

...Message from the superintendent

Feb. 11, 2011

Dear colleagues:

This is the season for sending heartfelt Valentine messages. Thank you for putting your heart into every season and into supporting each student through all seasons, and *Happy Valentines Day* to you and your loved ones.

Legislatively, this season has come to be far too closely associated with heartrending budget decisions and state budget cuts. Next school year's budget, and questions about next year's programs, weigh heavily on our minds. The state's legislative session is slated to end April 24. Until then, we are likely to have more questions than answers about funding. However, I believe it is important to share throughout the process:

- [what we do know](#),
- [what we don't](#), and
- **why we are [maintaining our momentum](#) this year.**
- What we are [doing to prepare](#) for what may be as much as \$5.5 million in budget cuts for next school year, and
- [how you can help](#).
- [Resources](#) for more information

What we do know: (see my [Dec. 15, 2010 and Jan 14, 2011 Superintendent's messages](#) for details)

- State legislators' budget decisions have taken direct aim at classroom programs.
- At the governor's request, state legislators met in December in early session to make emergency budget decisions. In an unprecedented move, they slashed K-12 funding for THIS school year for all Washington state public school systems. For Everett Public Schools, the cuts total \$6.5 budgeted this year and committed to teaching direct student services, and instruction support programs.
- Largely because voters approved the August 2010 Supplemental Levy and because we have access to some federal funding, *we do not have to make substantial budget cuts midyear*, in spite of the state's broken promises. Some neighboring school districts and others around the state are not so fortunate.
- For the upcoming 2011-12 school year, legislative budget proposals could eliminate another \$6.5 million. Thus, we again face another round of difficult budget reductions for 2011-12.
- Since 2000, and including the \$6.5 million cut midyear, this district has suffered budget cuts \$25.4 million dollars – always with the goal of protecting classroom programs as much as possible.

- Whittling away classroom support for so long threatens student success and brings each subsequent year's budget cutting decisions nearer to classrooms and direct student services.

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What we don't know:

- We don't know whether the same categories and dollar amounts the state cut will remain cut for next school year. I explained these cuts in the [Jan. 14 message](#). We may not know this answer until the very end of the legislative session in April. If the legislature extends into a special session, we may not know until May, possibly June.
- We are in another season of uncertainty when we must prepare for the worst and work for the best.

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Why we are maintaining momentum:

- We are maintaining this year's educational momentum, because it is simply too important to risk midyear losses.

We are maintaining positions and programs that foster continuous school improvement and our improving graduation results. This year we are funding access to and the ability to skillfully use student data to meet learning needs. (Wednesday's edition of [NewsLinks](#) told of our school board's selection of Global Scholar as the vendor for the new Learning Management System.)

We are maintaining budget allocations for professional development for programs such as AVID with a proven track record of fostering a college going culture in students, families and an entire school.

Our work in these areas is too important to drop them midyear – even though the state's midyear budget cut messages imply the opposite.

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What we are doing to prepare for what may be as much as \$5.5 million in budget cuts for next school year:

- The Fiscal Advisory Council (FAC), now in its second year, is meeting and working to develop a budget recommendation. Last year I asked the FAC to explore and suggest deep cuts and to prioritize their suggestions. We cut approximately \$3.8 million for this school year, and the FAC listed \$7 million as possibilities. I've asked the FAC to review their work from last year, and reconsider the reductions we did not make. I expect the council to present budget cutting ideas for \$5.5 million for me to consider before I take a budget

proposal to the school board in April. (Full information [about the FAC](#) meetings, membership and even [last year's FAC report](#) is on the Web.)

- March 7 (at Evergreen Middle School) and again on March 9 (at Heatherwood) the FAC will facilitate [public meetings](#) where members will present their draft budget reduction suggestions. These meetings, starting at 6:30 p.m., are designed to gather staff and public feedback about FAC proposals before those proposals come to me for consideration.

