School Board's Budget Could Spell End for Advanced Classes

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Kodiak Island Borough School District’s Board of Education unanimously passed a $48.7 million budget last night during its regular meeting. The new budget comes with the reduction of 18 district staff positions, which Chief Business Officer Lisa Pearce said should make staff levels more sustainable in future budget cycles.

“We’re just slimming back, we’re trimming back. Much more likely that we’ll be able to sustain these types of staffing levels, versus the increased," she said. "And as we go back historically we see that we’ve had significant decreases in our staffing numbers over the last few years.”

But the reduction in 18 staff positions doesn’t mean that many employees are losing their jobs. Instead, the district approached this year’s budget cycle through the concept of attrition. As openings became available through resignation and retirement, staff members in specialty positions were reassigned to fill empty roles.

Unfortunately, the shifts will mean fewer, if any, specialty staff, and certain programs will be significantly altered. Teresa Hedges works with the extended learning program for gifted students in the district – a program which could see big changes if specialty teachers, like Hedges, are moved to different positions in the district.

-- (School Budget 2 :17 “I kind of feel like I’m at a funeral, honestly. This is a time of huge loss, as you’re aware, and we are all aware. And the loss is not just a current loss, this loss will continue into the future by what is lost to the students of our community.”)

The idea is that programs like extended learning could shift from day time instruction to after school opportunities. Or current teachers may be asked to take on additional assignments. Ellen Carty is a freshman at Kodiak High School and said she’s sorry to see programs like those for gifted students reduced in the district.

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(School Budget 3 :21 “I have been in the gifted program

for about seven years now. I started out with Ms. Hedges during second grade and I can honestly say it benefited me more than anything else that I have ever done in school. Like sometimes I would wake up during elementary school and it was the only reason I came to school.”)

The proposed shifting of staff is ultimately a money saving solution to the district’s $2 million budget gap. Rising costs and falling contributions from state and federal sources meant tough decisions needed to be made. School board member Norm Wooten defended the district’s new approach to solving those budget shortfalls.

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(School Budget 4 :33 “This district is one of the very few in the state that is trying to look at it in a different way. And that’s where the new model approach has come. And I’m sure there’s going to be some adjustments, I’m sure there’s going to be things that are going to have to be done differently as we enter this process. The simple fact is our current model in Kodiak is simply not sustainable with the amount of funding we’re getting. We’re going to have to do something different.”)

The new budget includes a request for $10.6 million from the Kodiak Island Borough, which is the state-allowed maximum. The school board will present that request to the borough assembly during its joint work session on Thursday. If the borough assembly doesn’t agree to that funding amount, the district will have to rework the budget and put it before the school board at a future meeting. ###