governor. Legislative plans come out on Monday. Then, expect tough bargaining between administrators and unions, as school boards try to balance budgets that are a lot smaller than they'd like.

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[http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/04/what\\_a\\_new\\_round\\_of\\_school\\_bud.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2009/04/what_a_new_round_of_school_bud.html)

What a new round of school budget cuts will mean  
by Otto Schell, guest opinion  
Saturday April 25, 2009, 8:23 PM

It is hard to believe that for the third time in my freshman son's ten years in Oregon schools we are contemplating cutting school days and laying off thousands of teachers and staff.

Parents know what the proposed budget cuts mean. They mean: great teachers and staff gone from our schools; bigger classes where more kids will slip below the surface; more lost programs like art, music and PE.

Librarians and counselors were cut a while ago and are not likely to return. Pay to play is now the norm for most sports and music programs. Will families hit by the budget crisis pay more for a "free" public education?

We will fund-raise and volunteer to keep a few programs alive. We will scramble to find places for our kids when there is no school. Some kids are in schools and homes where they will not have those slight advantages. If they are struggling they will drift further off track. Inequity will grow.

How can it be that the state with one of the shortest school years chooses to cut school days? Eliminating thousands of education jobs adds to unemployment rolls. Small towns will miss family wage jobs the most, costing communities more in the long run.

Is Oregon now a place where we may not be able to graduate our students ready for the modern world? We want our kids to receive all the tools required to succeed. Repeatedly slashing teachers and programs doesn't look world class.

What parents really want to know is: isn't it about time all Oregonians shared the responsibility of making sure every student receives a quality education? We need bold steps from our state leaders to deal with this worst-in-a-lifetime crisis and preserve education, health care and the human services that our children depend on.

*Otto Schell became a school volunteer and advocate when his son entered kindergarten. He, his wife and live in Northeast Portland. He is the legislative director for the Oregon PTA.*

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<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/article/20090518/UPDATE/90518029>

Democrats outline budget for next 2 years  
The Associated Press

May 18, 2009  
The Associated Press • May 18, 2009

Lawmakers plan to raise \$800 million in new taxes while cutting \$2 billion in state services to balance a budget that has been sunk by the economic downturn. Those figures translate into shorter school years, bigger class sizes, severe cuts to state-subsidized day care and the loss of 1,700 state jobs.

"It's devastating to look at lists like this," said Rep. Peter Buckley, an Ashland Democrat and one of the Legislature's chief budget writers. "There are cuts on this list that will have impact, and that is not lost on us."

The state economist told lawmakers last week that Oregon faces a \$3.8 billion gap between the money it will collect over the next two years and the cost of continuing existing services. He also noted a \$361 million gap in the current two-year cycle that ends June 30.

The budget released Monday will be adjusted before moving to the governor, but the document provides a strong indication of where things are headed for state services in 2009-11.

"The governor thinks this is a good framework," said Anna Richter Taylor, Gov. Ted Kulongoski's spokeswoman. "There's still a lot of conversations that need to happen on the details, but it is a solid framework moving forward."

Education, social services and public safety account for more than 90 percent of the budget. All face cuts as the Legislature is forced, by law, to balance the budget.

Human Services comes in at just over \$4.2 billion, about \$400 million short of what advocates say the department needs to address increased demand from people seeking food stamps, state health care and cash assistance.

"It's not enough," said Cathy Kaufmann, a member of the advocacy group Human Services Coalition. "We're seeing critical programs devastated."

These programs include day care for the children of low-income workers. Without it, day-care costs become an "insurmountable hurdle" and people in already tenuous financial circumstances have to leave their jobs, Kaufmann said. Other cuts include closing the Oregon School for the Blind as well as the Blue Mountain Recovery Center.

In education, K-12 gets an initial budget of \$5.6 billion with the promise of \$400 million more if certain to-be-determined economic conditions are met. That's a better deal than lawmakers had previously mentioned but still more than \$500 million short of what is needed to continue current programs.

**That means art and sports programs are in jeopardy, class sizes will grow as school years shrink and some educators will lose their job, said Otto Schell a spokesman for the Oregon Parent-Teachers Association. "I appreciate that they tried to do more," he said. "But I know that it's still hundreds of millions of dollars out of basic education."**

Community colleges and the university system were hit harder, with each taking cuts of more than 15 percent. That will likely translate into tuition hikes of 7 to 9 percent for university students in each of the next two years — maybe more depending on the institution — and a one-time 12 percent hike for community college students.

With public safety, the blueprint is bit less certain. Lawmakers have convened a workgroup to look at delaying Measure 57, a law approved by voters in November that mandates minimum sentences for certain crimes at a cost of \$75 million to the state.

Overall, public safety will get about \$2 billion, \$200 million short of its essential budget level. No prisons will be closed and legislators remain committed to round-the-clock state police coverage by 2011.

Similar silver linings can be found in the other state agencies, as Buckley and Sen. Margaret Carter, the other chief budget writer, pointed out. Community-level mental health, drug and alcohol programs will survive as will in-home health care programs and family support programs.

Along with the cuts, Buckley and Carter plan to use \$1.3 billion in reserve and stimulus funds along with an additional \$800 million in taxes to square the budget.

The pair wouldn't go into specifics on the tax increases. Any revenue package, though, will likely include a boost to the corporate minimum tax, unchanged at \$10 since 1931, and an increased income tax on families making more than \$250,000. There is also talk of raising taxes on tobacco and beer.

Republicans have been vocal in their opposition to higher taxes.