Our employee association voices are represented among the FAC membership. Those staff representatives, the public representatives, *and I encourage and welcome your attendance at the public meetings.*

- On March 29 beginning at 5 p.m. our school board will hold a special meeting, a ["budget carousel,"](#) especially for staff and the public to sit face to face with an individual school board member to comment on budget proposals under consideration at that time.
- Since late last summer, school board members, administrators and ASB leaders have met here in Everett and in Olympia with legislators – telling our district's success stories and how carefully we spend resources to meet the needs of each individual student.

Over the Presidents' Day weekend, your school board and I will travel to Olympia with student leaders from each of our high schools to bring those stories and clear message about honoring the Constitution's paramount duty for "ample" funding. You may remember that we took students with us to Olympia last year, and their passionate, professional presentation was a credit to the quality of education you are providing for each student. (That story appears on page 2 of the [2010 spring edition of Everett Schools.](#))

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What you can do:

- Help with belt-tightening and conservation this year. As Interim Superintendent Brandsma emphasized two years ago, "Every dollar saved this year is a dollar we do not have to cut from next year's budget." That was the year this district cut a whopping \$9 million. Some of those savings were realized because of a collective *culture of conservation* that emphasized simple, common sense cost savings – turning off the lights, shutting down computers, turning down temperatures and donning sweaters, copying on both sides of pages, copying and printing only when necessary. I still see that *culture of conservation* in all our schools and support centers. Please be resolved to keep it up or ratchet up the effort a notch. Every kilowatt saved helps lower the power bill.

- Ask, “Is this meeting necessary?” Can you use technology to bring people together to save the cost and time of gathering?
- Think strategically about travel. Because we are committed to maintaining this year’s educational momentum, I am not banning all travel for the remainder of this year. Much of the district travel budget pays for staff who move among schools for their work, and the entire district travel budget accounts for only one tenth of one percent of the total operating budget. However, we will be examining travel requests carefully and denying travel not meeting our “educational momentum” goals for the rest of this year. Any out-of-state travel will require my advanced approval.
- Join the *Wellness Challenge*. Cutting down on substitutes for the rest of the year is a cost savings. The healthier our team is, the fewer substitute days we must fund.
- Understand that we may not fill empty positions this year. Non essential hiring is on hold for the rest of this year. We will hire only for positions which directly impact students or are required to meet legal compliance. It is counterproductive to hire staff for “permanent” positions when we do not yet know what we may have to cut. Any posting of a vacancy will require a cabinet member’s approval.
- Understand that hiring for next school year is most likely to take place from within. For example, current Forest View Elementary principal Brenda Fuglevand will be principal of Mill Creek Elementary next school year. Our Human Resources Department has opened the Forest View principalship and the principal position for Jefferson Elementary only to qualified candidates from within the district. To the extent possible, right now, my approach will be to hire from within.
- Stay informed; stay involved; understand how schools are funded. Links to resources and other information are at the end of this message.
- Attend school board meetings and the public events on March 7 and 9 held by the FAC.
- Become familiar with your legislators and what each knows about K-12 education.
- Ask questions; make suggestions. Share your thoughts with your supervisor or send to budget@everettsd.org. We’ll add your suggestions to those the FAC considers, and we’ll use your questions as the basis for budget Q&A on the Web.

Through this all, I implore you to keep the faith and remember our mission. Maintain your rock solid belief in the good work you do every day; help others who become discouraged. We must all be kind to each other. Many, many of our students' and staff members' worlds have been rocked by the state's economy. News and worries about budget cuts still looming can make each of us edgy. I ask that you be patient with yourself and with others and take some time to act on the spirit of the Valentine season – tell someone how much he or she means to you.

Gary

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Links to more school finance information

- [A Citizen's Guide to the Washington State K-12 Finance](#), provided by the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program Committee (LEAP)
- [Budget information](#) and process on district website
- [How to contact your legislator](#)
- [League of Education Voter website](#) with details about K-12 and higher education funding impacts as well as impacts to early learning programs
- [Local, regional and national news stories](#) about school finance
- [Partnership for Learning](#) website
- Washington Association of School Administrators [TWIO \(This Week in Olympia\)](#)
- [Washington Education Association](#) website
- [Washington State PTA](#) website
- [Washington State School Directors Association](#) (WSSDA) daily legislative reports, and
- [WSSDA First Reading](#), updates on the Legislature and state government

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