

May 8, 2009

Dear Ferndale School Board:

The Ferndale Education Association would like to express our serious concern with the Superintendent's Proposed Budget Reductions. While we realize the State budget crisis is real, every District in the state will choose to deal with the situation differently, based on local priorities. While the values of our community should be reflected in the decisions the District makes, educators in Ferndale are not confident this is the case at this time. Our members believe staffing reductions will cause significant harm to the students of the Ferndale School District. In addition, by our analysis, it appears the decision to reduce staff may be one of choice, not necessity.

A close look at the FSD proposed 2009-2010 budget¹ reveals the choice to lay-off up to fifteen certificated staff is simply unnecessary. As with any school district, it is true that unfunded mandates impact the budget. Regardless, Ferndale currently has more than adequate funds to offer its current instructional program, including funding of state requirements. Our budget analysis shows the District could choose to fully retain our staff and still maintain a healthy reserve.

The proposed budget reduction in certificated staffing is \$971,000. The budget also benefits from \$1,485,000 in federal stimulus dollars. The expressed intent of these dollars was specifically to save teacher's jobs. "Almost all the money that's going to states under the recovery act for education is designed to retain teacher's...right now, the biggest chunk is for teacher retention" *President Obama, 3/18/09*. "States are hurting, and schools across America are facing catastrophic cuts. We need to invest this money quickly, thoughtfully and transparently to protect kids, create jobs and drive reforms...the money...will be released as quickly as possible to insure that states can help districts minimize layoffs" *Secretary of Education Duncan 2/19/09*.

The District indicates, "It's absolutely imperative at this point to build some capacity to adapt to changing circumstances," according to Mark Deebach, executive director of business and support services². The choice to use the dollars to build the district's reserve ignores the intent of the stimulus dollars, even to the extent of misappropriation. The decision is evidenced not only in Deebach's comments, but also in the proposed FSD budget reserve of roughly \$875,000. The budget achieves because while the funding has been reduced by \$1,346,000, the proposed budget has been cut by \$2,225,000³.

Additionally, the District has not been transparent about projected enrollment. The proposed budget projects enrollment for 2009-2010 based on the District's actual annual enrollment as of February 2009 as its starting point. The District reports their February 2009 enrollment at 4,723.0 FTE, including running start. The proposed budget projects enrollment at 4,662.0 FTE for the 2009-10 school year, which could be argued as a reasonable projected decline of 61.0

¹ Ferndale School District 2009-10 Budget Powerpoint, May 6, 2009.

² Bellingham Herald, May 7, 2009 -- <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/102/story/900487.html>

³ Ferndale School District 2009-10 Budget Powerpoint, May 6, 2009.

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FTE from the February enrollment number. Based on the April 2009 data⁴, the District reports enrollment at 5,060.3 FTE, including running start. It is unfortunate that the District chose to ignore the April enrollment, which would be a more accurate predictor of future enrollment. The impact is a budget that estimates a decline of 398.3 FTE from the 2008-09 school year. As each FTE brings roughly \$5,000 to the district, the budget as calculated builds the reserve by an additional "hidden" \$2 million.

This seems extreme, as accurate projections are essential. It also reminds us, the District budgeted for a decrease in enrollment for 2008-2009 of 72.9 FTE⁵ compared to 2007-08 actual. Actual reported enrollment, through April 2009, reports an increase of 133.3 FTE compared to budget. It also begs the question, is the Ferndale School District proposing a working budget or a political document?

And who pays the price for politics? Kids – they're just kids, our kids.

Sincerely,

Tracie Morris, FEA President

Adam Goldstein, FEA Bargaining Chair

cc: Elvis Dellinger, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services
FEA Membership

Sources:

Ferndale School District –

- F195 Budgets
- F196 Annual Financial Statements
- 1191 Apportionment Reports
- 1191E Apportionment to calculate full time BEA Staffing
- Budget PPT – May 6, 2009

⁴ Ferndale School District 2008-09 Report 1191E, April 2009 --

<http://www.k12.wa.us/safs/rep/app/0809/37502app.pdf>

⁵ Ferndale School District 2007-08 Report 1191E Final and 2008-09 F195 Budget.