"With 9,500 more jobs lost in April, the Legislature must not pass a budget that raises taxes on the same individuals and businesses that are key to Oregon's economic recovery," said House Minority Leader Bruce Hanna in a statement.

In their competing budget, Republicans kept funding levels for the next two years roughly where it has been for the last two without raising taxes. That proposal didn't go far with Democrats or social services advocates who say it ignores increased need now that thousands more Oregonians are unemployed.

Should a tax package get deferred to the voters, Carter said she was "hopeful but nervous" that voters would pass it. She and Buckley traveled throughout Oregon while drawing up the budget; that's where she found hope.

"As we were on the roadway, Oregonians said they did not mind paying a little more to help the less fortunate," she said. "So, I'm living on their promise."

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<http://news.opb.org/article/4982-florence-schools-face-bleak-future/>

Florence Schools Face Bleak Future  
BY RACHAEL MCDONALD

Florence, OR May 24, 2009 10:18 a.m.

Many of Oregon's smaller schools have been hit especially hard by the recession.

Siuslaw School District serves 1349 students in the coastal town of Florence. It faces a \$1.7 million deficit.

Administrators are considering severe cuts, including laying off a quarter of the staff. Some locals are hoping a third attempt at passing a property tax levy will help save the district. KLCC's Rachael McDonald reports.

Florence voters have twice rejected property tax levies to fund public schools. But this time there's a new urgency.

The district cut the equivalent of 16 full time staff mid year. With a \$1.7 million budget shortfall next year, the superintendent has proposed cutting 26 more positions.

**PTA president Diane McCalmont has a sophomore daughter at Siuslaw High.**

**Diane McCalmont: “Some of the cuts we’ve already faced have brought it to the surface. And some of those people who were just in denial or maybe not seeing the effects are seeing it now. I think it’s definitely more public.”**

**McCalmont expects the cuts will hit kids hard. She says it’s not just after school activities that are getting axed.**

The levy, Measure 20-151, is a five year temporary property tax. Backers say an average Florence home would have an estimated local option tax of \$8 per month. It’s expected to raise a million dollars per year.

Volunteer and parent Rachel Pearson says she hopes voters will see the need.

Rachel Pearson: “What we’re hoping is that this time people will understand we’re not asking for the moon. We’re just asking for enough to keep the school going until the economy turns around.”

Siuslaw students have become their own advocates. A group has been taking to the streets in marches along Highway 101 calling for passage of the levy.

On a Thursday afternoon, outside Siuslaw High, the jazz band is tuning up. Senior Kaitlin Shepard says even though she’s graduating before the proposed cuts would take effect, she’s concerned.

Kaitlin Shepard: “We’ve been involved in the marches because we’re hoping to leave a school for the underclassmen with as many programs in it as we had.”

Shepard says she’s noticed a difference in the school since staff was reduced earlier in the year.

Kaitlin Shepard: “I think it’s kind of disgusting that they cut the janitors. Because now the school is, it’s gross I think. So they cut some janitors and almost immediately after they cut janitors there’s like this outbreak of colds in the school and everyone was coughing and everyone was sick. I kind of see a correlation.”

Next year, baseball, softball, wrestling, welding, culinary arts and other electives would be eliminated. Senior Amanda Pilcher says a class she took through Lane Community College would no longer be available to Siuslaw High students.

Amanda Pilcher: “This year I took Western Civilization and it’s a college now class and that’s going to be cut next year. And I think any college class that you can have is really important.”

Band director Steve Conaton is one of the teachers who will lose his job if the proposed cuts go forward. That will leave the choir director to teach band and choir at the high school and middle school.

School Board candidate Jim Fox does not think the property tax levy is a good idea. He says Oregonians already pay enough taxes.

Jim Fox: “We need to quit having so much reliance on property taxes. Property taxes in this state are tremendously high in terms of the value of the property.”

Jim Fox is a retired businessman who moved to Florence in 2004. He has grown children and two school-age grandchildren who live in the Medford area. Fox says he’s never run for office before, but he believes the school board is moving in the wrong direction.

Jim Fox: “One of the primary responsibilities of the board members is to be prudent custodians of the public funds. And that aspect of board responsibilities has been neglected.”

Fox says the district shouldn't be asking Florence citizens to pay higher property taxes when the economy is in trouble. He says the levy would not solve the problem, but consolidating the three school buildings into two would save money.

He also believes school administration could be cut back.

Jim Fox: "A lot of people question whether we even need a superintendent in a district this size. Particularly one that gets paid more than Oregon's governor. There's a lot of high priced people that aren't in the classrooms and frankly I'd rather see the money spent there."

Fox says he thinks school board members could take over some administrative duties.

Fox is running against incumbent Paul Burns for position four. Burns is current chair of the board. He works for the Forest Service and has two children in the district. Burns, has served on the board for four years—making him one of two senior members. He says he has experience with the budget.

Paul Burns: "It usually takes a couple of years before you really get into understand it. Our new board members are doing a great job of picking up on it, but it does take a little bit of time to really pick it up."

Burns says the district got into this situation because the state is not making education a priority.

Paul Burns: "We feel the state hasn't lived up to its obligation to fund the schools at the level that it even says it should. It has this quality education model that the state uses to show what schools should be funded at and we're way below those levels at this time."

It's still unknown how much money the district will receive from the state in the next school year. The district is applying for grant money from the federal stimulus bill.

Two other board positions are open. Each, only has one candidate although both were originally contested. One thing is certain, whoever is on the seven-member school board will have their work cut out for them, whether the levy passes or not.

The deadline to turn in ballots is Tuesday, May 19th.

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