



The Asotin-Anatone School District will likely face layoffs and a reduction to programs as administrators work to cut almost \$454,000 from its budget for the 2019-20 school year.

Proposals including the elimination of two teaching positions, an accompanist position in the music program, a part-time position in the food service department and the school district's preschool program will be discussed at 5:30 p.m. Monday, during a public input session at Wilcox Gym. The school board is set to approve any reductions at its April 29 meeting.

The school district also plans to absorb staff attrition by not filling some positions once an employee leaves or retires, and Superintendent Dale Bonfield said other

administrators will take over the duties of the middle school principal, after the person in that role accepted a job elsewhere.

The athletic program will also likely face significant changes, as the district has proposed more than \$72,000 in reductions to the department.

The proposed cuts are largely attributed to a change in state law that decreased the amount of money school districts can collect through levies to \$1.50 per \$1,000 in assessed value. Prior to the change, the school district's levy was set at \$4.25 per \$1,000, generating almost \$1.6 million in the 2017-18 school year.

Next year, the levy is estimated to bring in only \$572,000.

"Our fingers are crossed that the Legislature will come up with a little bit of a different funding formula so we won't have to devastate our programs, but that's kind of a guessing game," Bonfield said.

The budget discussions have led to frustration for Bonfield, who said he's never had to deal with this depth of cuts before.

But Asotin isn't the only district struggling. Clarkston is also proposing cuts as it looks to bridge a \$1.7 million deficit heading into the next school year.

"It's probably one of the most frustrating things I've experienced in education, because you think you are doing some great things and all of a sudden, (the Legislature) throws a monkey wrench in all the things your community has worked for and enjoyed," Bonfield said. "If we would have made errors, or if we did something wrong, we would accept that we were the ones who caused it. But we don't see that we caused this situation."



The school district faces another challenge in keeping its fund balance at 8 percent of its general fund in the coming years, as called for in school board policy.

With expenditures outpacing revenues by almost \$752,000 next year, the district proposed the almost \$454,000 in reductions, while utilizing another \$298,000 from its fund balance — essentially a savings account — to balance its budget.

At the end of the 2019-20 school year, the fund balance is predicted to be around \$1.2 million, or at approximately 14 percent, but that number is expected to drop below 8 percent by the 2021-22 school year. If nothing changes, the school district's fund balance in the 2022-23 school year would sit at just \$293,000, or at about 3 percent of its general fund.

That could lead to other problems, because the average monthly cost to run the school district is about \$743,000 — \$578,000 of which goes to payroll and benefits each month.

“Everybody says, ‘you have a healthy fund balance,’ and we did, but ... our fund balance is going to be ate up relatively quick,” Bonfield said.

That means more reductions will likely be necessary in future years, under the current funding model.

But Bonfield hopes the Legislature will offer some solutions to the issues plaguing Asotin and other districts around the state.

“It’s really kind of a battle on morale at times, but I have to say our community has been very positive and upbeat in trying to figure out ways to come together and help the best they can, and our staff is looking at doing the same,” Bonfield said. “Hopefully we can all work together to get through these tough times.”

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Public forum set on proposed budget cuts

The Asotin-Anatone School District will hold a forum at 5:30 p.m. Monday to garner feedback from the community on cuts proposed for the 2019-20 school year. The meeting will be held in the Wilcox Gym at the high school, 215 Second St., Asotin. The school board will make a final decision on what to cut at its April 29 meeting.