

The Bartlesville Public Schools District is in the process of constructing the budget for the 2017-18 school year. Monthly meetings for the Budget Development Committee began in January and the group has worked to outline the district's needs and priorities.

The first budget priority is to rebuild the fund balance. The district ended the last fiscal year, in June 2016, with a fund balance below 6%. This led to personnel reductions to ensure the district could make its December payroll as it awaited receipt of annual property taxes. Those reductions, along with the most recent bond issue, should help rebuild the fund balance to around 10% by the end of the fiscal year. A 10% fund balance should be sufficient to endure additional state revenue cuts.

Recruiting and retaining talented teachers is the second budget priority. When a school district cannot fill a teaching position with an experienced certified teacher, that district may request that the state issue an emergency certificate, either to an uncertified individual or to a teacher certified in a different subject area than what is to be taught. In the 2011-2012 school year, Oklahoma had 32 emergency certified teachers. As of December, that number was 1,082 and climbing. Bartlesville is not immune to the teacher shortage; we have been forced to request some emergency certificates. The district must be prepared to fill known vacancies earlier than in previous years, so that process will now begin in March instead of June.

Retaining teachers by providing salary increases and improving school culture will help to maintain class sizes. The current average class sizes are 22 for elementary, 26 for middle school, and 27 for high school core classes. With a 10% fund balance, the district will be able to fund the usual step increase for experience called for in the teacher salary schedule. Hopefully we can also provide a small and much-needed raise. The district has also been working on making Bartlesville Public Schools a great place to work by involving staff in decision-making processes and tailoring professional development to fit staff needs instead of one-size-fits-all.

The third budget priority is protecting the programs in the district. The district aims to continue to offer a wide range of academic and extracurricular offerings to our students.

Expanding science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) curriculum opportunities in the district is budget priority number four. The district will be bringing STEM into all the elementary schools, down to kindergarten, through Project Lead the Way Launch curricula.

The final budget priority is expanding instructional technology in the district. Technology literacy is critical to most future occupations. The district is investing in technology resources to successfully implement a multi-year 1:1 computing initiative to better prepare students for careers. This includes infrastructure, devices, training, and additional staffing.

Additionally, some additional administrative positions will be eliminated and restructured for the 2017-2018 fiscal year to streamline district operations. It is not anticipated that other significant personnel reductions will be needed.

My goal is to be transparent as we work through the process. Updates continue to be posted on our website at bps-ok.org via "Budget Development" in the Quick Links.

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This column is online at

https://docs.google.com/a/bps-ok.org/document/d/1uXSFUI3lWW-QlaXqtjxtLE-4Vcsyu68cphhgSk_zTw/edit?usp=sharing