



Recent state budget cuts created quite a stir in mid-April. However, thanks to last year's personnel reductions and bond issue, Bartlesville's budget priorities remain unchanged.

Knowing we had to build up our depleted fund balance, we made significant personnel cuts before August 2016 to reduce our annual expenditures by \$1.2 million. At this point, we are on track for a net cut of approximately \$900,000 in state funding. However, the conservative budget the Board of Education adopted last summer means we will have no problem making our payrolls.

Additionally, in August 2016 the Bartlesville community voted overwhelmingly to increase property taxes to shift at least an additional \$700,000 in annual operating expenses from the district's general fund to bond funds. Because we received bond funds in the middle of this school year, we could shift about \$450,000 for this fiscal year. We will shift a minimum of \$700,000 for 2017-2018.

We continue to make tough decisions such as streamlining administrative positions. Those reductions will reduce our annual expenditures by approximately \$160,000, adding to the \$292,000 in annual savings created by the elimination of three central office administrative positions for 2016-2017. We do not anticipate other significant personnel reductions to instructional staff.

Our budget priorities for 2017-2018 have not changed. They are to:

- rebuild the district fund balance
- protect existing programs
- expand STEM curricula into the elementary schools
- expand use of instructional technology
- recruit and retain talented teachers by maintaining class sizes, providing salary increases, and improving school culture

Retaining Bartlesville teachers is vital. According to a recent survey conducted by the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, state schools eliminated 1,530 teaching positions and 1,351 support positions since the 2015-2016 school year. Even so, it is increasingly difficult to find certified teachers to fill the remaining positions. Not enough new teachers are seeking to fill jobs vacated by more experienced teachers who are leaving the profession or leaving for work in a higher-paying state. As of December, there were 1,082 emergency teaching certificates issued statewide to those filling roles where certified teachers were not available. Locally, we too have to rely on some emergency certifications.

Teachers play a vital role in shaping and educating our future leaders, our children. They are dedicated, patient, hard-working professionals who direct our children's paths in a positive direction. The impact teachers make extends far beyond the classroom.

I ask that you help us all say thanks by taking the time to show your appreciation to a teacher you know during Teacher Appreciation Week, May 1-5. It is my goal to visit every classroom in every school, as I did last year, to personally say thank you. Businesses, this is a great time to display your appreciation on your storefront signs and marquees. Thank you for supporting Bartlesville teachers!

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This column is online at

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